

The Pomp of the Lavillettes, Volume 2.

Gilbert Parker

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POMP OF THE LAVILETTES

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

CHAPTER X

Ferrol's recovery from his injuries was swifter than might have been expected. As soon as he was able to move about Christine was his constant attendant. She had made herself his nurse, and no one had seriously interfered, though the Cure had not at all vaguely offered a protest to Madame Lavilette. But Madame Lavilette was now in the humour to defy or evade the Cure, whichever seemed the more convenient or more necessary. To be linked by marriage with the nobility would indeed be the justification of all her long-baffled hopes. Meanwhile, the parish gossiped, though little of that gossip was heard at the Manor Casimbault. By and by the Cure ceased to visit the Manor, but the Regimental Surgeon came often, and sometimes stayed late. He, perhaps, could have given Madame Lavilette the best advice and warning; but, in truth, he enjoyed what he considered a piquant position. Once, drawing at his pipe, as little like an Englishman as possible, he tried to say with an English accent, "Amusing and awkward situation!" but he said, "Damn funny and chic!" instead. He had no idea that any particular harm would be done--either by love or marriage; and neither seemed certain.

One day as Ferrol, entirely convalescent, was sitting in an arbour of the Manor garden, half asleep, he was awakened by voices near him.

He did not recognise one of the voices; the other was Nic Lavilette's.

The strange voice was saying: "I have collected five thousand dollars--all that can be got in the two counties. It is at the Seigneurie. Here is an order on the Seigneur Duhamel. Go there in two days and get the money. You will carry it to headquarters. These are General Papineau's orders. You will understand that your men--"

Ferrol heard no more, for the two rebels passed on, their voices becoming indistinct. He sat for a few moments motionless, for an idea had occurred to him even as Papineau's agent spoke.

If that money were only his!

Five thousand dollars--how that would ease the situation! The money belonged to whom? To a lot of rebels: to be used for making war against the British Government. After the money left the hands of the men who gave it--Lavilette and the rest--it wasn't theirs. It belonged to a cause. Well, he was the enemy of that cause. All was fair in love and

war!

There were two ways of doing it. He could waylay Nicolas as he came from the house of the old seigneur, could call to him to throw up his hands in good highwayman fashion, and, well disguised, could get away with the money without being discovered. Or again, he could follow Nic from the Seigneury to the Manor, discover where he kept the money, and devise a plan to steal it.

For some time he had given up smoking; but now, as a sort of celebration of his plan, he opened his cigar case, and finding two cigars left, took one out and lighted it.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "thieving is a nice come-down, I must say! But a man has to live, and I'm sick of charity--sick of it. I've had enough."

He puffed his cigar briskly, and enjoyed the forbidden and deadly luxury to the full.

Presently he got up, took his stick, came down-stairs, and passed out into the garden. The shoulder which had been lacerated by the bear drooped forward some what, and seemed smaller than the other. Although he held himself as erect as possible, you still could have laid your hand in the hollow of his left breast, and it would have done no more than give it a natural fulness. Perhaps it was a sort of vanity, perhaps a kind of courage, which made him resolutely straighten himself, in spite of the deadly weight dragging his shoulder down. He might be melancholy in secret, but in public he was gay and hopeful, and talked of everything except himself. On that interesting topic he would permit no discussion. Yet there often came jugs and jars from friendly people, who never spoke to him of his disease--they were polite and sensitive, these humble folk --but sent him their home-made medicines, with assurances scrawled on paper that "it would cure Mr. Ferrol's cold, oh, absolutely."

Before the Lavillettes he smiled, and received the gifts in a debonair way, sometimes making whimsical remarks. At the same time the jugs and jars of cordial (whose contents varied from whiskey, molasses and boneset, to rum, licorice, gentian and sarsaparilla roots) he carried to his room; and he religiously tried them all by turn. Each seemed to do him good for a few days, then to fail of effect; and he straightway tried another, with renewed hope on every occasion, and subsequent disappointment. He also secretly consulted the Regimental Surgeon, who was too kindhearted to tell him the truth; and he tried his hand at various remedies of his own, which did no more than to loosen the cough which was breaking down his strength.

As now, he often walked down the street swinging his cane, not as though he needed it for walking, but merely for occupation and companionship. He did not delude the villagers by these sorrowful deceptions, but they made believe he did. There were a few people who did not like him; but they were of that cantankerous minority who put thorns in the bed of the elect.

To-day, occupied with his thoughts, he walked down the main road, then presently diverged on a side road which led past Magon Farcinelle's house to an old disused mill, owned by Magon's father. He paused when he came opposite Magon's house, and glanced up at the open door. He was tired, and the coolness of the place looked inviting. He passed through the

gate, and went lightly up the path. He could see straight through the house into the harvest-fields at the back. Presently a figure crossed the lane of light, and made a cheerful living foreground to the blue sky beyond the farther door. The light and ardour of the scene gave him a thrill of pleasure, and hurried his footsteps. The air was palpitating with sleepy comfort round him, and he felt a new vitality pass into him: his imagination was feeding his enfeebled body; his active brain was giving him a fresh counterfeit of health. The hectic flush on his pale face deepened. He came to the wooden steps of the piazza, or stoop, and then paused a moment, as if for breath; but, suddenly conscious of what he was doing, he ran briskly up the steps, knocked with his cane upon the door jamb, and, without waiting, stepped inside.

Between him and the outer door, against the ardent blue background, stood Sophie Farcinelle--the English faced Sophie--a little heavy, a little slow, but with the large, long profile which is the type of English beauty--docile, healthy, cow-like. Her face, within her sunbonnet, caught the reflected light, and the pink calico of her dress threw a glow over her cheeks and forehead, and gave a good gleam to her eyes. She had in her hands a dish of strawberries. It was a charming picture in the eyes of a man to whom the feelings of robustness and health were mostly a reminiscence. Yet, while the first impression was on him, he contrasted Sophie with the impetuous, fiery-hearted Christine, with her dramatic Gallic face and blood, to the latter's advantage, in spite of the more harmonious setting of this picture.

Sophie was in place in this old farmhouse, with its dormer windows, with the weaver's loom in the large kitchen, the meat-block by the fireplace, and the big bread-tray by the stove, where the yeast was as industrious as the reapers beyond in the fields. She was in keeping with the chromo of the Madonna and the Child upon the wall, with the sprig of holy palm at the shrine in the corner, with the old King Louis blunderbuss above the chimney.

Sophie tried to take off her sunbonnet with one hand, but the knot tightened, and it tipped back on her head, giving her a piquant air. She flushed.

"Oh, m'sieu'!" she said in English, "it's kind of you to call. I am quite glad--yes."

Then she turned round to put the strawberries upon a table, but he was beside her in an instant and took the dish out of her hands. Placing it on the table, he took a couple of strawberries in his fingers.

"May I?" he asked in French.

She nodded as she whipped off the sunbonnet, and replied in her own language:

"Certainly, as many as you want."

He bit into one, but got no further with it. Her back was turned to him, and he threw the berry out of the window. She felt rather than saw what he had done. She saw that he was fagged. She instantly thought of a cordial she had in the house, the gift of a nun from the Ursuline Convent in Quebec; a precious little bottle which she had kept for the anniversary of her wedding day. If she had been told in the morning that she would open that bottle now, and for a stranger, she probably would

have resented the idea with scorn.

His disguised weariness still exciting her sympathy, she offered him a chair.

"You will sit down, m'sieu'?" she asked. "It is very warm."

She did not say: "You look very tired." She instinctively felt that it would suggest the delicate state of his health.

The chair was inviting enough, with its chintz cover and wicker seat, but he would never admit fatigue. He threw his leg half jauntily over the end of the table and said:

"No--no, thanks; I'd rather not sit."

His forehead was dripping with perspiration. He took out his handkerchief and dried it. His eyes were a little heavy, but his complexion was a delicate and unnatural pink and white--like a piece of fine porcelain. It was a face without care, without vice, without fear, and without morals. For the absence of vice with the absence of morals are not incongruous in a human face. Sophie went into another room for a moment, and brought back a quaint cut-glass bottle of cordial.

"It is very good," she said, as she took the cork out; "better than peach brandy or things like that."

He watched her pour it out into a wine-glass, and as soon as he saw the colour and the flow of it he was certain of its quality.

"That looks like good stuff," he said, as she handed him a glass brimming over; "but you must have one with me. I can't drink alone, you know."

"Oh, m'sieu', if you please, no," she answered half timidly, flattered by the glance of his eye--a look of flattery which was part of his stock-in-trade. It had got him into trouble all his life.

"Ah, madame, but I plead yes!" he answered, with a little encouraging nod towards her. "Come, let me pour it for you."

He took the odd little bottle and poured her glass as full as his own.

"If Magon were only here--he'd like some, I know," she said, vaguely struggling with a sense of impropriety, though why, she did not know; for, on the surface, this was only dutiful hospitality to a distinguished guest. The impropriety probably lay in the sensations roused by this visit and this visitor. "I intended--"

"Oh, we must try to get along without monsieur," he said, with a little cough; "he's a busy gentleman." The rather rude and flippant sentiment seemed hardly in keeping with the fatal token of his disease.

"Of course, he's far away out there in the field, mowing," she said, as if in apology for something or other. "Yes, he's ever so far away," was his reply, as he turned half lazily to the open doorway.

Neither spoke for a moment. The eyes of both were on the distant harvest-fields. Vaguely, not decisively, the hazy, indolent air of summer was broken by the lazy droning of the locusts and grasshoppers.

A driver was calling to his oxen down the dusty road, the warning bark of a dog came across the fields from the gap in the fence which he was tending, and the blades of the scythes made three-quarter circles of light as the mowers travelled down the wheat-fields.

When their eyes met again, the glasses of cordial were at their lips. He held her look by the intentional warmth and meaning of his own, drinking very slowly to the last drop; and then, like a bon viveur, drew a breath of air through his open mouth, and nodded his satisfaction.

"By Jove, but it is good stuff!" he said. "Here's to the nun that made it," he added, making a motion to drink from the empty glass.

Sophie had not drunk all her cordial. At least one third of it was still in the glass. She turned her head away, a little dismayed by his toast.

"Come, that's not fair," he said. "That elixir shouldn't be wasted. Voila, every drop of it now!" he added, with an insinuating smile and gesture.

"Oh, m'sieu!" she said in protest, but drank it off. He still held the empty glass in his hand, twisting it round musingly.

"A little more, m'sieu'?" she asked, "just a little?" Perhaps she was surprised that he did not hesitate. He instantly held out his glass.

"It was made by a saint; the result should be health and piety--I need both," he added, with a little note of irony in his voice.

"So, once again, my giver of good gifts--to you!" He raised his glass again, toasting her, but paused. "No, this won't do; you must join me," he added.

"Oh, no, m'sieu', no! It is not possible. I feel it now in my head and in all of me. Oh, I feel so warm all through, and my heart it beats so very fast! Oh, no, m'sieu', no more!"

Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes had become softer and more brilliant under the influence of the potent liqueur.

"Well, well, I'll let you off this time; but next time--next time, remember."

He raised the glass once more, and let the cordial drain down lazily.

He had said, "next time"--she noticed that. He seemed very fond of this strong liqueur. She placed the bottle on the table, her own glass beside it.

"For a minute, a little minute," she said suddenly, and went quickly into the other room.

He coolly picked up the bottle of liqueur, poured his glass full once more, and began drinking it off in little sips. Presently he stood up, and throwing back his shoulder, with a little ostentation of health, he went over to the chintz-covered chair, and sat down in it. His mood was contented and brisk. He held up the glass of liqueur against the sunlight.

"Better than any Benedictine I ever tasted," he said. "A dozen bottles of that would cure this beastly cold of mine. By Jove! it would. It's as good as the Gardivani I got that blessed day when we chaps of the Ninetieth breakfasted with the King of Savoy." He laughed to himself at the reminiscence. "What a day that was, what a stunning day that was!"

He was still smiling, his white teeth showing humorously, when Sophie again entered the room. He had forgotten her, forgotten all about her. As she came in he made a quick, courteous movement to rise--too quick; for a sharp pain shot through his breast, and he grew pale about the lips. But he made essay to stand up lightly, nevertheless.

She saw his paleness, came quickly to him, and put out her hand to gently force him back into his seat, but as instantly decided not to notice his indisposition, and turned towards the table instead. Taking the bottle of cordial, she brought it over, and not looking at him, said:

"Just one more little glass, m'sieu'?" She had in her other hand a plate of seed-cakes. "But yes, you must sit down and eat a cake," she added adroitly. "They are very nice, and I made them myself. We are very fond of them; and once, when the bishop stayed at our house, he liked them too."

Before he sat down he drank off the whole of the cordial in the glass.

She took a chair near him, and breaking a seed-cake began eating it. His tongue was loosened now, and he told her what he was smiling at when she came into the room. She was amused, and there was a little awe to her interest also. To think--she was sitting here, talking easily to a man who had eaten at kings' tables--with the king! Yet she was at ease too--since she had drunk the cordial. It had acted on her like some philtre. He begged that she would go on with her work; and she got the dish of strawberries, and began stemming them while he talked.

It was much easier talking or listening to him while she was so occupied. She had never enjoyed anything so much in her life. She was not clever, like Christine, but she had admiration of ability, and was obedient to the charm of temperament. Whenever Ferrol had met her he had lavished little attentions on her, had said things to her that carried weight far beyond their intention. She had been pleased at the time, but they had had no permanent effect.

Now everything he said had a different influence: she felt for the first time that it was not easy to look into his eyes, and as if she never could again without betraying--she knew not what.

So they sat there, he talking, she listening and questioning now and then. She had placed the bottle of liqueur and the seed-cakes at his elbow on the windowsill; and as if mechanically, he poured out a glassful, and after a little time, still another, and at last, apparently unconsciously, poured her out one also, and handed it to her. She shook her head; he still held the glass poised; her eyes met his; she made a feeble sort of protest, then took the glass and drank off the liqueur in little sips.

"Gad, that puts fat on the bones, and gives the gay heart!" he said. "Doesn't it, though?"

She laughed quietly. Her nature was warm, and she had the animal-like

fondness for physical ease and content.

"It's as if there wasn't another stroke of work to do in the world," she answered, and sat contentedly back in her chair, the strawberries in her lap. Her fingers, stained with red, lay beside the bowl. All the strings of conscious duty were loose, and some of them were flying. The bumble-bee that flew in at the door and boomed about the room contributed to the day-dream.

She never quite knew how it happened that a moment later he was bending over the back of her chair, with her face upturned to his, and his lips-- With that touch thrilling her, she sprang to her feet, and turned away from him towards the table. Her face was glowing like a peony, and a troubled light came into her eyes. He came over to her, after a moment, and spoke over her shoulders as he just touched her waist with his fingers.

"A la bonne heure--Sophie!"

"Oh, it isn't--it isn't right," she said, her body slightly inclining from him.

"One minute out of a whole life--What does it matter! Ce ne fait rien! Good-bye-Sophie."

Now she inclined towards him. He was about to put his arms round her, when he heard the distant sound of a horse's hoofs. He let her go, and turned towards the front door. Through it he saw Christine driving up the road. She would pass the house.

"Good-bye-Sophie," he said again over her shoulder, softly; and, picking up his hat and stick, he left the house.

Her eyes followed him dreamily as he went up the road. She sat down in a chair, the trance of the passionate moment still on her, and began to brood. She vaguely heard the rattle of a buggy--Christine's--as it passed the house, and her thoughts drifted into a new-discovered hemisphere where life was all a somnolent sort of joy and bodily love.

She was roused at last by a song which came floating across the fields. The air she knew, and the voice she knew. The chanson was, "Le Voleur de grand Chemin!" The voice was her husband's.

She knew the words, too; and even before she could hear them, they were fitting into the air:

"Qui va la! There's some one in the orchard,
There's a robber in the apple-trees;
Qui va la! He is creeping through the doorway.
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

She hurriedly put away the cordial and the seed-cakes. She picked up the bottle. It was empty. Ferrol had drunk near half a pint of the liqueur! She must get another bottle of it somehow. It would never do for Magon to know that the precious anniversary cordial was all gone--in this way.

She hurried towards the other room. The voice of the farrier-farmer was more distinct now. She could hear clearly the words of the song. She looked out. The square-shouldered, blue-shirted Magon was skirting the

turnip field, making a short cut home. His straw hat was pushed back on his head, his scythe was over his shoulder. He had cut the last swathe in the field--now for Sophie. He was not handsome, and she had known that always; but he seemed rough and coarse to-day. She did not notice how well he fitted in with everything about him; and he was so healthy that even three glasses of that cordial would have sent him reeling to bed.

As she passed into the dining-room, the words of the song followed her:

"Qui va la! If you please, I own the mansion,
And this is my grandfather's gun!
Qui va la! Now you're a dead man, robber
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

CHAPTER XI

"I saw you coming," Ferrol said, as Christine stopped the buggy.

"You have been to see Magon and Sophie?" she asked.

"Yes, for a minute," he answered. "Where are you going?"

"Just for a drive," she replied. "Come, won't you?" He got in, and she drove on.

"Where were you going?" she asked.

"Why, to the old mill," was his reply. "I wanted a little walk, then a rest."

Ten minutes later they were looking from a window of the mill, out upon the great wheel which had done all the work the past generations had given it to do, and was now dropping into decay as it had long dropped into disuse. Moss had gathered on the great paddles; many of them were broken, and the debris had been carried away by the freshets of spring and the floods of autumn.

They were silent for a time. Presently she looked up at him.

"You're much better to-day," she said; "better than you've been since--since that night!"

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered; "right as can be." He suddenly turned on her, put his hand upon her arm, and said:

"Come, now, tell me what there was between you and Vanne Castine--once upon a time.

"He was in love with me five years ago," she said.

"And five years ago you were in love with him, eh?" "How dare you say that to me!" she answered. "I never was. I always hated him."

She told her lie with unscrupulous directness. He did not believe her; but what did that matter! It was no reason why he should put her at a

disadvantage, and, strangely enough, he did not feel any contempt for her because she told the lie, nor because she had once cared for Castine. Probably in those days she had never known anybody who was very much superior to Castine. She was in love with himself now; that was enough, or nearly enough, and there was no particular reason why he should demand more from her than she demanded from him. She was lying to him now because--well, because she loved him. Like the majority of men, when women who love them have lied to them so, they have seen in it a compliment as strong as the act was weak. It was more to him now that this girl should love him than that she should be upright, or moral, or truthful. Such is the egotism and vanity of such men.

"Well, he owes me several years of life. I put in a bad hour that night."

He knew that "several years of life" was a misstatement; but, then, they were both sinners.

Her eyes flashed, she stamped her foot, and her fingers clinched.

"I wish I'd killed him when I killed his bear!" she said.

Then excitedly she described the scene exactly as it occurred. He admired the dramatic force of it. He thrilled at the direct simplicity of the tale. He saw Vanne Castine in the forearms of the huge beast, with his eyes bulging from his head, his face becoming black, and he saw blind justice in that death grip; Christine's pistol at the bear's head, and the shoulder in the teeth of the beast, and then!

"By the Lord Harry," he said, as she stood panting, with her hands fixed in the last little dramatic gesture, "what a little spitfire and brick you are!"

All at once he caught her away from the open window and drew her to him. Whether what he said that moment, and what he did then, would have been said and done if it were not for the liqueur he had drunk at Sophie's house would be hard to tell; but the sum of it was that she was his and he was hers. She was to be his until the end of all, no matter what the end might be. She looked up at him, her face glowing, her bosom beating--beating, every pulse in her tingling.

"You mean that you love me, and that--that you want to marry me?" she said; and then, with a fervent impulse, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him again and again.

The directness of her question dumfounded him for the moment; but what she suggested (though it might be selfish in him to agree to it) would be the best thing that could happen to him. So he lied to her, and said:

"Yes, that's what I meant. But, then, to tell you the sober truth, I'm as poor as a church mouse."

He paused. She looked up at him with a sudden fear in her face.

"You're not married?" she asked, "you're not married?" then, breaking off suddenly: "I don't care if you are, I don't! I love you--love you! Nobody would look after you as I would. I don't; no, I don't care."

She drew up closer and closer to him.

"No, I don't mean that I was married," he said. "I meant--what you know--that my life isn't worth, perhaps, a ten-days' purchase."

Her face became pale again.

"You can have my life," she said; "have it just as long as you live, and I'll make you live a year--yes, I'll make you live ten years. Love can do anything; it can do everything. We'll be married to-morrow."

"That's rather difficult," he answered. "You see, you're a Catholic, and I'm a Protestant, and they wouldn't marry us here, I'm afraid; at least not at once, perhaps not at all. You see, I--I've only one lung."

He had never spoken so frankly of his illness before. "Well, we can go over the border into the English province--into Upper Canada," she answered. "Don't you see? It's only a few miles' drive to a village. I can go over one day, get the licence; then, a couple of days after, we can go over together and be married. And then, then--"

He smiled. "Well, then it won't make much difference, will it? We'll have to fit in one way or another, eh?"

"We could be married afterwards by the Cure, if everybody made a fuss. The bishop would give us a dispensation. It's a great sin to marry a heretic, but--"

"But love--eh, ma cigale!" Then he took her eagerly, tenderly into his arms; and probably he had then the best moment in his life.

Sophie Farcinelle saw them driving back together. She was sitting at early supper with Magon, when, raising her head at the sound of wheels, she saw Christine laughing and Ferrol leaning affectionately towards her. Ferrol had forgotten herself and the incident of the afternoon. It meant nothing to him. With her, however, it was vital: it marked a change in her life. Her face flushed, her hands trembled, and she arose hurriedly and went to get something from the kitchen, that Magon might not see her face.

CHAPTER XII

Twenty men had suddenly disappeared from Bonaventure on the day that Ferrol visited Sophie Farcinelle, and it was only the next morning that the cause of their disappearance was generally known.

There had been many rumours abroad that a detachment of men from the parish were to join Papineau. The Rebellion was to be publicly declared on a certain date near at hand, but nothing definite was known; and because the Cure condemned any revolt against British rule, in spite of the evils the province suffered from bad government, every recruit who joined Nic Lavilette's standard was sworn to secrecy. Louis Lavilette and his wife knew nothing of their son's complicity in the rumoured revolt--one's own people are generally the last to learn of one's misdeeds. Madame would have been sorely frightened and chagrined if she had known the truth, for she was partly English. Besides, if the Rebellion did not succeed, disgrace must come, and then good-bye to the

progress of the Lavillettes, and goodbye, maybe, to her son!

In spite of disappointments and rebuffs in many quarters, she still kept faith with her ambitions, and, fortunately for herself, she did not see the abject failure of many of her schemes. Some of the gentry from the neighbouring parishes had called, chiefly, she was aware, because of Mr. Ferrol. She was building the superstructure of her social ambitions on that foundation for the present. She told Louis sometimes, with tears of joy in her eyes, that a special Providence had sent Mr. Ferrol to them, and she did not know how to be grateful enough. He suggested a gift to the church in token of gratitude, but her thanksgiving did not take that form.

Nic was entirely French at heart, and ignored his mother's nationality. He resented the English blood in his veins, and atoned for it by increased loyalty to his French origin. This was probably not so much a principle as a fancy. He had a kind of importance also in the parish, and in his own eyes, because he made as much in three months by buying and selling horses as most people did in a year. The respect of Bonaventure for his ability was considerable; and though it had no marked admiration for his character, it appreciated his drolleries, and was attracted by his high spirits. He had always been erratic, so that when he disappeared for days at a time no one thought anything of it, and when he came home to the Manor at unearthly hours it created no peculiar notice.

He had chosen very good men for his recruits; for, though they talked much among themselves, they drew a cordon of silence round their little society of revolution. They vanished in the night, and Nic with them; but he returned the next afternoon when the fire of excitement was at its height. As he rode through the streets, people stopped him and poured out questions; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and gave no information, and neither denied nor affirmed anything.

Acting under orders, he had marched his company to make conjunction with other companies at a point in the mountains twenty miles away, but had himself returned to get the five thousand dollars gathered by Papineau's agent. Now that the Rebellion was known, Nicolas intended to try and win his father and his father's money and horses over to the cause.

Because Ferrol was an Englishman he made no confidant of him, and because he was a dying man he saw in him no menace to the cause. Besides, was not Ferrol practically dependent upon their hospitality? If he had guessed that his friend knew accurately of his movements since the night he had seen Vanne Castine hand him his commission from Papineau, he would have felt less secure: for, after all, love--or prejudice--of country is a principle in the minds of most men deeper than any other. When all other morals go, this latent tendency to stand by the blood of his clan is the last moral in man that bears the test without treason. If he had known that Ferrol had written to the Commandant at Quebec, telling him of the imminence of the Rebellion, and the secret recruiting and drilling going on in the parishes, his popular comrade might have paid a high price for his disclosure.

That morning at sunrise, Christine, saying she was going upon a visit to the next parish, started away upon her mission to the English province. Ferrol had urged her to let him go, but she had refused. He had not yet fully recovered from his adventure with the bear, she said. Then he said they might go together; but she insisted that she must make the way

clear, and have everything ready. They might go and find the minister away, and then--voila, what a chance for cancan! So she went alone.

From his window he watched her depart; and as she drove away in the fresh morning he fell to thinking what it might seem like if he had to look forward to ten, twenty, or forty years with just such a woman as his wife. Now she was at her best (he did not deceive himself), but in ten years or less the effects of her early life would show in many ways. She had once loved Vanne Castine! and now vanity and cowardice, or unscrupulousness, made her lie about it. He would have her at her best --a young, vigorous radiant nature--for his short life, and then, good-bye, my lover, good-bye! Selfish? Of course. But she would rather--she had said it--have him for the time he had to live than not at all. Position? What was his position? Cast off by his family, forgotten by his old friends, in debt, penniless--let position be hanged! Self-preservation was the first law. What was the difference between this girl and himself? Morals? She was better than himself, anyhow. She had genuine passions, and her sins would be in behalf of those genuine passions. He had kicked over the moral traces many a time from absolute selfishness. She had clean blood in her veins, she was good-looking, she had a quick wit, she was an excellent horse-woman--what then? If she wasn't so "well bred," that was a matter of training and opportunity which had never quite been hers. What was he himself? A loafer, "a deuced unfortunate loafer," but still a loafer. He had no trade and no profession. Confound it! how much better off, and how much better in reality, were these people who had trades and occupations. In the vigour and lithe activity of that girl's body was the force of generations of honest workers. He argued and thought--as every intelligent man in his position would have done--until he had come into the old life again, and into the presence of the old advantages and temptations!

Christine pulled up for a moment on a little hill, and waved her whip. He shook his handkerchief from the window. That was their prearranged signal. He shook it until she had driven away beyond the hill and was lost to sight, and still stood there at the window looking out.

Presently Madame Lavilette appeared in the garden below, and he was sure, from the way she glanced up at the window, and from her position in the shrubbery, that she had seen the signal. Madame did not look displeased. On the contrary, though an alliance with Christine now seemed unlikely, because of the state of Ferrol's health and his religion and nationality, it pleased her to think that it might have been.

When she had passed into the house, Ferrol sat down on the broad window-sill, and looked out the way Christine had gone. He was thinking of the humiliation of his position, and how it would be more humiliating when he married Christine, should the Lavillettes turn against them--which was quite possible. And from outside: the whole parish--a few excepted--sympathised with the Rebellion, and once the current of hatred of the English set in, he would be swept down by it. There were only three English people in the place. Then, if it became known that he had given information to the authorities, his life would be less uncertain than it was just now. Yet, confound the dirty lot of little rebels, it served them right! He couldn't sit by and see a revolt against British rule without raising a hand. Warn Nic? To what good? The result would be just the same. But if harm came to this intended brother-in-law--well, why borrow trouble? He was not the Lord in Heaven, that he could have everything as he wanted it! It was a toss-up, and he would see the sport out. "Have to cough your way through, my boy!" he said, as he swayed

back and forth, the hard cough hacking in his throat.

As he had said yesterday, there was only one thing to do: he must have that five thousand dollars which was to be handed over by the old seigneur. This time he did not attempt to find excuses; he called the thing by its proper name.

"Well, it's stealing, or it's highway robbery, no matter how one looks at it," he said to himself. "I wonder what's the matter with me. I must have got started wrong somehow. Money to spend, playing at soldiering, made to believe I'd have a pot of money and an estate, and then told one fine day that a son and heir, with health in form and feature, was come, and Esau must go. No profession, except soldiering, debt staring me in the face, and a nasty mess of it all round. I wonder why it is that I didn't pull myself together, be honest to a hair, and fight my way through? I suppose I hadn't it in me. I wasn't the right metal at the start. There's always been a black sheep in our family, a gentleman or a lady, born without morals, and I happen to be the gentleman this generation. I always knew what was right, and liked it, and I always did what was wrong, and liked it--nearly always. But I suppose I was fated. I was bound to get into a hole, and I'm in it now, with one lung, and a wife in prospect to support. I suppose if I were to write down all the decent things I've thought in my life, and put them beside the indecent things I've done, nobody would believe the same man was responsible for them. I'm one of the men who ought to be put above temptation; be well bridled, well fed, and the mere cost of comfortable living provided, and then I'd do big things. But that isn't the way of the world; and so I feel that a morning like this, and the love of a girl like that" (he nodded towards the horizon into which Christine had gone) "ought to make a man sing a Te Deum. And yet this evening, or to-morrow evening, or the next, I'll steal five thousand dollars, if it can be done, and risk my neck in doing it--to say nothing of family honour, and what not."

He got up from the window, went to his trunk, opened it, and, taking out a pistol, examined it carefully, cocking and uncorking it, and after loading it, and again trying the trigger, put it back again. There came a tap at the door, and to his call a servant entered with a glass of milk and whiskey, with which he always began the day.

The taste of the liquid brought back the afternoon of the day before, and he suddenly stopped drinking, threw back his head, and laughed softly.

"By Jingo, but that liqueur was stunning--and so was-Sophie . . . Sophie! That sounds compromisingly familiar this morning, and very improper also! But Sophie is a very nice person, and I ought to be well ashamed of myself. I needed the bit and curb both yesterday. It'll never do at all. If I'm going to marry Christine, we must have no family complications. 'Must have'!" he exclaimed. "But what if Sophie already?--good Lord!"

It was a strange sport altogether, in which some people were bound to get a bad fall, himself probably among the rest. He intended to rob the brother, he had set the government going against the brother's revolutionary cause, he was going to marry one sister, and the other--the less thought and said about that matter the better.

The afternoon brought Nic, who seemed perplexed and excited, but was most friendly. It seemed to Ferrol as if Nic wished to disclose something; but he gave him no opportunity. What he knew he knew, and he could make

use of; but he wanted no further confidences. Ever since the night of the fight with the bear there had been nothing said on matters concerning the Rebellion. If Nicolas disclosed any secret now, it must surely be about the money, and that must not be if he could prevent it. But he watched his friend, nevertheless.

Night came, and Christine did not return; eight o'clock, nine o'clock. Lavilette and his wife were a little anxious; but Ferrol and Nicolas made excuses for her, and, in the wild talk and gossip about the Rebellion, attention was easily shifted from her. Besides, Christine was well used to taking care of herself.

Lavilette flatly refused to give Nic a penny for "the cause," and stormed at his connection with it; but at last became pacified, and agreed it was best that Madame Lavilette should know nothing about Nic's complicity just yet. At half past nine o'clock Nic left the house and took the road towards the Seigneury.

CHAPTER XIII

About half-way between the Seigneury and the main street of the village there was a huge tree, whose limbs stretched across the road and made a sort of archway. In the daytime, during the summer, foot travellers, carts and carriages, with their drivers, loitered in its shade as they passed, grateful for the rest it gave; but at night, even when it was moonlight, the wide branches threw a dark and heavy shadow, and the passage beneath them was gloomy travel. Many a foot traveller hesitated to pass into that umbrageous circle, and skirted the fence beyond the branches on the further side of the road instead.

When Nicolas Lavilette, returning from the Seigneury with the precious bag of gold for Papineau, came hurriedly along the road towards the village, he half halted, with sudden premonition of danger, a dozen feet or so from the great tree. But like most young people, who are inclined to trust nothing but their own strong arms and what their eyes can see, he withstood the temptation to skirt the fence; and with a little half-scornful laugh at himself, yet a little timidity also (or he would not have laughed at all), he hurried under the branches. He had not gone three steps when the light of a dark lantern flashed suddenly in his face, and a pistol touched his forehead. All he could see was a figure clothed entirely in black, even to hands and face, with only holes for eyes, nose and mouth.

He stood perfectly still; the shock was so sudden. There was something determined and deadly in the pose of the figure before him, in the touch of the weapon, in the clearness of the light. His eyes dropped, and fixed involuntarily upon the lantern.

He had a revolver with him; but it was useless to attempt to defend himself with it. Not a word had been spoken. Presently, with the fingers that held the lantern, his assailant made a motion of Hands up! There was no reason why he should risk his life without a chance of winning, so he put up his hands. At another motion he drew out the bag of gold with his left hand, and, obeying the direction of another gesture, dropped it on the ground. There was a pause, then another gesture, which he pretended not to understand.

"Your pistol!" said the voice in a whisper through the mask.

He felt the cold steel at his forehead press a little closer; he also felt how steady it was. He was no fool. He had been in trouble before in his lifetime; he drew out the pistol, and passed it, handle first, to three fingers stretched out from the dark lantern.

The figure moved to where the money and the pistol were, and said, in a whisper still:

"Go!"

He had one moment of wild eagerness to try his luck in a sudden assault, but that passed as suddenly as it came; and with the pistol still covering him, he moved out into the open road, with a helpless anger on him.

A crescent moon was struggling through floes of fleecy clouds, the stars were shining, and so the road was not entirely dark. He went about thirty steps, then turned and looked back. The figure was still standing there, with the pistol and the light. He walked on another twenty or thirty steps, and once again looked back. The light and the pistol were still there. Again he walked on. But now he heard the rumble of buggy wheels behind. Once more he looked back: the figure and the light had gone. The buggy wheels sounded nearer. With a sudden feeling of courage, he turned round and ran back swiftly. The light suddenly flashed again.

"It's no use," he said to himself, and turned and walked slowly along the road.

The sound of the buggy wheels came still nearer. Presently it was obscured by passing under the huge branches of the tree. Then the horse, buggy and driver appeared at the other side, and in a few moments had overtaken him. He looked up sharply, scrutinisingly. Suddenly he burst out:

"Holy mother, Chris, is that you! Where've you been? Are you all right?"

She had whipped up her horse at first sight of him, thinking he might be some drunken rough.

"Mais, mon dieu, Nic, is that you? I thought at first you were a highwayman!"

"No, you've passed the highwayman! Come, let me get in."

Five minutes afterwards she knew exactly what had happened to him.

"Who could it be?" she asked.

"I thought at first it was that beast Vanne Castine!" he answered; "he's the only one that knew about the money, besides the agent and the old seigneur. He brought word from Papineau. But it was too tall for him, and he wouldn't have been so quiet about it. Just like a ghost. It makes my flesh creep now!"

It did not seem such a terrible thing to her at the moment, for she had in her pocket the licence to marry the Honourable Tom Ferrol upon the morrow, and she thought, with joy, of seeing him just as soon as she set foot in the doorway of the Manor Casimbault.

It was something of a shock to her that she did not see him for quite a half hour after she arrived home, and that was half past ten o'clock. But women forget neglect quickly in the delight of a lover's presence; so her disappointment passed. Yet she could not help speaking of it.

"Why weren't you at the door to meet me when I came back to-night with that-that in my pocket?" she asked him, his arm round her.

"I've got a kicking lung, you know," he said, with a half ironical, half self-pitying smile.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Tom, my love!" she said as she buried her face on his breast.

CHAPTER XIV

Before he left for the front next morning to join his company and march to Papineau's headquarters, Nic came to Ferrol, told him, with rage and disappointment, the story of the highway robbery, and also that he hoped Ferrol would not worry about the Rebellion, and would remain at the Manor Casimbault in any case.

"Anyhow," said he, "my mother's half English; so you're not alone. We're going to make a big fight for it. We've stood it as long as we can. But we're friends in this, aren't we, Ferrol?"

There was a pause, in which Ferrol sipped his whiskey and milk, and continued dressing. He set the glass down, and looked towards the open window, through which came the smell of the ripe orchard and the fragrance of the pines. He turned to Lavilette at last and said, as he fastened his collar:

"Yes, you and I are friends, Nic; but I'm a Britisher, and my people have been Britishers since Edward the Third's time; and for this same Quebec two of my great-grand-uncles fought and lost their lives. If I were sound of wind and limb I'd fight, like them, to keep what they helped to get. You're in for a rare good beating, and, see, my friend--while I wouldn't do you any harm personally, I'd crawl on my knees from here to the citadel at Quebec to get a pot-shot at your rag-tag-and-bobtail 'patriots.' You can count me a first-class enemy to your 'cause,' though I'm not a first-class fighting man. And now, Nic, give me a lift with my coat. This shoulder jibs a bit since the bear-baiting."

Lavilette was naturally prejudiced in Ferrol's favour; and this deliberate and straightforward patriotism more pleased than offended him. His own patriotism was not a deep or lasting thing: vanity and a restless spirit were its fountains of inspiration. He knew that Ferrol was penniless--or he was so yesterday--and this quiet defiance of events in the very camp of the enemy could not but appeal to his ebullient, Gallic chivalry. Ferrol did not say these things because he had five thousand dollars behind him, for he would have said them if he were starving and

dying--perhaps out of an inherent stubbornness, perhaps because this hereditary virtue in him would have been as hard to resist as his sins.

"That's all right, Ferrol," answered Lavilette. "I hope you'll stay here at the Manor, no matter what comes. You're welcome. Will you?"

"Yes, I'll stay, and glad to. I can't very well do anything else. I'm bankrupt. Haven't got a penny--of my own," he added, with daring irony. "Besides, it's comfortable here, and I feel like one of the family; and, anyhow, Life is short and Time is a pacer!" His wearing cough emphasised the statement.

"It won't be easy for you in Bonaventure," said Nicolas, walking restlessly up and down. "They're nearly all for the cause, all except the Cure. But he can't do much now, and he'll keep out of the mess. By the time he has a chance to preach against it, next Sunday, every man that wants to 'll be at the front, and fighting. But you'll be all right, I think. They like you here."

"I've a couple of good friends to see me through," was the quiet reply.

"Who are they?"

Ferrol went to his trunk, took out a pair of pistols, and balanced them lightly in his hands. "Good to confuse twenty men," he said. "A brace of 'em are bound to drop, and they don't know which one."

He raised a pistol lazily, and looked out along its barrel through the open, sunshiny window. Something in the pose of the body, in the curve of the arm, struck Nicolas strangely. He moved almost in front of Ferrol. There came back to him mechanically the remembrance of a piece of silver on the butt of one of the highwayman's pistols!

The same piece of silver was on the butt of Ferrol's pistol. It startled him; but he almost laughed to him self at the absurdity of the suggestion. Ferrol was the last man in the world to play a game like that, and with him.

Still he could not resist a temptation. He stepped in front of the pistol, almost touching it with his forehead, looking at Ferrol as he had looked at the highwayman last night.

"Look out, it's loaded!" said Ferrol, lowering the weapon coolly, and not showing by sign or muscle that he understood Lavilette's meaning. "I should think you'd had enough of pistols for one twenty-four hours."

"Do you know, Ferrol, you looked just then so like the robber last night that, for one moment, I half thought!--And the pistol, too, looks just the same--that silver piece on the butt!"

"Oh, yes, this piece for the name of the owner!" said Ferrol, in a laughing brogue, and he coughed a little. "Well, maybe some one did use this pistol last night. It wouldn't be hard to open my trunk. Let's see; whom shall we suspect?"

Lavilette was entirely reassured, if indeed he needed reassurance. Ferrol coughed still more, and was obliged to sit down on the side of the bed and rest himself against the foot-board.

"There's a new jug of medicine or cordial come this morning from Shangois, the notary," said Lavilette. "I just happened to think of it. What he does counts. He knows a lot."

Ferrol's eyes showed interest at once.

"I'll try it. I'll try it. The stuff Gatineau the miller sent doesn't do any good now."

"Shangois is here--he's downstairs--if you want to see him."

Ferrol nodded. He was tired of talking.

"I'm going," said Lavilette, holding out his hand. "I'll join my company to-day, and the scrimmage 'll begin as soon as we reach Papineau. We've got four hundred men."

Ferrol tried to say something, but he was struggling with the cough in his throat. He held out his hand, and Nicolas took it. At last he was able to say:

"Good luck to you, Nic, and to the devil with the Rebellion! You're in for a bad drubbing."

Nicolas had a sudden feeling of anger. This superior air of Ferrol's was assumed by most Englishmen in the country, and it galled him.

"We'll not ask quarter of Englishmen; no-sacre!" he said in a rage.

"Well, Nic, I'm not so sure of that. Better do that than break your pretty neck on a taut rope," was the lazy reply.

With an oath, Lavilette went out, banging the door after him. Ferrol shrugged his shoulder with a stoic ennui, and put away the pistols in the trunk. He was thinking how reckless he had been to take them out; and yet he was amused, too, at the risk he had run. A strange indifference possessed him this morning--indifference to everything. He was suffering reaction from the previous day's excitement. He had got the five thousand dollars, and now all interest in it seemed to have departed.

Suddenly he said to himself, as he ran a brush around his coat-collar:

"Pon my soul, I forgot; this is my wedding day!--the great day in a man's life, the immense event, after which comes steady happiness or the devil to pay."

He stepped to the window and looked out. It was only six o'clock as yet. He could see the harvesters going to their labours in the fields of wheat and oats, the carters already bringing in little loads of hay. He could hear their marche-'t'-en! to the horses. Over by a little house on the river bank stood an old woman sharpening a sickle. He could see the flash of the steel as the stone and metal gently clashed.

Presently a song came up to him, through the garden below, from the house. The notes seemed to keep time to the hand of the sickle-sharpener. He had heard it before, but only in snatches. Now it seemed to pierce his senses and to flood his nerves with feeling.

The air was sensuous, insinuating, ardent. The words were full of summer

and of that dramatic indolence of passion which saved the incident at Magon Farcinelle's from being as vulgar as it was treacherous. The voice was Christine's, on her wedding day.

"Oh, hark how the wind goes, the wind goes
(And dark goes the stream by the mill!)
Oh, see where the storm blows, the storm blows
(There's a rider comes over the hill!)

"He went with the sunshine one morning
(Oh, loud was the bugle and drum!)
My soldier, he gave me no warning
(Oh, would that my lover might come!)

"My kisses, my kisses are waiting
(Oh, the rider comes over the hill!)
In summer the birds should be mating
(Oh, the harvest goes down to the mill!)

"Oh, the rider, the rider he stayeth
(Oh, joy that my lover hath come!)
We will journey together he sayeth
(No more with the bugle and drum!)"

He caught sight of Christine for a moment as she passed through the garden towards the stable. Her gown was of white stuff, with little spots of red in it, and a narrow red ribbon was shot through the collar. Her hat was a pretty white straw, with red artificial flowers upon it. She wore at her throat a medallion brooch: one of the two heirlooms of the Lavilette family. It had belonged to the great-grandmother of Monsieur Louis Lavilette, and was the one security that this ambitious family did not spring up, like a mushroom, in one night. It had always touched Christine's imagination as a child. Some native instinct in her made her prize it beyond everything else. She used to make up wonderful stories about it, and tell them to Sophie, who merely wondered, and was not sure but that Christine was wicked; for were not these little romances little lies? Sophie's imagination was limited. As the years went on Christine finally got possession of the medallion, and held it against all opposition. Somehow, with it on this morning, she felt diminish the social distance between herself and Ferrol.

Ferrol himself thought nothing of social distance. Men, as a rule, get rather above that sort of thing. The woman: that was all that was in his mind. She was good to look at: warm, lovable, fascinating in her little daring wickednesses; a fiery little animal, full of splendid impulses, gifted with a perilous temperament: and she loved him. He had a kind of exultation at the very fierceness of her love for him, of what she had done to prove her love: her fury at Vanne Castine, the slaughter of the bear, and the intention to kill Vanne himself; and he knew that she would do more than that, if a great test came. Men feel surer of women than women feel of men.

He sat down on the broad window-ledge, still sipping his whiskey and milk, as he looked at her. She was very good to see. Presently she had to cross a little plot of grass. The dew was still on it. She gathered up her skirts and tip-toed quickly across it. The action was attractive enough, for she had a lithe smoothness of motion. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"White stockings--humph!" he said.

Somehow those white stockings suggested the ironical comment of the world upon his proposed mesalliance; then he laughed good-humouredly.

"Taste is all a matter of habit, anyhow," said he to himself. "My own sister wouldn't have had any better taste if she hadn't been taught. And what am I?"

"What am I? I drink more whiskey in a day than any three men in the country. I don't do a stroke of work; I've got debts all over the world; I've mulcted all my friends; I've made fools of two or three women in my time; I've broken every commandment except--well, I guess I've broken every one, if it comes to that, in spirit, anyhow. I'm a thief, a fire-eating highwayman, begad, and here I am, with a perforated lung, going to marry a young girl like that, without one penny in the world except what I stole! What beasts men are! The worst woman may be worse than the worst man, but all men are worse than most women. But she wants to marry me. She knows exactly what I am in health and prospects; so why shouldn't I?"

He drew himself up, thinking honestly. He believed that he would live if he married Christine; that his "cold" would get better; that the hole in his lung would heal. It was only a matter of climate; he was sure of it. Christine had a few hundred dollars--she had told him so. Suppose he took three hundred dollars of the five thousand dollars: that would leave four thousand seven hundred dollars for his sister. He could go away south with Christine, and could live on five or six hundred dollars a year; then he'd be fit for something. He could go to work. He could join the Militia, if necessary. Anyhow, he could get something to do when he got well.

He drank some more whiskey and milk. "Self-preservation, that's the thing; that's the first law," he said. "And more: if the only girl I ever loved, ever really loved--loved from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet--were here to-day, and Christine stood beside her, little plebeian with a big heart, by Heaven, I'd choose Christine. I can trust her, though she is a little liar. She loves, and she'll stick; and she's true where she loves. Yes; if all the women in the world stood beside Christine this morning, I'd look them all over, from duchess to danseuse, and I'd say, 'Christine Lavilette, I'm a scoundrel. I haven't a penny in the world. I'm a thief; a thief who believes in you. You know what love is; you know what fidelity is. No matter what I did, you would stand by me to the end. To the last day of my life, I'll give you my heart and my hand; and as you are faithful to me, so I will be faithful to you, so help me God!'"

"I don't believe I ever could have run straight in life. I couldn't have been more than four years old when I stole the peaches from my mother's dressing-table; and I lied just as coolly then as I could now. I made love to a girl when I was ten years old." He laughed to himself at the remembrance. "Her father had a foundry. She used to wear a red dress, I remember, and her hair was brown. She sang like a little lark. I was half mad about her; and yet I knew that I didn't really love her. Still, I told her that I did. I suppose it was the cursed falseness of my whole nature. I know that whenever I have said most, and felt most, something in me kept saying all the time: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying!' Was I born a liar?"

I wonder if the first words I ever spoke were a lie? I wonder, when I kissed my mother first, and knew that I was kissing her, if the same little devil that sits up in my head now, said then: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying.' It has said so enough times since. I loved to be with my mother; yet I never felt, even when she died--and God knows I felt bad enough then!

I never felt that my love was all real. It had some infernal note of falseness somewhere, some miserable, hollow place where the sound of my own voice, when I tried to speak the truth, mocked me! I wonder if the smiles I gave, before I was able to speak at all, were only blarney? I wonder, were they only from the wish to stand well with everybody, if I could? It must have been that; and how much I meant, and how much I did not mean, God alone knows!

"What a sympathy I have always had for criminals! I have always wanted, or, anyhow, one side of me has always wanted, to do right, and the other side has always done wrong. I have sympathised with the just, but I have always felt that I'd like to help the criminal to escape his punishment. If I had been more real with that girl in New York, I wonder whether she wouldn't have stuck to me? When I was with her I could always convince her; but, I remember, she told me once that, when I was away from her, she somehow felt that I didn't really love her. That's always been the way. When I was with people, they liked me; when I was away from them, I couldn't depend upon them. No; upon my soul, of all the friends I've ever had, there's not one that I know of that I could go to now--except my sister, poor girl!--and feel sure that no matter what I did, they'd stick to me to the end. I suppose the fault is mine. If I'd been worth the standing by, I'd have been the better stood by. But this girl, this little French provincial, with a heart of fire and gold, with a touch of sin in her, and a thumping artery of truth, she would walk with me to the gallows, and give her life to save my life--yes, a hundred times. Well, then, I'll start over again; for I've found the real thing. I'll be true to her just as long as she's true to me. I'll never lie to her; and I'll do something else--something else. I'll tell her--"

He reached out, picked a wild rose from the vine upon the wall, and fastened it in his button-hole, with a defiant sort of smile, as there came a tap to his door. "Come in," he said.

The door opened, and in stepped Shangois, the notary. He carried a jug under his arm, which, with a nod, he set down at the foot of the bed.

"M'sieu'," said he, "it is a thing that cured the bishop; and once, when a prince of France was at Quebec, and had a bad cold, it cured him. The whiskey in it I made myself--very good white wine." Ferrol looked at the little man curiously. He had only spoken with him once or twice, but he had heard the numberless legends about him, and the Cure had told him many of his sayings, a little weird and sometimes maliciously true to the facts of life.

Ferrol thanked the little man, and motioned to a chair. There was, however, a huge chest against the wall near the window, and Shangois sat down on this, with his legs hunched up to his chin, looking at Ferrol with steady, inquisitive eyes. Ferrol laughed outright. A grotesque thought occurred to him. This little black notary was exactly like the weird imp which, he had always imagined, sat high up in his brain, dropping down little ironies and devilries--his personified conscience; or, perhaps, the truth left out of him at birth and given this form, to

be with him, yet not of him.

Shangois did not stir, nor show by even the wink of an eyelid that he recognised the laughter, or thought that he was being laughed at.

Presently Ferrol sat down and looked at Shangois without speaking, as Shangois looked at him. He smiled more than once, however, as the thought recurred to him.

"Well?" he said at last.

"What if she finds out about the five thousand dollars--eh, m'sieu'?"

Ferrol was completely dumfounded. The brief question covered so much ground--showed a knowledge of the whole case. Like Conscience itself, the little black notary had gone straight to the point, struck home. He was keen enough, however, had sufficient self-command, not to betray himself, but remained unmoved outwardly, and spoke calmly.

"Is that your business--to go round the parish asking conundrums?" he said coolly. "I can't guess the answer to that one, can you?"

Shangois hated cowards, and liked clever people--people who could answer him after his own fashion. Nearly everybody was afraid of his tongue and of him. He knew too much; which was a crime.

"I can find out," he replied, showing his teeth a little.

"Then you're not quite sure yourself, little devilkin?"

"The girl is a riddle. I am not the great reader of riddles."

"I didn't call you that. You're only a common little imp."

Shangois showed his teeth in a malicious smile.

"Why did you set me the riddle, then?" Ferrol continued, his eyes fixed with apparent carelessness on the other's face.

"I thought she might have told you the answer."

"I never asked her the puzzle. Have you?"

By instinct, and from the notary's reputation, Ferrol knew that he was in the presence of an honest man at least, and he waited most anxiously for an answer, for his fate might hang on it.

"M'sieu', I have not seen her since yesterday morning."

"Well, what would you do if you found out about the five thousand dollars?"

"I would see what happened to it; and afterwards I would see that a girl of Bonaventure did not marry a Protestant, and a thief."

Ferrol rose from his chair, coughing a little. Walking over to Shangois, he caught him by both ears and shook the shaggy head back and forth.

"You little scrap of hell," he said in a rage, "if you ever come within fifty feet of me again I'll send you where you came from!"

Though Shangois's eyes bulged from his head, he answered:

"I was only ten feet away from you last night under the elm!"

Suddenly Ferrol's hand slipped down to Shangois's throat. Ferrol's fingers tightened, pressed inwards.

"Now, see, I know what you mean. Some one has robbed Nicolas Lavilette of five thousand dollars. You dare to charge me with it, curse you. Let me see if there's any more lies on your tongue!"

With the violence of the pressure Shangois's tongue was forced out of his mouth.

Suddenly a paroxysm of coughing seized Ferrol, and he let go and staggered back against the window ledge. Shangois was transformed--an animal. No human being had ever seen him as he was at this moment. The fingers of his one hand opened and shut convulsively, his arms worked up and down, his face twitched, his teeth showed like a beast's as he glared at Ferrol. He looked as though he were about to spring upon the now helpless man. But up from the garden below there came the sound of a voice--Christine's--singing.

His face quieted, and his body came to its natural pose again, though his eyes retained an active malice. He turned to go.

"Remember what I tell you," said Ferrol: "if you publish that lie, you'll not live to hear it go about. I mean what I say." Blood showed upon his lips, and a tiny little stream flowed down the corner of his mouth. Whenever he felt that warm fluid on his tongue he was certain of his doom, and the horror of slowly dying oppressed him, angered him. It begot in him a desire to end it all. He had a hatred of suicide; but there were other ways. "I'll have your life, or you'll have mine. I'm not to be played with," he added.

The sentences were broken by coughing, and his handkerchief was wet and red.

"It is no concern of the world," answered Shangois, stretching up his throat, for he still felt the pressure of Ferrol's fingers--"only of the girl and her brother. The girl--I saved her once before from your friend Vanne Castine, and I will save her from you--but, yes! It is nothing to the world, to Bonaventure, that you are a robber; it is everything to her. You are all robbers--you English--cochons!"

He opened the door and went out. Ferrol was about to follow him, but he had a sudden fit of weakness, and he caught up a pillow, and, throwing it on the chest where Shangois had sat, stretched himself upon it. He lay still for quite a long time, and presently fell into a doze. In those days no event made a lasting impression on him. When it was over it ended, so far as concerned any disturbing remembrances of it. He was awakened (he could not have slept for more than fifteen minutes) by a tapping at his door, and his name spoken softly. He went to the door and opened it. It was Christine. He thought she seemed pale, also that she seemed nervous; but her eyes were full of light and fire, and there was no mistaking the look in her face: it was all for him. He set down her

agitation to the adventure they were about to make together. He stepped back, as if inviting her to enter, but she shook her head.

"No, not this morning. I will meet you at the old mill in half an hour. The parish is all mad about the Rebellion, and no one will notice or talk of anything else. I have the best pair of horses in the stable; and we can drive it in two hours, easy."

She took a paper from her pocket.

"This is--the--license," she added, and she blushed. Then, with a sudden impulse, she stepped inside the room, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and he clasped her to his breast.

"My darling Tom!" she said, and then hastened away, with tears in her eyes.

He saw the tears. "I wonder what they were for?" he said musingly, as he opened up the official blue paper. "For joy?" He laughed a little uneasily as he said it. His eyes ran through the document.

"The Honourable Tom Ferrol, of Stavely Castle, County Galway, Ireland, bachelor, and Christine Marie Lavilette, of the Township of Bonaventure, in the Province of Lower Canada, spinster, Are hereby granted," etc., etc., etc., "according to the laws of the Province of Upper Canada," etc., etc., etc.

He put it in his pocket.

"For better or for worse, then," he said, and descended the stairs.

Presently, as he went through the village, he noticed signs of hostility to himself. Cries of Vive la Canada! Vive la France! a bas l'Anglais! came to him out of the murmuring and excitement. But the Regimental Surgeon took off his cap to him, very conspicuously advancing to meet him, and they exchanged a few words.

"By the way, monsieur," the Regimental Surgeon added, as he took his leave, "I knew of this some days ago, and, being a justice of the peace, it was my duty to inform the authorities--yes of course! One must do one's duty in any case," he said, in imitation of English bluffness, and took his leave.

Ten minutes later Christine and Ferrol were on their way to the English province to be married.

That afternoon at three o'clock, as they left the little English-speaking village man and wife, they heard something which startled them both. It was a bear-trainer, singing to his bear the same weird song, without words, which Vanne Castine sang to Michael. Over in another street they could see the bear on his hind feet, dancing, but they could not see the man.

Christine glanced at Ferrol anxiously, for she was nervous and excited, though her face had also a look of exultant happiness.

"No, it's not Castine!" he said, as if in reply to her look.

In a vague way, however, she felt it to be ominous.

CHAPTER XV

The village had no thought or care for anything except the Rebellion and news of it; and for several days Ferrol and Christine lived their new life unobserved by the people of the village, even by the household of Manor Casimbault.

It almost seemed that Ferrol's prophecy regarding himself was coming true, for his cheek took on a heightened colour, his step a greater elasticity, and he flung his shoulders out with a little of the old military swagger: cheerful, forgetful of all the world, and buoyant in what he thought to be his new-found health and permanent happiness.

Vague reports came to the village concerning the Rebellion. There were not a dozen people in the village who espoused the British cause; and these few were silent. For the moment the Lavillettes were popular. Nicolas had made for them a sort of grand coup. He had for the moment redeemed the snobbishness of two generations.

After his secret marriage, Ferrol was not seen in the village for some days, and his presence and nationality were almost forgotten by the people: they only thought of what was actively before their eyes. On the fifth day after his marriage, which was Saturday, he walked down to the village, attracted by shouting and unusual excitement. When he saw the cause of the demonstration he had a sudden flush of anger. A flag-staff had been erected in the centre of the village, and upon it had been run up the French tricolour. He stood and looked at the shouting crowd a moment, then swung round and went to the office of the Regimental Surgeon, who met him at the door. When he came out again he carried a little bundle under his left arm. He made straight for the crowd, which was scattered in groups, and pushed or threaded his way to the flag-staff. He was at least a head taller than any man there, and though he was not so upright as he had been, the lines of his figure were still those of a commanding personality. A sort of platform had been erected around the flag-staff and on it a drunken little habitant was talking treason. Without a word, Ferrol stepped upon the platform, and, loosening the rope, dropped the tricolour half-way down the staff before his action was quite comprehended by the crowd. Presently a hoarse shout proclaimed the anger and consternation of the habitants.

"Leave that flag alone," shouted a dozen voices. "Leave it where it is!" others repeated with oaths.

He dropped it the full length of the staff, whipped it off the string, and put his foot upon it. Then he unrolled the bundle which he had carried under his arm. It was the British flag. He slipped it upon the string, and was about to haul it up, when the drunken orator on the platform caught him by the arm with fiery courage.

"Here, you leave that alone: that's not our flag, and if you string it up, we'll string you up, bagosh!" he roared.

Ferrol's heavy walking-stick was in his right hand. "Let go my arm-quick!" he said quietly.

He was no coward, and these people were, and he knew it. The habitant drew back.

"Get off the platform," he said with quiet menace.

He turned quickly to the crowd, for some had sprung towards the platform to pull him off. Raising his voice, he said:

"Stand back, and hear what I've got to say. You're a hundred to one. You can probably kill me; but before you do that I shall kill three or four of you. I've had to do with rioters before. You little handful of people here--little more than half a million--imagine that you can defeat thirty-five millions, with an army of half a million, a hundred battle-ships, ten thousand cannon and a million rifles. Come now, don't be fools. The Governor alone up there in Montreal has enough men to drive you all into the hills of Maine in a week. You think you've got the start of Colborne? Why, he has known every movement of Papineau and your rebels for the last two months. You can bluster and riot to-day, but look out for to-morrow. I am the only Englishman here among you. Kill me; but watch what your end will be! For every hair of my head there will be one less habitant in this province. You haul down the British flag, and string up your tricolour in this British village while there is one Britisher to say, 'Put up that flag again!--You fools!'"

He suddenly gave the rope a pull, and the flag ran up half-way; but as he did so a stone was thrown. It flew past his head, grazing his temple. A sharp point lacerated the flesh, and the blood flowed down his cheek. He ran the flag up to its full height, swiftly knotted the cord and put his back against the pole. Grasping his stick he prepared himself for an attack.

"Mind what I say," he cried; "the first man that comes will get what for!"

There was a commotion in the crowd; consternation and dismay behind Ferrol, and excitement and anger in front of him. Three men were pushing their way through to him. Two of them were armed. They reached the platform and mounted it. It was the Regimental Surgeon and two British soldiers. The Regimental Surgeon held a paper in his hand.

"I have here," he said to the crowd, "a proclamation by Sir John Colborne. The rebels have been defeated at three points, and half of the men from Bonaventure who joined Papineau have been killed. The ringleader, Nicolas Lavillette, when found, will be put on trial for his life. Now, disperse to your homes, or every man of you will be arrested and tried by court-martial."

The crowd melted away like snow, and they hurried not the less because the stone which some one had thrown at Ferrol had struck a lad in the head, and brought him senseless and bleeding to the ground.

Ferrol picked up the tricolour and handed it to the Regimental Surgeon.

"I could have done it alone, I believe," he said; "and, upon my soul, I'm sorry for the poor devils. Suppose we were Englishmen in France, eh?"

CHAPTER XVI

The fight was over. The childish struggle against misrule had come to a childish end. The little toy loyalists had been broken all to pieces. A few thousand Frenchmen, with a vague patriotism, had shied some harmless stones at the British flag-staff on the citadel: that was all. Obeying the instincts of blood, religion, race, and language, they had made a haphazard, sidelong charge upon their ancient conquerors, had spluttered and kicked a little, and had then turned tail upon disaster and defeat. An incoherent little army had been shattered into fugitive factors, and every one of these hurried and scurried for a hole of safety into which he could hide. Some were mounted, but most were on foot.

Officers fared little better than men. It was "Save who can": they were all on a dead level of misfortune. Hundreds reached no cover, but were overtaken and driven back to British headquarters. In their terror, twenty brave rebels of two hours ago were to be captured by a single British officer of infantry speaking bad French.

Two of these hopeless fugitives were still fortunate enough to get a start of the hounds of retaliation and revenge. They were both mounted, and had far to go to reach their destination. Home was the one word in the mind of each; and they both came from Bonaventure.

The one was a tall, athletic young man, who had borne a captain's commission in Papineau's patriot army. He rode a sorel horse--a great, wiry raw-bone, with a lunge like a moose, and legs that struck the ground with the precision of a piston-rod. As soon as his nose was turned towards Bonaventure he smelt the wind of home in his nostrils; his hatchet head jerked till he got the bit straight between his teeth; then, gripping it as a fretful dog clamps the bone which his master pretends to wrest from him, he leaned down to his work, and the mud, the new-fallen snow and the slush flew like dirty sparks, and covered man and horse.

Above, an uncertain, watery moon flew in and out among the shifting clouds; and now and then a shot came through the mist and the half dusk, telling of some poor fugitive fighting, overtaken, or killed.

The horse neither turned head nor slackened gait. He was like a living machine, obeying neither call nor spur, but travelling with an unchanging speed along the level road, and up and down hill, mile after mile.

In the rider's heart were a hundred things; among them fear, that miserable depression which comes with the first defeats of life, the falling of the mercury from passionate activity to that frozen numbness which betrays the exhausted nerve and despairing mind. The horse could not go fast enough; the panic of flight was on him. He was conscious of it, despised himself for it; but he could not help it. Yet, if he were overtaken, he would fight; yes, fight to the end, whatever it might be. Nicolas Lavilette had begun to unwind the coil of fortune and ambition which his mother had long been engaged in winding.

A mile or two behind was another horse and another rider. The animal was clean of limb, straight and shapely of body, with a leg like a lady's, and heart and wind to travel till she dropped. This mare the little black notary, Shangois, had cheerfully stolen from beside the tent of the English general. The bridle-rein hung upon the wrist of the notary's palsied left hand, and in his right hand he carried the long sabre of an artillery officer, which he had picked up on the battlefield. He rode

like a monkey clinging to the back of a hound, his shoulder hunched, his body bent forward even with the mare's neck, his knees gripping the saddle with a frightened tenacity, his small, black eyes peering into the darkness before him, and his ears alert to the sound of pursuers.

Twenty men of the British artillery were also off on a chase that pleased them well. The hunt was up. It was not only the joy of killing, but the joy of gain, that spurred them on; for they would have that little black thief who stole the general's brown mare, or they would know the reason why.

As the night wore on, Lavilette could hear hoof-beats behind him; those of the mare growing clearer and clearer, and those of the artillerymen remaining about the same, monotonously steady. He looked back, and saw the mare lightly leaning to her work, and a little man hanging to her back. He did not know who it was; and if he had known he would have wondered. Shangois had ridden to camp to fetch him back to Bonaventure for two purposes: to secure the five thousand dollars from Ferrol, and to save Nic's sister from marrying a highwayman. These reasons he would have given to Nic Lavilette, but other ulterior and malicious ideas were in his mind. He had no fear, no real fear. His body shrank, but that was because he had been little used to rough riding and to peril. But he loved this game too, though there was a troop of foes behind him; and as long as they rode behind him he would ride on.

He foresaw a moment when he would stop, slide to the ground, and with his sabre kill one man--or more. Yes, he would kill one man. He had a devilish feeling of delight in thinking how he would do it, and how red the sabre would look when he had done it. He wished he had a hundred hands and a hundred sabres in those hands. More than once he had been in danger of his life, and yet he had had no fear.

He had in him the power of hatred; and he hated Ferrol as he had never hated anything in his life. He hated him as much as, in a furtive sort of way, he loved the rebellious, primitive and violent Christine.

As he rode on a hundred fancies passed through his brain, and they all had to do with killing or torturing. As a boy dreams of magnificent deeds of prowess, so he dreamed of deeds of violence and cruelty. In his life he had been secret, not vicious; he had enjoyed the power which comes from holding the secrets of others, and that had given him pleasure enough. But now, as if the true passion, the vital principle, asserted itself at the very last, so with the shadow of death behind him, his real nature was dominant. He was entirely sane, entirely natural, only malicious.

The night wore on, and lifted higher into the sky, and the grey dawn crept slowly up: first a glimmer, then a neutral glow, then a sort of darkness again, and presently the candid beginning of day.

As they neared the Parish of Bonaventure, Lavilette looked back again, and saw the little black notary a few hundred yards behind. He recognised him this time, waved a hand, and then called to his own fagged horse. Shangois's mare was not fagged; her heart and body were like steel.

Not a quarter of a mile behind them both were three of the twenty artillerymen. Lavilette came to the bridge shouting for Baby, the keeper. Baby recognised him, and ran to the lever even as the sorel

galloped up. For the first time in the ride, Nic stuck spurs harshly into the mare's side. With a grunt of pain the horse sprang madly on. A half-dozen leaps more and they were across, even as the bridge began to turn; for Baby had not recognised the little black notary, and supposed him to be one of Nic's pursuers; the others he saw further back in the road. It was only when Shangois was a third of the way across, that he knew the mare's rider. There was no time to turn the bridge back, and there was no time for Shangois to stop the headlong pace of the mare. She gave a wild whinny of fright, and jumped cornerwise, clear out across the chasm, towards the moving bridge. Her front feet struck the timbers, and then, without a cry, mare and rider dropped headlong down to the river beneath, swollen by the autumn rains.

Baby looked down and saw the mare's head thrust above the water, once, twice; then there was a flash of a sabre--and nothing more.

Shangois, with his dreams of malice and fighting, and the secrets of a half-dozen parishes strapped to his back, had dropped out of Bonaventure, as a stone crumbles from a bank into a stream, and many waters pass over it, and no one inquires whither it has gone, and no one mourns for it.

CHAPTER XVII

ON Sunday morning Ferrol lay resting on a sofa in a little room off the saloon. He had suffered somewhat from the bruise on his head, and while the Lavillettes, including Christine, were at mass, he remained behind, alone in the house, save for two servants in the kitchen. From where he lay he could look down into the village. He was thinking of the tangle into which things had got. Feeling was bitter against him, and against the Lavillettes also, now that the patriots were defeated. It had gone about that he had warned the Governor. The habitants, in their blind way, blamed him for the consequences of their own misdoing. They blamed Nicolas Lavilette. They blamed the Lavillettes for their friendship with Ferrol. They talked and blustered, yet they did not interfere with the two soldiers who kept guard at the home of the Regimental Surgeon. It was expected that the Cure would speak of the Rebellion from the altar this morning. It was also rumoured that he would have something to say about the Lavillettes; and Christine had insisted upon going. He laughed to think of her fury when he suggested that the Cure would probably have something unpleasant to say about himself. She would go and see to that herself, she said. He was amused, and yet he was not in high spirits, for he had coughed a great deal since the incident of the day before, and his strength was much weakened.

Presently he heard a footstep in the room, and turned over so that he might see. It was Sophie Farcinelle.

Before he had time to speak or to sit up, she had dropped a hand on his shoulder. Her face was aflame.

"You have been badly hurt, and I'm very sorry," she said. "Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you. I looked every day, and you didn't come, and--and I thought you had forgotten. Have you? Have you, Mr. Ferrol?"

He had raised himself on his elbow, and his face was near hers. It was

not in him to resist the appealing of a pretty woman, and he had scarcely grasped the fact that he was a married man, his clandestine meetings with his wife having had, to this point, rather an air of adventure and irresponsibility. It is hard to say what he might have done or left undone; but, as Sophie's face was within an inch of his own, the door of the room suddenly opened, and Christine appeared. The indignation that had sent her back from mass to Ferrol was turned into another indignation now.

Sophie, frightened, turned round and met her infuriated look. She did not move, however.

"Leave this room at once. What do you want here?" Christine said, between gasps of anger.

"The room is as much mine as yours," answered Sophie, sullenly.

"The man isn't," retorted Christine, with a vicious snap of her teeth.

"Come, come," said Ferrol, in a soothing tone, rising from the sofa and advancing.

"What's he to you?" said Sophie, scornfully.

"My husband: that's all!" answered Christine. "And now, if you please, will you go to yours? You'll find him at mass. He'll have plenty of praying to do if he prays for you both--voila!"

"Your husband!" said Sophie, in a husky voice, dumfounded and miserable. "Is that so?" she added to Ferrol. "Is she-your wife?"

"That's the case," he answered, "and, of course," he added in a mollifying tone, "being my sister as well as Christine's, there's no reason why you shouldn't be alone with me in the room a few moments. Is there now?" he added to Christine.

The acting was clever enough, but not quite convincing, and Christine was too excited to respond to his blarney.

"He can't be your real husband," said Sophie, hardly above a whisper. "The Cure didn't marry you, did he?" She looked at Ferrol doubtfully.

"Well, no," he said; "we were married over in Upper Canada."

"By a Protestant?" asked Sophie.

Christine interrupted. "What's that to you? I hope I'll never see your face again while I live. I want to be alone with my husband, and your husband wants to be alone with his wife: won't you oblige us and him--Hein?"

Sophie gave Ferrol a look which haunted him while he lived. One idle afternoon he had sowed the seeds of a little storm in the heart of a woman, and a whirlwind was driving through her life to parch and make desolate the green fields of her youth and womanhood. He had loitered and dallied without motive; but the idle and unmeaning sinner is the most dangerous to others and to himself, and he realised it at that moment, so far as it was in him to realise anything of the kind.

Sophie's figure as it left the room had that drooping, beaten look which only comes to the stricken and the incurably humiliated.

"What have you said to her?" asked Christine of Ferrol, "what have you done to her?"

"I didn't do a thing, upon my soul. I didn't say a thing. She'd only just come in."

"What did she say to you?"

"As near as I can remember, she said: 'You have been hurt, and I'm very sorry. Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you; but you didn't come, and I thought you had forgotten me.'"

"What did she mean by that? How dared she!"

"See here, Christine," he said, laying his hand on her quivering shoulder, "I didn't say much to her. I was over there one afternoon, the afternoon I asked you to marry me. I drank a lot of liqueur; she looked very pretty, and before she had a chance to say yes or no about it I kissed her. Now that's a fact. I've never spent five minutes with her alone since; I haven't even seen her since, until this morning. Now that's the honest truth. I know it was scampish; but I never pretended to be good. It is nothing for you to make a fuss about, because, whatever I am--and it isn't much one way or another--I am all yours, straight as a die, Christine. I suppose, if we lived together fifty years, I'd probably kiss fifty women--once a year isn't a high average; but those kisses wouldn't mean anything; and you, you, my girl"--he bent his head down to her "why, you mean everything to me, and I wouldn't give one kiss of yours for a hundred thousand of any other woman's in the world! What you've done for me, and what you'd do for me--"

There was a strange pathos in his voice, an uncommon thing, because his usual eloquence was, as a rule, more pleasing than touching. A quick change of feeling passed over her, and her eyes filled with tears. He ran his arm round her shoulder.

"Ah, come, come!" he said, with a touch of insinuating brogue, and kissed her. "Come, it's all right. I didn't mean anything, and she didn't mean anything; and let's start fresh again."

She looked up at him with quick intelligence. "That's just what we'll have to do," she said. "The Cure this morning at mass scolded the people about the Rebellion, and said that Nic and you had brought all this trouble upon Bonaventure; and everybody looked at our pew and snickered. Oh, how I hate them all! Then I jumped up--"

"Well?" asked Ferrol, "and what then?"

"I told them that my brother wasn't a coward, and that you were my husband."

"And then--then what happened?"

"Oh, then there was a great fuss in the church, and the Cure said ugly things, and I left and came home quick. And now--"

"Well, and now?" Ferrol interrupted.

"Well, now we'll have to do something."

"You mean, to go away?" he asked, with a little shrug of his shoulder. She nodded her head.

He was depressed: he had had a hemorrhage that morning, and the road seemed to close in on him on all sides.

"How are we to live?" he asked, with a pitiful sort of smile.

She looked up at him steadily for a moment, without speaking. He did not understand the look in her eyes, until she said:

"You have that five thousand dollars!"

He drew back a step from her, and met her unwavering look a little fearfully. She knew that--she--! "When did you find it out?" he asked.

"The morning we were married," she replied.

"And you--you, Christine, you married me, a thief!" She nodded again.

"What difference could it make?" she asked. "I wouldn't have been happy if I hadn't married you. And I loved you!"

"Look here, Christine," he said, "that five thousand dollars is not for you or for me. You will be safe enough if anything should happen to me; your people would look after you, and you have some money in your own right. But I've a sister, and she's lame. She never had to do a stroke of work in her life, and she can't do it now. I have shared with her anything I have had since times went wrong with us and our family. I needed money badly enough, but I didn't care very much whether I got it for myself or not--only for her. I wanted that five thousand dollars for her, and to her it shall go; not one penny to you, or to me, or to any other human being. The Rebellion is over: that money wouldn't have altered things one way or another. It's mine, and if anything happens to me--"

He suddenly stooped down and caught her hands, looking her in the eyes steadily.

"Christine," he said, "I want you never to ask me to spend a penny of that money; and I want you to promise me, by the name of the Virgin Mary, that you'll see my sister gets it, and that you'll never let her or any one else know where it came from. Come, Christine, will you do it for me? I know it's very little indeed I give you, and you're giving me everything; but some people are born to be debtors in this world, and some to be creditors, and some give all and get little, because--"

She interrupted him.

"Because they love as I love you," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "Show me where the money is, and I'll do all you say, if--"

"Yes, if anything happens to me," he said, and dropped his hand caressingly upon her head. He loved her in that moment.

She raised her eyes to his. He stooped and kissed her. She was still in his arms as the door opened and Monsieur and Madame Lavilette entered, pale and angry.

CHAPTER XVIII

That night the British soldiers camped in the village. All over the country the rebels had been scattered and beaten, and Bonaventure had been humbled and injured. After the blind injustice of the fearful and the beaten, Nicolas Lavilette and his family were blamed for the miseries which had come upon the place. They had emerged from their isolation to tempt popular favour, had contrived many designs and ambitions, and in the midst of their largest hopes were humiliated, and were followed by resentment. The position was intolerable. In happy circumstances, Christine's marriage with Ferrol might have been a completion of their glory, but in reality it was the last blow to their progress.

In the dusk, Ferrol and Christine sat in his room: she, defiant, indignant, courageous; he hiding his real feelings, and knowing that all she now planned and arranged would come to naught. Three times that day he had had violent paroxysms of coughing; and at last had thrown himself on his bed, exhausted, helplessly wishing that something would end it all. Illusion had passed for ever. He no longer had a cold, but a mortal trouble that was killing him inch by inch. He remembered how a brother officer of his, dying of an incurable disease, and abhorring suicide, had gone into a cafe and slapped an unoffending bully and duellist in the face, inviting a combat. The end was sure, easy and honourable. For himself--he looked at Christine. Not all her abounding vitality, her warm, healthy body, or her overwhelming love, could give him one extra day of life, not one day. What a fool he had been to think that she could do so! And she must sit and watch him--she, with her primitive fierceness of love, must watch him sinking, fading helplessly out of life, sight and being.

A bottle of whiskey was beside him. During the two hours just gone he had drunk a whole pint of it. He poured out another half-glass, filled it up with milk, and drank it off slowly. At that moment a knock came to the door. Christine opened it, and admitted one of the fugitives of Nicolas's company of rebels. He saw Ferrol, and came straight to him.

"A letter for M'sieu' the Honourable," said he "from M'sieu' le Capitaine Lavilette."

Ferrol opened the paper. It contained only a few lines. Nicolas was hiding in the store-room of the vacant farmhouse, and Ferrol must assist him to escape to the State of New York.

He had stolen into the village from the north, and, afraid to trust any one except this faithful member of his company, had taken refuge in a place where, if the worst came to the worst, he could defend himself, for a time at least. Twenty rifles of the rebels had been stored in the farmhouse, and they were all loaded! Ferrol, of course, could go where he liked, being a Britisher, and nobody would notice him. Would he not try to get him away?

While Christine questioned the fugitive, Ferrol thought the matter over.

One thing he knew: the solution of the great problem had come; and the means to the solution ran through his head like lightning. He rose to his feet, drank off a few mouthfuls of undiluted whiskey, filled a flask and put it in his pocket. Then he found his pistols, and put on his greatcoat, muffler and cap, before he spoke a word.

Christine stood watching him intently.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" she said quietly. "I am going to save your brother, if I can," was his reply, as he handed her Nic's letter.

CHAPTER XIX

Half an hour later, as Ferrol was passing from Louis Lavilette's stables into the road leading to the Seigneury he met Sophie Farcinelle, face to face. In a vague sort of way he was conscious that a look of despair and misery had suddenly wasted the bloom upon her cheek, and given to the large, cow-like eyes an expression of child-like hopelessness. An apathy had settled upon his nerves. He saw things as in a dream. His brain worked swiftly, but everything that passed before his eyes was, as it were, in a kaleidoscope, vivid and glowing, but yet intangible. His brain told him that here before him was a woman into whose life he had brought its first ordeal and humiliation. But his heart only felt a reflective sort of pity: it was not a personal or immediate realisation, that is, not at first.

He was scarcely conscious that he stood and looked at her for quite two minutes, without motion or speech on the part of either; but the dumb, desolate look in her eyes--a look of appeal, astonishment, horror and shame combined, presently clarified his senses, and he slowly grew to look at her as at his punishment, the punishment of his life. Before --always before--Sophie had been vague and indistinct: seen to-day, forgotten tomorrow; and previous to meeting her scores had affected his senses, affected them not at all deeply.

She was like a date in history to a boy who remembers that it meant something, but what, is not quite sure. But the meaning and definiteness were his own. Out of the irresponsibility of his nature, out of the moral ineptitude to which he had been born, moral knowledge came to him at last. Love had not done it; neither the love of Christine, as strong as death, nor the love of his sister, the deepest thing he ever knew--but the look of a woman wronged. He had inflicted on her the deepest wrong that may be done a woman. A woman can forgive passion and ruin, and worse, if the man loves her, and she can forgive herself, remembering that to her who loved much, much was forgiven. But out of wilful idleness, the mere flattery of the senses, a vampire feeding upon the spirits and souls of others, for nothing save emotion for emotion's sake --that was shameless, it was the last humiliation of a woman. As it were, to lose joy, and glow, and fervour of young, sincere and healthy life, to whip up the dying vitality and morbid brain of a consumptive!

All in a flash he saw it, realised it, and hated himself for it. He knew that as long as he lived, an hour or ten years, he never could redeem himself; never could forgive himself, and never buy back the life that he had injured. Many a time in his life he had kissed and ridden away, and had been unannoyed by conscience. But in proportion as conscience had

neglected him before, it ground him now between the stones, and he saw himself as he was. Come of a gentleman's family, he knew he was no gentleman. Having learned the forms and courtesies of life, having infused his whole career with a spirit of gay bonhomie, he knew that in truth he was a swaggerer; that bad taste, infamous bad taste, had marked almost everything that he had done in his life. He had passed as one of the nobility, but he knew that all true men, all he had ever met, must have read him through and through. He had understood this before to a certain point, had read himself to a certain mark of gauge, but he had never been honestly and truly a man until this moment. His soul was naked before his eyes. It had been naked before, but he had laughed. Born without real remorse, he felt it at last. The true thing started within him. God, the avenger, the revealer and the healer, had held up this woman as a glass to him that he might see himself.

He saw her as she had been, a docile, soft-eyed girl, untouched by anything that defames or shames, and all in a moment the man that had never been in him until now, from the time he laughed first into his mother's eyes as a babe, spoke out as simply as a child would have spoken, and told the truth. There were no ameliorating phrases to soften it to her ears; there was no tact, there was no blarney, there was no suave suggestion now, no cheap gaiety, no cynicism of the social vampire --only the direct statement of a self-reproachful, dying man.

"I didn't fully know what I was doing," he said to her. "If I had understood then as I do now, I would never have come near you. It was the worst wickedness I ever did."

The new note in his voice, the new fashion of his words, the new look of his eyes, startled her, confused her. She could scarcely believe he was the same man. The dumb desolation lifted a little, and a look of understanding seemed to pierce her tragic apathy. As if a current of thought had been suddenly sent through her, she drew herself up with a little shiver, and looked at him as if she were about to speak; but instead of doing so, a strange, unhappy smile passed across her lips.

He saw that all the goodness of her nature was trying to arouse itself and assure him of forgiveness. It did not deceive him in the least.

"I won't be so mean now as to say I was weak," he added. "I was not weak; I was bad. I always felt I was born a liar and a thief. I've lied to myself all my life; and I've lied to other people because I never was a true man."

"A thief!" she said at last, scarcely above a whisper, and looking at him with a flash of horror in her eyes. "A thief!"

It was no use; he could not allow her to think he meant a thief in the vulgar, common sense, though that was what he was: just a common criminal.

"I have stolen the kind thoughts and love of people to whom I gave nothing in return," he said steadily. "There is nothing good in me. I used to think I was good-natured; but I was not, or I wouldn't have brought misery to a girl like you."

His truth broke down the barriers of her anger and despair. Something welled up in her heart: it may have been love, it may have been inherent womanliness.

"Why did you marry Christine?" she asked.

All at once he saw that she never could quite understand. Her stand-point would still, in the end, be the stand-point of a woman. He saw that she would have forgiven him, even had he not loved her, if he had not married Christine. For the first time he knew something, the real something, of a woman's heart. He had never known it before, because he had been so false himself. He might have been evil and had a conscience too; then he would have been wise. But he had been evil, and had had no conscience or moral mentor from the beginning; so he had never known anything real in his life. He thought he had known Christine, but now he saw her in a new light, through the eyes of her sister from whose heart he had gathered a harvest of passion and affection, and had burnt the stubble and seared the soil forever. Sophie could never justify herself in the eyes of her husband, or in her own eyes, because this man did not love her. Even as he stood before her there, declaring himself to her as wilfully wicked in all that he had said and done, she still longed passionately for the thing that was denied her: not her lost truth back, but the love that would have compensated for her suffering, and in some poor sense have justified her in years to come. She did not put it into words, but the thought was bluntly in her mind. She looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears, which dropped down her cheek to the ground.

He was about to answer her question, when, all at once, her honest eyes looked into his mournfully, and she said with an incredible pathos and simplicity:

"I don't know how I am going to live on with Magon. I suppose I'll have to keep pretending till I die!"

The bell in the church was ringing for vespers. It sounded peaceful and quiet, as though no war, or rebellion, or misery and shame, were anywhere within the radius of its travel.

Just where they stood there was a tall calvary. Behind it was some shrubbery. Ferrol was going to answer her, when he saw, coming along the road, the Cure in his robes, bearing the host. In front of him trotted an acolyte, swinging the censer.

Ferrol quickly drew Sophie aside behind the bushes, where they should not be seen; for he was no longer reckless. He wished to be careful for the woman's sake.

The Cure did not turn his head to the right or left, but came along chanting something slowly. The smell of the incense floated past them. When the priest and the lad reached the calvary they turned towards it, bowed, crossed themselves, and the lad rang a little silver bell. Then the two passed on, the lad still ringing. When they were out of sight the sound of the bell came softly, softly up the road, while the bell in the church tower still called to prayer.

The words the priest chanted seemed to ring through the air after he had gone.

"God have mercy upon the passing soul!
God have mercy upon the passing soul!
Hear the prayer of the sinner, O Lord;
Listen to the voice of those that mourn;

Have mercy upon the sinner, O Lord!"

When Ferrol turned to Sophie again, both her hands were clasping the calvary, and she had dropped her head upon them.

"I must go," he said. She did not move.

Again he spoke to her; but she did not lift her head. Presently, however, as he stood watching her, she moved away from the calvary, and, with her back still turned to him, stepped out into the road and hurried on towards her home, never once turning her head.

He stood looking after her for a moment, then turned and, sitting on a log behind the shrubbery, he tore a few pieces of paper out of a notebook and began writing. He wrote swiftly for about twenty minutes or more, then, arising, he moved on towards the village, where crowds had gathered--excited, fearful, tumultuous; for the British soldiers had just entered the place.

Ferrol seemed almost oblivious of the threatening crowd, which once or twice jostled him more than was accidental. He came into the post-office, got an envelope, put his letter inside it, stamped it, addressed it to Christine, and dropped it into the letter-box.

CHAPTER XX

An hour later he stood among a few companies of British soldiers in front of the massive stone store-house of the Lavillettes' abandoned farmhouse, with its thick shuttered windows and its solid oak doors. It was too late to attempt the fugitive's escape, save by strategy. Over half an hour Nic had kept them at bay. He had made loopholes in the shutters and the door, and from these he fired upon his assailants. Already he had wounded five and killed two.

Men had been sent for timber to batter down the door and windows. Meanwhile, the troops stood at a respectful distance, out of the range of Nic's firing, awaiting developments.

Ferrol consulted with the officers, advising a truce and parley, offering himself as mediator to induce Nic to surrender. To this the officers assented, but warned him that his life might pay the price of his temerity. He laughed at this. He had been talking, with his head and throat well muffled, and the collar of his greatcoat drawn about his ears. Once or twice he coughed, a hacking, wrenching cough, which struck the ears of more than one of the officers painfully; for they had known him in his best and gayest days at Quebec.

It was arranged that he should advance, holding out a flag of truce. Before he went he drew aside one of the younger lieutenants, in whose home at Quebec his sister had always been a welcome visitor, and told him briefly the story of his marriage, of his wife and of Nicolas. He sent Christine a message, that she should not forget to carry his last token to his sister! Then turning, he muffled up his face against the crisp, harsh air (there was design in this also), and, waving a white handkerchief, advanced to the door of the store-room.

The soldiers waited anxiously, fearing that Nic would fire, in spite of all; but presently a spot of white appeared at one of the loopholes; then the door was slowly opened. Ferrol entered, and it was closed again.

Nicolas Lavilette grasped his hand.

"I knew you wouldn't go back on me," said he. "I knew you were my friend. What the devil do they want out there?"

"I am more than your friend: I'm your brother," answered Ferrol, meaningly. Then, quickly taking off his greatcoat, cap, muffler and boots: "Quick, on with these!" he said. "There's no time to lose!"

"What's all this?" asked Nic.

"Never mind; do exactly as I say, and there's a chance for you."

Nic put on the overcoat. Ferrol placed the cap on his head, and muffled him up exactly as he himself had been, then made him put on his own top-boots.

"Now, see," he said, "everything depends upon how you do this thing. You are about my height. Pass yourself off for me. Walk loose and long as I do, and cough like me as you go."

There was no difficulty in showing him what the cough was like: he involuntarily offered an illustration as he spoke.

"As soon as I shut the door and you start forward, I'll fire on them. That'll divert their attention from you. They'll take you for me, and think I've failed in persuading you to give yourself up. Go straight on--don't hurry--coughing all the time; and if you can make the dark, just beyond the soldiers, by the garden bench, you'll find two men. They'll help you. Make for the big tree on the Seigneury road--you know: where you were robbed. There you'll find the fastest horse from your father's stables. Then ride, my boy, ride for your life to the State of New York!"

"And you--you?" asked Nicolas. Ferrol laughed.

"You needn't worry about me, Nic. I'll get out of this all right; as right as rain! Are you ready? Steady now, steady. Let me hear you cough." Nic coughed.

"No, that isn't it. Listen and watch." Ferrol coughed. "Here," he said, taking something from his pocket, "open your mouth." He threw some pepper down the other's throat. "Now try it."

Nic coughed almost convulsively.

"Yes, that's it, that's it! Just keep that up. Come along now. Quick--not a moment to lose! Steady! You're all right, my boy; you've got nerve, and that's the thing. Good-bye, Nic, good luck to you!"

They grasped hands: the door opened swiftly, and Nic stepped outside. In an instant Ferrol was at the loophole. Raising a rifle, he fired, then again and again. Through the loophole he could see a half-dozen men lift a log to advance on the door as Nic passed a couple of officers, coughing hard, and making spasmodic motions with his hand, as though exhausted and

unable to speak.

He fired again, and a soldier fell. The lust of fighting was on him now. It was not a question of country or of race, but only a man crowding the power of old instincts into the last moments of his life. The vigour and valour of a reconquered youth seemed to inspire him; he felt as he did when a mere boy fighting on the Danube. His blood rioted in his veins; his eyes flashed. He lifted the flask of whiskey and gulped down great mouthfuls of it, and fired again and again, laughing madly.

"Let them come on, let them come on," he cried. "By God, I'll settle them!" The frenzy of war possessed him. He heard the timber crash against the door--once, twice, thrice, and then give away. He swung round and saw men's faces glowing in the light of the fire, and then another face shot in before the others--that of Vanne Castine.

With a cry of fury he ran forward into the doorway. Castine saw him at the same moment. With a similar instinct each sprang for the other's throat, Castine with a knife in his hand.

A cry of astonishment went up from the officers and the men without. They had expected to see Nic; but Nic was on his way to the horse beneath the great elm tree, and from the elm tree to the State of New York--and safety.

The men and the officers fell back as Castine and Ferrol clinched in a death struggle. Ferrol knew that his end had come. He had expected it, hoped for it. But, before the end, he wanted to kill this man, if he could. He caught Castine's head in his hands, and, with a last effort, twisted it back with a sudden jerk.

All at once, with the effort, blood spurted from his mouth into the other's face. He shivered, tottered and fell back, as Castine struck blindly into space. For a moment Ferrol swayed back and forth, stretched out his hands convulsively and gasped, trying to speak, the blood welling from his lips. His eyes were wild, anxious and yearning, his face deadly pale and covered with a cold sweat. Presently he collapsed, like a loosened bundle, upon the steps.

Castine, blinded with blood, turned round, and the light of the fire upon his open mouth made him appear to grin painfully--an involuntary grimace of terror.

At that instant a rifle shot rang out from the shrubbery, and Castine sprang from the ground and fell at Ferrol's feet. Then, with a contortive shudder, he rolled over and over the steps, and lay face downward upon the ground--dead.

A girl ran forward from the trees, with a cry, pushing her way through to Ferrol's body. Lifting up his head, she called to him in an agony of entreaty. But he made no answer.

"That's the woman who fired the shot!" said a subaltern officer excitedly. "I saw her!"

"Shut up, you fool--it was his wife!" exclaimed the young captain to whom Ferrol had given his last message for Christine.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

After which comes steady happiness or the devil to pay (wedding)
All men are worse than most women
I always did what was wrong, and liked it--nearly always
Men feel surer of women than women feel of men

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POMP OF THE LAVILLETES

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

CHAPTER X

Ferrols's recovery from his injuries was swifter than might have been expected. As soon as he was able to move about Christine was his constant attendant. She had made herself his nurse, and no one had seriously interfered, though the Cure had not at all vaguely offered a protest to Madame Lavilette. But Madame Lavilette was now in the humour to defy or evade the Cure, whichever seemed the more convenient or more necessary. To be linked by marriage with the nobility would indeed be the justification of all her long-baffled hopes. Meanwhile, the parish gossiped, though little of that gossip was heard at the Manor Casimbault.

By and by the Cure ceased to visit the Manor, but the Regimental Surgeon came often, and sometimes stayed late. He, perhaps, could have given Madame Lavilette the best advice and warning; but, in truth, he enjoyed what he considered a piquant position. Once, drawing at his pipe, as little like an Englishman as possible, he tried to say with an English accent, "Amusing and awkward situation!" but he said, "Damn funny and chic!" instead. He had no idea that any particular harm would be done--either by love or marriage; and neither seemed certain.

One day as Ferrol, entirely convalescent, was sitting in an arbour of the Manor garden, half asleep, he was awakened by voices near him.

He did not recognise one of the voices; the other was Nic Lavilette's.

The strange voice was saying: "I have collected five thousand dollars--all that can be got in the two counties. It is at the Seigneury. Here is an order on the Seigneur Duhamel. Go there in two days and get the money. You will carry it to headquarters. These are General Papineau's orders. You will understand that your men--"

Ferrol heard no more, for the two rebels passed on, their voices becoming indistinct. He sat for a few moments motionless, for an idea had occurred to him even as Papineau's agent spoke.

If that money were only his!

Five thousand dollars--how that would ease the situation! The money belonged to whom? To a lot of rebels: to be used for making war against the British Government. After the money left the hands of the men who gave it--Lavilette and the rest--it wasn't theirs. It belonged to a cause. Well, he was the enemy of that cause. All was fair in love and war!

There were two ways of doing it. He could waylay Nicolas as he came from the house of the old seigneur, could call to him to throw up his hands in good highwayman fashion, and, well disguised, could get away with the money without being discovered. Or again, he could follow Nic from the Seigneury to the Manor, discover where he kept the money, and devise a plan to steal it.

For some time he had given up smoking; but now, as a sort of celebration of his plan, he opened his cigar case, and finding two cigars left, took one out and lighted it.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "thieving is a nice come-down, I must say! But a man has to live, and I'm sick of charity--sick of it. I've had enough."

He puffed his cigar briskly, and enjoyed the forbidden and deadly luxury to the full.

Presently he got up, took his stick, came down-stairs, and passed out into the garden. The shoulder which had been lacerated by the bear drooped forward some what, and seemed smaller than the other. Although he held himself as erect as possible, you still could have laid your hand in the hollow of his left breast, and it would have done no more than give it a natural fulness. Perhaps it was a sort of vanity, perhaps a kind of courage, which made him resolutely straighten himself, in spite of the deadly weight dragging his shoulder down. He might be melancholy

in secret, but in public he was gay and hopeful, and talked of everything except himself. On that interesting topic he would permit no discussion. Yet there often came jugs and jars from friendly people, who never spoke to him of his disease--they were polite and sensitive, these humble folk --but sent him their home-made medicines, with assurances scrawled on paper that "it would cure Mr. Ferrol's cold, oh, absolutely."

Before the Lavillettes he smiled, and received the gifts in a debonair way, sometimes making whimsical remarks. At the same time the jugs and jars of cordial (whose contents varied from whiskey, molasses and boneset, to rum, licorice, gentian and sarsaparilla roots) he carried to his room; and he religiously tried them all by turn. Each seemed to do him good for a few days, then to fail of effect; and he straightway tried another, with renewed hope on every occasion, and subsequent disappointment. He also secretly consulted the Regimental Surgeon, who was too kindhearted to tell him the truth; and he tried his hand at various remedies of his own, which did no more than to loosen the cough which was breaking down his strength.

As now, he often walked down the street swinging his cane, not as though he needed it for walking, but merely for occupation and companionship. He did not delude the villagers by these sorrowful deceptions, but they made believe he did. There were a few people who did not like him; but they were of that cantankerous minority who put thorns in the bed of the elect.

To-day, occupied with his thoughts, he walked down the main road, then presently diverged on a side road which led past Magon Farcinelle's house to an old disused mill, owned by Magon's father. He paused when he came opposite Magon's house, and glanced up at the open door. He was tired, and the coolness of the place looked inviting. He passed through the gate, and went lightly up the path. He could see straight through the house into the harvest-fields at the back. Presently a figure crossed the lane of light, and made a cheerful living foreground to the blue sky beyond the farther door. The light and ardour of the scene gave him a thrill of pleasure, and hurried his footsteps. The air was palpitating with sleepy comfort round him, and he felt a new vitality pass into him: his imagination was feeding his enfeebled body; his active brain was giving him a fresh counterfeit of health. The hectic flush on his pale face deepened. He came to the wooden steps of the piazza, or stoop, and then paused a moment, as if for breath; but, suddenly conscious of what he was doing, he ran briskly up the steps, knocked with his cane upon the door jamb, and, without waiting, stepped inside.

Between him and the outer door, against the ardent blue background, stood Sophie Farcinelle--the English faced Sophie--a little heavy, a little slow, but with the large, long profile which is the type of English beauty--docile, healthy, cow-like. Her face, within her sunbonnet, caught the reflected light, and the pink calico of her dress threw a glow over her cheeks and forehead, and gave a good gleam to her eyes. She had in her hands a dish of strawberries. It was a charming picture in the eyes of a man to whom the feelings of robustness and health were mostly a reminiscence. Yet, while the first impression was on him, he contrasted Sophie with the impetuous, fiery-hearted Christine, with her dramatic Gallic face and blood, to the latter's advantage, in spite of the more harmonious setting of this picture.

Sophie was in place in this old farmhouse, with its dormer windows, with the weaver's loom in the large kitchen, the meat-block by the fireplace,

and the big bread-tray by the stove, where the yeast was as industrious as the reapers beyond in the fields. She was in keeping with the chromo of the Madonna and the Child upon the wall, with the sprig of holy palm at the shrine in the corner, with the old King Louis blunderbuss above the chimney.

Sophie tried to take off her sunbonnet with one hand, but the knot tightened, and it tipped back on her head, giving her a piquant air. She flushed.

"Oh, m'sieu'!" she said in English, "it's kind of you to call. I am quite glad--yes."

Then she turned round to put the strawberries upon a table, but he was beside her in an instant and took the dish out of her hands. Placing it on the table, he took a couple of strawberries in his fingers.

"May I?" he asked in French.

She nodded as she whipped off the sunbonnet, and replied in her own language:

"Certainly, as many as you want."

He bit into one, but got no further with it. Her back was turned to him, and he threw the berry out of the window. She felt rather than saw what he had done. She saw that he was fagged. She instantly thought of a cordial she had in the house, the gift of a nun from the Ursuline Convent in Quebec; a precious little bottle which she had kept for the anniversary of her wedding day. If she had been told in the morning that she would open that bottle now, and for a stranger, she probably would have resented the idea with scorn.

His disguised weariness still exciting her sympathy, she offered him a chair.

"You will sit down, m'sieu'?" she asked. "It is very warm."

She did not say: "You look very tired." She instinctively felt that it would suggest the delicate state of his health.

The chair was inviting enough, with its chintz cover and wicker seat, but he would never admit fatigue. He threw his leg half jauntily over the end of the table and said:

"No--no, thanks; I'd rather not sit."

His forehead was dripping with perspiration. He took out his handkerchief and dried it. His eyes were a little heavy, but his complexion was a delicate and unnatural pink and white--like a piece of fine porcelain. It was a face without care, without vice, without fear, and without morals. For the absence of vice with the absence of morals are not incongruous in a human face. Sophie went into another room for a moment, and brought back a quaint cut-glass bottle of cordial.

"It is very good," she said, as she took the cork out; "better than peach brandy or things like that."

He watched her pour it out into a wine-glass, and as soon as he saw the

colour and the flow of it he was certain of its quality.

"That looks like good stuff," he said, as she handed him a glass brimming over; "but you must have one with me. I can't drink alone, you know."

"Oh, m'sieu', if you please, no," she answered half timidly, flattered by the glance of his eye--a look of flattery which was part of his stock-in-trade. It had got him into trouble all his life.

"Ah, madame, but I plead yes!" he answered, with a little encouraging nod towards her. "Come, let me pour it for you."

He took the odd little bottle and poured her glass as full as his own.

"If Magon were only here--he'd like some, I know," she said, vaguely struggling with a sense of impropriety, though why, she did not know; for, on the surface, this was only dutiful hospitality to a distinguished guest. The impropriety probably lay in the sensations roused by this visit and this visitor. "I intended--"

"Oh, we must try to get along without monsieur," he said, with a little cough; "he's a busy gentleman." The rather rude and flippant sentiment seemed hardly in keeping with the fatal token of his disease.

"Of course, he's far away out there in the field, mowing," she said, as if in apology for something or other. "Yes, he's ever so far away," was his reply, as he turned half lazily to the open doorway.

Neither spoke for a moment. The eyes of both were on the distant harvest-fields. Vaguely, not decisively, the hazy, indolent air of summer was broken by the lazy droning of the locusts and grasshoppers. A driver was calling to his oxen down the dusty road, the warning bark of a dog came across the fields from the gap in the fence which he was tending, and the blades of the scythes made three-quarter circles of light as the mowers travelled down the wheat-fields.

When their eyes met again, the glasses of cordial were at their lips. He held her look by the intentional warmth and meaning of his own, drinking very slowly to the last drop; and then, like a bon viveur, drew a breath of air through his open mouth, and nodded his satisfaction.

"By Jove, but it is good stuff!" he said. "Here's to the nun that made it," he added, making a motion to drink from the empty glass.

Sophie had not drunk all her cordial. At least one third of it was still in the glass. She turned her head away, a little dismayed by his toast.

"Come, that's not fair," he said. "That elixir shouldn't be wasted. Voila, every drop of it now!" he added, with an insinuating smile and gesture.

"Oh, m'sieu'!" she said in protest, but drank it off. He still held the empty glass in his hand, twisting it round musingly.

"A little more, m'sieu'?" she asked, "just a little?" Perhaps she was surprised that he did not hesitate. He instantly held out his glass.

"It was made by a saint; the result should be health and piety--I need both," he added, with a little note of irony in his voice.

"So, once again, my giver of good gifts--to you!" He raised his glass again, toasting her, but paused. "No, this won't do; you must join me," he added.

"Oh, no, m'sieu', no! It is not possible. I feel it now in my head and in all of me. Oh, I feel so warm all, through, and my heart it beats so very fast! Oh, no, m'sieu', no more!"

Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes had become softer and more brilliant under the influence of the potent liqueur.

"Well, well, I'll let you off this time; but next time--next time, remember."

He raised the glass once more, and let the cordial drain down lazily.

He had said, "next time"--she noticed that. He seemed very fond of this strong liqueur. She placed the bottle on the table, her own glass beside it.

"For a minute, a little minute," she said suddenly, and went quickly into the other room.

He coolly picked up the bottle of liqueur, poured his glass full once more, and began drinking it off in little sips. Presently he stood up, and throwing back his shoulder, with a little ostentation of health, he went over to the chintz-covered chair, and sat down in it. His mood was contented and brisk. He held up the glass of liqueur against the sunlight.

"Better than any Benedictine I ever tasted," he said. "A dozen bottles of that would cure this beastly cold of mine. By Jove! it would. It's as good as the Gardivani I got that blessed day when we chaps of the Ninetieth breakfasted with the King of Savoy." He laughed to himself at the reminiscence. "What a day that was, what a stunning day that was!"

He was still smiling, his white teeth showing humorously, when Sophie again entered the room. He had forgotten her, forgotten all about her. As she came in he made a quick, courteous movement to rise--too quick; for a sharp pain shot through his breast, and he grew pale about the lips. But he made essay to stand up lightly, nevertheless.

She saw his paleness, came quickly to him, and put out her hand to gently force him back into his seat, but as instantly decided not to notice his indisposition, and turned towards the table instead. Taking the bottle of cordial, she brought it over, and not looking at him, said:

"Just one more little glass, m'sieu'?" She had in her other hand a plate of seed-cakes. "But yes, you must sit down and eat a cake," she added adroitly. "They are very nice, and I made them myself. We are very fond of them; and once, when the bishop stayed at our house, he liked them too."

Before he sat down he drank off the whole of the cordial in the glass.

She took a chair near him, and breaking a seed-cake began eating it. His tongue was loosened now, and he told her what he was smiling at when she came into the room. She was amused, and there was a little awe to her

interest also. To think--she was sitting here, talking easily to a man who had eaten at kings' tables--with the king! Yet she was at ease too--since she had drunk the cordial. It had acted on her like some philtre. He begged that she would go on with her work; and she got the dish of strawberries, and began stemming them while he talked.

It was much easier talking or listening to him while she was so occupied. She had never enjoyed anything so much in her life. She was not clever, like Christine, but she had admiration of ability, and was obedient to the charm of temperament. Whenever Ferrol had met her he had lavished little attentions on her, had said things to her that carried weight far beyond their intention. She had been pleased at the time, but they had had no permanent effect.

Now everything he said had a different influence: she felt for the first time that it was not easy to look into his eyes, and as if she never could again without betraying--she knew not what.

So they sat there, he talking, she listening and questioning now and then. She had placed the bottle of liqueur and the seed-cakes at his elbow on the windowsill; and as if mechanically, he poured out a glassful, and after a little time, still another, and at last, apparently unconsciously, poured her out one also, and handed it to her. She shook her head; he still held the glass poised; her eyes met his; she made a feeble sort of protest, then took the glass and drank off the liqueur in little sips.

"Gad, that puts fat on the bones, and gives the gay heart!" he said.
"Doesn't it, though?"

She laughed quietly. Her nature was warm, and she had the animal-like fondness for physical ease and content.

"It's as if there wasn't another stroke of work to do in the world," she answered, and sat contentedly back in her chair, the strawberries in her lap. Her fingers, stained with red, lay beside the bowl. All the strings of conscious duty were loose, and some of them were flying. The bumble-bee that flew in at the door and boomed about the room contributed to the day-dream.

She never quite knew how it happened that a moment later he was bending over the back of her chair, with her face upturned to his, and his lips-- With that touch thrilling her, she sprang to her feet, and turned away from him towards the table. Her face was glowing like a peony, and a troubled light came into her eyes. He came over to her, after a moment, and spoke over her shoulders as he just touched her waist with his fingers.

"A la bonne heure--Sophie!"

"Oh, it isn't--it isn't right," she said, her body slightly inclining from him.

"One minute out of a whole life--What does it matter! Ce ne fait rien! Good-bye-Sophie."

Now she inclined towards him. He was about to put his arms round her, when he heard the distant sound of a horse's hoofs. He let her go, and turned towards the front door. Through it he saw Christine driving up

the road. She would pass the house.

"Good-bye-Sophie," he said again over her shoulder, softly; and, picking up his hat and stick, he left the house.

Her eyes followed him dreamily as he went up the road. She sat down in a chair, the trance of the passionate moment still on her, and began to brood. She vaguely heard the rattle of a buggy--Christine's--as it passed the house, and her thoughts drifted into a new-discovered hemisphere where life was all a somnolent sort of joy and bodily love.

She was roused at last by a song which came floating across the fields. The air she knew, and the voice she knew. The chanson was, "Le Voleur de grand Chemin!" The voice was her husband's.

She knew the words, too; and even before she could hear them, they were fitting into the air:

"Qui va la! There's some one in the orchard,
There's a robber in the apple-trees;
Qui va la! He is creeping through the doorway.
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

She hurriedly put away the cordial and the seed-cakes. She picked up the bottle. It was empty. Ferrol had drunk near half a pint of the liqueur! She must get another bottle of it somehow. It would never do for Magon to know that the precious anniversary cordial was all gone--in this way.

She hurried towards the other room. The voice of the farrier-farmer was more distinct now. She could hear clearly the words of the song. She looked out. The square-shouldered, blue-shirted Magon was skirting the turnip field, making a short cut home. His straw hat was pushed back on his head, his scythe was over his shoulder. He had cut the last swathe in the field--now for Sophie. He was not handsome, and she had known that always; but he seemed rough and coarse to-day. She did not notice how well he fitted in with everything about him; and he was so healthy that even three glasses of that cordial would have sent him reeling to bed.

As she passed into the dining-room, the words of the song followed her:

"Qui va la! If you please, I own the mansion,
And this is my grandfather's gun!
Qui va la! Now you're a dead man, robber
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

CHAPTER XI

"I saw you coming," Ferrol said, as Christine stopped the buggy.

"You have been to see Magon and Sophie?" she asked.

"Yes, for a minute," he answered. "Where are you going?"

"Just for a drive," she replied. "Come, won't you?" He got in, and she drove on.

"Where were you going?" she asked.

"Why, to the old mill," was his reply. "I wanted a little walk, then a rest."

Ten minutes later they were looking from a window of the mill, out upon the great wheel which had done all the work the past generations had given it to do, and was now dropping into decay as it had long dropped into disuse. Moss had gathered on the great paddles; many of them were broken, and the debris had been carried away by the freshets of spring and the floods of autumn.

They were silent for a time. Presently she looked up at him.

"You're much better to-day," she said; "better than you've been since--since that night!"

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered; "right as can be." He suddenly turned on her, put his hand upon her arm, and said:

"Come, now, tell me what there was between you and Vanne Castine--once upon a time.

"He was in love with me five years ago," she said.

"And five years ago you were in love with him, eh?" "How dare you say that to me!" she answered. "I never was. I always hated him."

She told her lie with unscrupulous directness. He did not believe her; but what did that matter! It was no reason why he should put her at a disadvantage, and, strangely enough, he did not feel any contempt for her because she told the lie, nor because she had once cared for Castine. Probably in those days she had never known anybody who was very much superior to Castine. She was in love with himself now; that was enough, or nearly enough, and there was no particular reason why he should demand more from her than she demanded from him. She was lying to him now because--well, because she loved him. Like the majority of men, when women who love them have lied to them so, they have seen in it a compliment as strong as the act was weak. It was more to him now that this girl should love him than that she should be upright, or moral, or truthful. Such is the egotism and vanity of such men.

"Well, he owes me several years of life. I put in a bad hour that night."

He knew that "several years of life" was a misstatement; but, then, they were both sinners.

Her eyes flashed, she stamped her foot, and her fingers clinched.

"I wish I'd killed him when I killed his bear!" she said.

Then excitedly she described the scene exactly as it occurred. He admired the dramatic force of it. He thrilled at the direct simplicity of the tale. He saw Vanne Castine in the forearms of the huge beast, with his eyes bulging from his head, his face becoming black, and he saw blind justice in that death grip; Christine's pistol at the bear's head, and the shoulder in the teeth of the beast, and then!

"By the Lord Harry," he said, as she stood panting, with her hands fixed in the last little dramatic gesture, "what a little spitfire and brick you are!"

All at once he caught her away from the open window and drew her to him. Whether what he said that moment, and what he did then, would have been said and done if it were not for the liqueur he had drunk at Sophie's house would be hard to tell; but the sum of it was that she was his and he was hers. She was to be his until the end of all, no matter what the end might be. She looked up at him, her face glowing, her bosom beating--beating, every pulse in her tingling.

"You mean that you love me, and that--that you want-to marry me?" she said; and then, with a fervent impulse, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him again and again.

The directness of her question dumfounded him for the moment; but what she suggested (though it might be selfish in him to agree to it) would be the best thing that could happen to him. So he lied to her, and said:

"Yes, that's what I meant. But, then, to tell you the sober truth, I'm as poor as a church mouse."

He paused. She looked up at him with a sudden fear in her face.

"You're not married?" she asked, "you're not married?" then, breaking off suddenly: "I don't care if you are, I don't! I love you--love you! Nobody would look after you as I would. I don't; no, I don't care."

She drew up closer and closer to him.

"No, I don't mean that I was married," he said. "I meant--what you know--that my life isn't worth, perhaps, a ten-days' purchase."

Her face became pale again.

"You can have my life," she said; "have it just as long as you live, and I'll make you live a year--yes, I'll make you live ten years. Love can do anything; it can do everything. We'll be married to-morrow."

"That's rather difficult," he answered. "You see, you're a Catholic, and I'm a Protestant, and they wouldn't marry us here, I'm afraid; at least not at once, perhaps not at all. You see, I--I've only one lung."

He had never spoken so frankly of his illness before. "Well, we can go over the border into the English province--into Upper Canada," she answered. "Don't you see? It's only a few miles' drive to a village. I can go over one day, get the licence; then, a couple of days after, we can go over together and be married. And then, then--"

He smiled. "Well, then it won't make much difference, will it? We'll have to fit in one way or another, eh?"

"We could be married afterwards by the Cure, if everybody made a fuss. The bishop would give us a dispensation. It's a great sin to marry a heretic, but--"

"But love--eh, ma cigale!" Then he took her eagerly, tenderly into his

arms; and probably he had then the best moment in his life.

Sophie Farcinelle saw them driving back together. She was sitting at early supper with Magon, when, raising her head at the sound of wheels, she saw Christine laughing and Ferrol leaning affectionately towards her. Ferrol had forgotten herself and the incident of the afternoon. It meant nothing to him. With her, however, it was vital: it marked a change in her life. Her face flushed, her hands trembled, and she arose hurriedly and went to get something from the kitchen, that Magon might not see her face.

CHAPTER XII

Twenty men had suddenly disappeared from Bonaventure on the day that Ferrol visited Sophie Farcinelle, and it was only the next morning that the cause of their disappearance was generally known.

There had been many rumours abroad that a detachment of men from the parish were to join Papineau. The Rebellion was to be publicly declared on a certain date near at hand, but nothing definite was known; and because the Cure condemned any revolt against British rule, in spite of the evils the province suffered from bad government, every recruit who joined Nic Lavilette's standard was sworn to secrecy. Louis Lavilette and his wife knew nothing of their son's complicity in the rumoured revolt--one's own people are generally the last to learn of one's misdeeds. Madame would have been sorely frightened and chagrined if she had known the truth, for she was partly English. Besides, if the Rebellion did not succeed, disgrace must come, and then good-bye to the progress of the Lavillettes, and goodbye, maybe, to her son!

In spite of disappointments and rebuffs in many quarters, she still kept faith with her ambitions, and, fortunately for herself, she did not see the abject failure of many of her schemes. Some of the gentry from the neighbouring parishes had called, chiefly, she was aware, because of Mr. Ferrol. She was building the superstructure of her social ambitions on that foundation for the present. She told Louis sometimes, with tears of joy in her eyes, that a special Providence had sent Mr. Ferrol to them, and she did not know how to be grateful enough. He suggested a gift to the church in token of gratitude, but her thanksgiving did not take that form.

Nic was entirely French at heart, and ignored his mother's nationality. He resented the English blood in his veins, and atoned for it by increased loyalty to his French origin. This was probably not so much a principle as a fancy. He had a kind of importance also in the parish, and in his own eyes, because he made as much in three months by buying and selling horses as most people did in a year. The respect of Bonaventure for his ability was considerable; and though it had no marked admiration for his character, it appreciated his drolleries, and was attracted by his high spirits. He had always been erratic, so that when he disappeared for days at a time no one thought anything of it, and when he came home to the Manor at unearthly hours it created no peculiar notice.

He had chosen very good men for his recruits; for, though they talked much among themselves, they drew a cordon of silence round their little

society of revolution. They vanished in the night, and Nic with them; but he returned the next afternoon when the fire of excitement was at its height. As he rode through the streets, people stopped him and poured out questions; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and gave no information, and neither denied nor affirmed anything.

Acting under orders, he had marched his company to make conjunction with other companies at a point in the mountains twenty miles away, but had himself returned to get the five thousand dollars gathered by Papineau's agent. Now that the Rebellion was known, Nicolas intended to try and win his father and his father's money and horses over to the cause.

Because Ferrol was an Englishman he made no confidant of him, and because he was a dying man he saw in him no menace to the cause. Besides, was not Ferrol practically dependent upon their hospitality? If he had guessed that his friend knew accurately of his movements since the night he had seen Vanne Castine hand him his commission from Papineau, he would have felt less secure: for, after all, love--or prejudice--of country is a principle in the minds of most men deeper than any other. When all other morals go, this latent tendency to stand by the blood of his clan is the last moral in man that bears the test without treason. If he had known that Ferrol had written to the Commandant at Quebec, telling him of the imminence of the Rebellion, and the secret recruiting and drilling going on in the parishes, his popular comrade might have paid a high price for his disclosure.

That morning at sunrise, Christine, saying she was going upon a visit to the next parish, started away upon her mission to the English province. Ferrol had urged her to let him go, but she had refused. He had not yet fully recovered from his adventure with the bear, she said. Then he said they might go together; but she insisted that she must make the way clear, and have everything ready. They might go and find the minister away, and then--voila, what a chance for cancan! So she went alone.

From his window he watched her depart; and as she drove away in the fresh morning he fell to thinking what it might seem like if he had to look forward to ten, twenty, or forty years with just such a woman as his wife. Now she was at her best (he did not deceive himself), but in ten years or less the effects of her early life would show in many ways. She had once loved Vanne Castine! and now vanity and cowardice, or unscrupulousness, made her lie about it. He would have her at her best--a young, vigorous radiant nature--for his short life, and then, good-bye, my lover, good-bye! Selfish? Of course. But she would rather--she had said it--have him for the time he had to live than not at all. Position? What was his position? Cast off by his family, forgotten by his old friends, in debt, penniless--let position be hanged! Self-preservation was the first law. What was the difference between this girl and himself? Morals? She was better than himself, anyhow. She had genuine passions, and her sins would be in behalf of those genuine passions. He had kicked over the moral traces many a time from absolute selfishness. She had clean blood in her veins, she was good-looking, she had a quick wit, she was an excellent horse-woman--what then? If she wasn't so "well bred," that was a matter of training and opportunity which had never quite been hers. What was he himself? A loafer, "a deuced unfortunate loafer," but still a loafer. He had no trade and no profession. Confound it! how much better off, and how much better in reality, were these people who had trades and occupations. In the vigour and lithe activity of that girl's body was the force of generations of honest workers. He argued and thought--as every intelligent man in his

position would have done--until he had come into the old life again, and into the presence of the old advantages and temptations!

Christine pulled up for a moment on a little hill, and waved her whip. He shook his handkerchief from the window. That was their prearranged signal. He shook it until she had driven away beyond the hill and was lost to sight, and still stood there at the window looking out.

Presently Madame Lavilette appeared in the garden below, and he was sure, from the way she glanced up at the window, and from her position in the shrubbery, that she had seen the signal. Madame did not look displeased. On the contrary, though an alliance with Christine now seemed unlikely, because of the state of Ferrol's health and his religion and nationality, it pleased her to think that it might have been.

When she had passed into the house, Ferrol sat down on the broad window-sill, and looked out the way Christine had gone. He was thinking of the humiliation of his position, and how it would be more humiliating when he married Christine, should the Lavillettes turn against them--which was quite possible. And from outside: the whole parish--a few excepted--sympathised with the Rebellion, and once the current of hatred of the English set in, he would be swept down by it. There were only three English people in the place. Then, if it became known that he had given information to the authorities, his life would be less uncertain than it was just now. Yet, confound the dirty lot of little rebels, it served them right! He couldn't sit by and see a revolt against British rule without raising a hand. Warn Nic? To what good? The result would be just the same. But if harm came to this intended brother-in-law--well, why borrow trouble? He was not the Lord in Heaven, that he could have everything as he wanted it! It was a toss-up, and he would see the sport out. "Have to cough your way through, my boy!" he said, as he swayed back and forth, the hard cough hacking in his throat.

As he had said yesterday, there was only one thing to do: he must have that five thousand dollars which was to be handed over by the old seigneur. This time he did not attempt to find excuses; he called the thing by its proper name.

"Well, it's stealing, or it's highway robbery, no matter how one looks at it," he said to himself. "I wonder what's the matter with me. I must have got started wrong somehow. Money to spend, playing at soldiering, made to believe I'd have a pot of money and an estate, and then told one fine day that a son and heir, with health in form and feature, was come, and Esau must go. No profession, except soldiering, debt staring me in the face, and a nasty mess of it all round. I wonder why it is that I didn't pull myself together, be honest to a hair, and fight my way through? I suppose I hadn't it in me. I wasn't the right metal at the start. There's always been a black sheep in our family, a gentleman or a lady, born without morals, and I happen to be the gentleman this generation. I always knew what was right, and liked it, and I always did what was wrong, and liked it--nearly always. But I suppose I was fated. I was bound to get into a hole, and I'm in it now, with one lung, and a wife in prospect to support. I suppose if I were to write down all the decent things I've thought in my life, and put them beside the indecent things I've done, nobody would believe the same man was responsible for them. I'm one of the men who ought to be put above temptation; be well bridled, well fed, and the mere cost of comfortable living provided, and then I'd do big things. But that isn't the way of the world; and so I feel that a morning like this, and the love of a girl like that" (he

nodded towards the horizon into which Christine had gone) "ought to make a man sing a Te Deum. And yet this evening, or to-morrow evening, or the next, I'll steal five thousand dollars, if it can be done, and risk my neck in doing it--to say nothing of family honour, and what not."

He got up from the window, went to his trunk, opened it, and, taking out a pistol, examined it carefully, cocking and uncorking it, and after loading it, and again trying the trigger, put it back again. There came a tap at the door, and to his call a servant entered with a glass of milk and whiskey, with which he always began the day.

The taste of the liquid brought back the afternoon of the day before, and he suddenly stopped drinking, threw back his head, and laughed softly.

"By Jingo, but that liqueur was stunning--and so was-Sophie . . . Sophie! That sounds compromisingly familiar this morning, and very improper also! But Sophie is a very nice person, and I ought to be well ashamed of myself. I needed the bit and curb both yesterday. It'll never do at all. If I'm going to marry Christine, we must have no family complications. 'Must have!'" he exclaimed. "But what if Sophie already?--good Lord!"

It was a strange sport altogether, in which some people were bound to get a bad fall, himself probably among the rest. He intended to rob the brother, he had set the government going against the brother's revolutionary cause, he was going to marry one sister, and the other--the less thought and said about that matter the better.

The afternoon brought Nic, who seemed perplexed and excited, but was most friendly. It seemed to Ferrol as if Nic wished to disclose something; but he gave him no opportunity. What he knew he knew, and he could make use of; but he wanted no further confidences. Ever since the night of the fight with the bear there had been nothing said on matters concerning the Rebellion. If Nicolas disclosed any secret now, it must surely be about the money, and that must not be if he could prevent it. But he watched his friend, nevertheless.

Night came, and Christine did not return; eight o'clock, nine o'clock. Lavilette and his wife were a little anxious; but Ferrol and Nicolas made excuses for her, and, in the wild talk and gossip about the Rebellion, attention was easily shifted from her. Besides, Christine was well used to taking care of herself.

Lavilette flatly refused to give Nic a penny for "the cause," and stormed at his connection with it; but at last became pacified, and agreed it was best that Madame Lavilette should know nothing about Nic's complicity just yet. At half past nine o'clock Nic left the house and took the road towards the Seigneury.

CHAPTER XIII

About half-way between the Seigneury and the main street of the village there was a huge tree, whose limbs stretched across the road and made a sort of archway. In the daytime, during the summer, foot travellers, carts and carriages, with their drivers, loitered in its shade as they passed, grateful for the rest it gave; but at night, even when it was

moonlight, the wide branches threw a dark and heavy shadow, and the passage beneath them was gloomy travel. Many a foot traveller hesitated to pass into that umbrageous circle, and skirted the fence beyond the branches on the further side of the road instead.

When Nicolas Lavilette, returning from the Seigneury with the precious bag of gold for Papineau, came hurriedly along the road towards the village, he half halted, with sudden premonition of danger, a dozen feet or so from the great tree. But like most young people, who are inclined to trust nothing but their own strong arms and what their eyes can see, he withstood the temptation to skirt the fence; and with a little half-scornful laugh at himself, yet a little timidity also (or he would not have laughed at all), he hurried under the branches. He had not gone three steps when the light of a dark lantern flashed suddenly in his face, and a pistol touched his forehead. All he could see was a figure clothed entirely in black, even to hands and face, with only holes for eyes, nose and mouth.

He stood perfectly still; the shock was so sudden. There was something determined and deadly in the pose of the figure before him, in the touch of the weapon, in the clearness of the light. His eyes dropped, and fixed involuntarily upon the lantern.

He had a revolver with him; but it was useless to attempt to defend himself with it. Not a word had been spoken. Presently, with the fingers that held the lantern, his assailant made a motion of Hands up! There was no reason why he should risk his life without a chance of winning, so he put up his hands. At another motion he drew out the bag of gold with his left hand, and, obeying the direction of another gesture, dropped it on the ground. There was a pause, then another gesture, which he pretended not to understand.

"Your pistol!" said the voice in a whisper through the mask.

He felt the cold steel at his forehead press a little closer; he also felt how steady it was. He was no fool. He had been in trouble before in his lifetime; he drew out the pistol, and passed it, handle first, to three fingers stretched out from the dark lantern.

The figure moved to where the money and the pistol were, and said, in a whisper still:

"Go!"

He had one moment of wild eagerness to try his luck in a sudden assault, but that passed as suddenly as it came; and with the pistol still covering him, he moved out into the open road, with a helpless anger on him.

A crescent moon was struggling through floes of fleecy clouds, the stars were shining, and so the road was not entirely dark. He went about thirty steps, then turned and looked back. The figure was still standing there, with the pistol and the light. He walked on another twenty or thirty steps, and once again looked back. The light and the pistol were still there. Again he walked on. But now he heard the rumble of buggy wheels behind. Once more he looked back: the figure and the light had gone. The buggy wheels sounded nearer. With a sudden feeling of courage, he turned round and ran back swiftly. The light suddenly flashed again.

"It's no use," he said to himself, and turned and walked slowly along the road.

The sound of the buggy wheels came still nearer. Presently it was obscured by passing under the huge branches of the tree. Then the horse, buggy and driver appeared at the other side, and in a few moments had overtaken him. He looked up sharply, scrutinisingly. Suddenly he burst out:

"Holy mother, Chris, is that you! Where've you been? Are you all right?"

She had whipped up her horse at first sight of him, thinking he might be some drunken rough.

"Mais, mon dieu, Nic, is that you? I thought at first you were a highwayman!"

"No, you've passed the highwayman! Come, let me get in."

Five minutes afterwards she knew exactly what had happened to him.

"Who could it be?" she asked.

"I thought at first it was that beast Vanne Castine!" he answered; "he's the only one that knew about the money, besides the agent and the old seigneur. He brought word from Papineau. But it was too tall for him, and he wouldn't have been so quiet about it. Just like a ghost. It makes my flesh creep now!"

It did not seem such a terrible thing to her at the moment, for she had in her pocket the licence to marry the Honourable Tom Ferrol upon the morrow, and she thought, with joy, of seeing him just as soon as she set foot in the doorway of the Manor Casimbault.

It was something of a shock to her that she did not see him for quite a half hour after she arrived home, and that was half past ten o'clock. But women forget neglect quickly in the delight of a lover's presence; so her disappointment passed. Yet she could not help speaking of it.

"Why weren't you at the door to meet me when I came back to-night with that-that in my pocket?" she asked him, his arm round her.

"I've got a kicking lung, you know," he said, with a half ironical, half self-pitying smile.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Tom, my love!" she said as she buried her face on his breast.

CHAPTER XIV

Before he left for the front next morning to join his company and march to Papineau's headquarters, Nic came to Ferrol, told him, with rage and disappointment, the story of the highway robbery, and also that he hoped Ferrol would not worry about the Rebellion, and would remain at the Manor

Casimbault in any case.

"Anyhow," said he, "my mother's half English; so you're not alone. We're going to make a big fight for it. We've stood it as long as we can. But we're friends in this, aren't we, Ferrol?"

There was a pause, in which Ferrol sipped his whiskey and milk, and continued dressing. He set the glass down, and looked towards the open window, through which came the smell of the ripe orchard and the fragrance of the pines. He turned to Lavilette at last and said, as he fastened his collar:

"Yes, you and I are friends, Nic; but I'm a Britisher, and my people have been Britishers since Edward the Third's time; and for this same Quebec two of my great-grand-uncles fought and lost their lives. If I were sound of wind and limb I'd fight, like them, to keep what they helped to get. You're in for a rare good beating, and, see, my friend--while I wouldn't do you any harm personally, I'd crawl on my knees from here to the citadel at Quebec to get a pot-shot at your rag-tag-and-bobtail 'patriots.' You can count me a first-class enemy to your 'cause,' though I'm not a first-class fighting man. And now, Nic, give me a lift with my coat. This shoulder jibs a bit since the bear-baiting."

Lavilette was naturally prejudiced in Ferrol's favour; and this deliberate and straightforward patriotism more pleased than offended him. His own patriotism was not a deep or lasting thing: vanity and a restless spirit were its fountains of inspiration. He knew that Ferrol was penniless--or he was so yesterday--and this quiet defiance of events in the very camp of the enemy could not but appeal to his ebullient, Gallic chivalry. Ferrol did not say these things because he had five thousand dollars behind him, for he would have said them if he were starving and dying--perhaps out of an inherent stubbornness, perhaps because this hereditary virtue in him would have been as hard to resist as his sins.

"That's all right, Ferrol," answered Lavilette. "I hope you'll stay here at the Manor, no matter what comes. You're welcome. Will you?"

"Yes, I'll stay, and glad to. I can't very well do anything else. I'm bankrupt. Haven't got a penny--of my own," he added, with daring irony. "Besides, it's comfortable here, and I feel like one of the family; and, anyhow, Life is short and Time is a pacer!" His wearing cough emphasised the statement.

"It won't be easy for you in Bonaventure," said Nicolas, walking restlessly up and down. "They're nearly all for the cause, all except the Cure. But he can't do much now, and he'll keep out of the mess. By the time he has a chance to preach against it, next Sunday, every man that wants to 'll be at the front, and fighting. But you'll be all right, I think. They like you here."

"I've a couple of good friends to see me through," was the quiet reply.

"Who are they?"

Ferrol went to his trunk, took out a pair of pistols, and balanced them lightly in his hands. "Good to confuse twenty men," he said. "A brace of 'em are bound to drop, and they don't know which one."

He raised a pistol lazily, and looked out along its barrel through the

open, sunshiny window. Something in the pose of the body, in the curve of the arm, struck Nicolas strangely. He moved almost in front of Ferrol. There came back to him mechanically the remembrance of a piece of silver on the butt of one of the highwayman's pistols!

The same piece of silver was on the butt of Ferrol's pistol. It startled him; but he almost laughed to himself at the absurdity of the suggestion. Ferrol was the last man in the world to play a game like that, and with him.

Still he could not resist a temptation. He stepped in front of the pistol, almost touching it with his forehead, looking at Ferrol as he had looked at the highwayman last night.

"Look out, it's loaded!" said Ferrol, lowering the weapon coolly, and not showing by sign or muscle that he understood Lavilette's meaning. "I should think you'd had enough of pistols for one twenty-four hours."

"Do you know, Ferrol, you looked just then so like the robber last night that, for one moment, I half thought!--And the pistol, too, looks just the same--that silver piece on the butt!"

"Oh, yes, this piece for the name of the owner!" said Ferrol, in a laughing brogue, and he coughed a little. "Well, maybe some one did use this pistol last night. It wouldn't be hard to open my trunk. Let's see; whom shall we suspect?"

Lavilette was entirely reassured, if indeed he needed reassurance. Ferrol coughed still more, and was obliged to sit down on the side of the bed and rest himself against the foot-board.

"There's a new jug of medicine or cordial come this morning from Shangois, the notary," said Lavilette. "I just happened to think of it. What he does counts. He knows a lot."

Ferrol's eyes showed interest at once.

"I'll try it. I'll try it. The stuff Gatineau the miller sent doesn't do any good now."

"Shangois is here--he's downstairs--if you want to see him."

Ferrol nodded. He was tired of talking.

"I'm going," said Lavilette, holding out his hand. "I'll join my company to-day, and the scrimmage 'll begin as soon as we reach Papineau. We've got four hundred men."

Ferrol tried to say something, but he was struggling with the cough in his throat. He held out his hand, and Nicolas took it. At last he was able to say:

"Good luck to you, Nic, and to the devil with the Rebellion! You're in for a bad drubbing."

Nicolas had a sudden feeling of anger. This superior air of Ferrol's was assumed by most Englishmen in the country, and it galled him.

"We'll not ask quarter of Englishmen; no-sacre!" he said in a rage.

"Well, Nic, I'm not so sure of that. Better do that than break your pretty neck on a taut rope," was the lazy reply.

With an oath, Lavilette went out, banging the door after him. Ferrol shrugged his shoulder with a stoic ennui, and put away the pistols in the trunk. He was thinking how reckless he had been to take them out; and yet he was amused, too, at the risk he had run. A strange indifference possessed him this morning--indifference to everything. He was suffering reaction from the previous day's excitement. He had got the five thousand dollars, and now all interest in it seemed to have departed.

Suddenly he said to himself, as he ran a brush around his coat-collar:

"Pon my soul, I forgot; this is my wedding day!--the great day in a man's life, the immense event, after which comes steady happiness or the devil to pay."

He stepped to the window and looked out. It was only six o'clock as yet. He could see the harvesters going to their labours in the fields of wheat and oats, the carters already bringing in little loads of hay. He could hear their marche-'t'-en! to the horses. Over by a little house on the river bank stood an old woman sharpening a sickle. He could see the flash of the steel as the stone and metal gently clashed.

Presently a song came up to him, through the garden below, from the house. The notes seemed to keep time to the hand of the sickle-sharpener. He had heard it before, but only in snatches. Now it seemed to pierce his senses and to flood his nerves with feeling.

The air was sensuous, insinuating, ardent. The words were full of summer and of that dramatic indolence of passion which saved the incident at Magon Farcinelle's from being as vulgar as it was treacherous. The voice was Christine's, on her wedding day.

"Oh, hark how the wind goes, the wind goes
(And dark goes the stream by the mill!)
Oh, see where the storm blows, the storm blows
(There's a rider comes over the hill!)

"He went with the sunshine one morning
(Oh, loud was the bugle and drum!)
My soldier, he gave me no warning
(Oh, would that my lover might come!)

"My kisses, my kisses are waiting
(Oh, the rider comes over the hill!)
In summer the birds should be mating
(Oh, the harvest goes down to the mill!)

"Oh, the rider, the rider he stayeth
(Oh, joy that my lover hath come!)
We will journey together he sayeth
(No more with the bugle and drum!)"

He caught sight of Christine for a moment as she passed through the garden towards the stable. Her gown was of white stuff, with little spots of red in it, and a narrow red ribbon was shot through the collar. Her hat was a pretty white straw, with red artificial flowers upon it.

She wore at her throat a medallion brooch: one of the two heirlooms of the Lavilette family. It had belonged to the great-grandmother of Monsieur Louis Lavilette, and was the one security that this ambitious family did not spring up, like a mushroom, in one night. It had always touched Christine's imagination as a child. Some native instinct in her made her prize it beyond everything else. She used to make up wonderful stories about it, and tell them to Sophie, who merely wondered, and was not sure but that Christine was wicked; for were not these little romances little lies? Sophie's imagination was limited. As the years went on Christine finally got possession of the medallion, and held it against all opposition. Somehow, with it on this morning, she felt diminish the social distance between herself and Ferrol.

Ferrol himself thought nothing of social distance. Men, as a rule, get rather above that sort of thing. The woman: that was all that was in his mind. She was good to look at: warm, lovable, fascinating in her little daring wickednesses; a fiery little animal, full of splendid impulses, gifted with a perilous temperament: and she loved him. He had a kind of exultation at the very fierceness of her love for him, of what she had done to prove her love: her fury at Vanne Castine, the slaughter of the bear, and the intention to kill Vanne himself; and he knew that she would do more than that, if a great test came. Men feel surer of women than women feel of men.

He sat down on the broad window-ledge, still sipping his whiskey and milk, as he looked at her. She was very good to see. Presently she had to cross a little plot of grass. The dew was still on it. She gathered up her skirts and tip-toed quickly across it. The action was attractive enough, for she had a lithe smoothness of motion. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"White stockings--humph!" he said.

Somehow those white stockings suggested the ironical comment of the world upon his proposed mesalliance; then he laughed good-humouredly.

"Taste is all a matter of habit, anyhow," said he to himself. "My own sister wouldn't have had any better taste if she hadn't been taught. And what am I?"

"What am I? I drink more whiskey in a day than any three men in the country. I don't do a stroke of work; I've got debts all over the world; I've mulcted all my friends; I've made fools of two or three women in my time; I've broken every commandment except--well, I guess I've broken every one, if it comes to that, in spirit, anyhow. I'm a thief, a fire-eating highwayman, begad, and here I am, with a perforated lung, going to marry a young girl like that, without one penny in the world except what I stole! What beasts men are! The worst woman may be worse than the worst man, but all men are worse than most women. But she wants to marry me. She knows exactly what I am in health and prospects; so why shouldn't I?"

He drew himself up, thinking honestly. He believed that he would live if he married Christine; that his "cold" would get better; that the hole in his lung would heal. It was only a matter of climate; he was sure of it. Christine had a few hundred dollars--she had told him so. Suppose he took three hundred dollars of the five thousand dollars: that would leave four thousand seven hundred dollars for his sister. He could go away south with Christine, and could live on five or six hundred dollars a

year; then he'd be fit for something. He could go to work. He could join the Militia, if necessary. Anyhow, he could get something to do when he got well.

He drank some more whiskey and milk. "Self-preservation, that's the thing; that's the first law," he said. "And more: if the only girl I ever loved, ever really loved--loved from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet--were here to-day, and Christine stood beside her, little plebeian with a big heart, by Heaven, I'd choose Christine. I can trust her, though she is a little liar. She loves, and she'll stick; and she's true where she loves. Yes; if all the women in the world stood beside Christine this morning, I'd look them all over, from duchess to danseuse, and I'd say, 'Christine Lavilette, I'm a scoundrel. I haven't a penny in the world. I'm a thief; a thief who believes in you. You know what love is; you know what fidelity is. No matter what I did, you would stand by me to the end. To the last day of my life, I'll give you my heart and my hand; and as you are faithful to me, so I will be faithful to you, so help me God!'

"I don't believe I ever could have run straight in life. I couldn't have been more than four years old when I stole the peaches from my mother's dressing-table; and I lied just as coolly then as I could now. I made love to a girl when I was ten years old." He laughed to himself at the remembrance. "Her father had a foundry. She used to wear a red dress, I remember, and her hair was brown. She sang like a little lark. I was half mad about her; and yet I knew that I didn't really love her. Still, I told her that I did. I suppose it was the cursed falseness of my whole nature. I know that whenever I have said most, and felt most, something in me kept saying all the time: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying!' Was I born a liar?

I wonder if the first words I ever spoke were a lie? I wonder, when I kissed my mother first, and knew that I was kissing her, if the same little devil that sits up in my head now, said then: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying.' It has said so enough times since. I loved to be with my mother; yet I never felt, even when she died--and God knows I felt bad enough then!

I never felt that my love was all real. It had some infernal note of falseness somewhere, some miserable, hollow place where the sound of my own voice, when I tried to speak the truth, mocked me! I wonder if the smiles I gave, before I was able to speak at all, were only blarney? I wonder, were they only from the wish to stand well with everybody, if I could? It must have been that; and how much I meant, and how much I did not mean, God alone knows!

"What a sympathy I have always had for criminals! I have always wanted, or, anyhow, one side of me has always wanted, to do right, and the other side has always done wrong. I have sympathised with the just, but I have always felt that I'd like to help the criminal to escape his punishment. If I had been more real with that girl in New York, I wonder whether she wouldn't have stuck to me? When I was with her I could always convince her; but, I remember, she told me once that, when I was away from her, she somehow felt that I didn't really love her. That's always been the way. When I was with people, they liked me; when I was away from them, I couldn't depend upon them. No; upon my soul, of all the friends I've ever had, there's not one that I know of that I could go to now--except my sister, poor girl!--and feel sure that no matter what I did, they'd stick to me to the end. I suppose the fault is mine. If I'd been worth

the standing by, I'd have been the better stood by. But this girl, this little French provincial, with a heart of fire and gold, with a touch of sin in her, and a thumping artery of truth, she would walk with me to the gallows, and give her life to save my life--yes, a hundred times. Well, then, I'll start over again; for I've found the real thing. I'll be true to her just as long as she's true to me. I'll never lie to her; and I'll do something else--something else. I'll tell her--"

He reached out, picked a wild rose from the vine upon the wall, and fastened it in his button-hole, with a defiant sort of smile, as there came a tap to his door. "Come in," he said.

The door opened, and in stepped Shangois, the notary. He carried a jug under his arm, which, with a nod, he set down at the foot of the bed.

"M'sieu'," said he, "it is a thing that cured the bishop; and once, when a prince of France was at Quebec, and had a bad cold, it cured him. The whiskey in it I made myself--very good white wine." Ferrol looked at the little man curiously. He had only spoken with him once or twice, but he had heard the numberless legends about him, and the Cure had told him many of his sayings, a little weird and sometimes maliciously true to the facts of life.

Ferrol thanked the little man, and motioned to a chair. There was, however, a huge chest against the wall near the window, and Shangois sat down on this, with his legs hunched up to his chin, looking at Ferrol with steady, inquisitive eyes. Ferrol laughed outright. A grotesque thought occurred to him. This little black notary was exactly like the weird imp which, he had always imagined, sat high up in his brain, dropping down little ironies and devilries--his personified conscience; or, perhaps, the truth left out of him at birth and given this form, to be with him, yet not of him.

Shangois did not stir, nor show by even the wink of an eyelid that he recognised the laughter, or thought that he was being laughed at.

Presently Ferrol sat down and looked at Shangois without speaking, as Shangois looked at him. He smiled more than once, however, as the thought recurred to him.

"Well?" he said at last.

"What if she finds out about the five thousand dollars--eh, m'sieu'?"

Ferrol was completely dumfounded. The brief question covered so much ground--showed a knowledge of the whole case. Like Conscience itself, the little black notary had gone straight to the point, struck home. He was keen enough, however, had sufficient self-command, not to betray himself, but remained unmoved outwardly, and spoke calmly.

"Is that your business--to go round the parish asking conundrums?" he said coolly. "I can't guess the answer to that one, can you?"

Shangois hated cowards, and liked clever people--people who could answer him after his own fashion. Nearly everybody was afraid of his tongue and of him. He knew too much; which was a crime.

"I can find out," he replied, showing his teeth a little.

"Then you're not quite sure yourself, little devilkin?"

"The girl is a riddle. I am not the great reader of riddles."

"I didn't call you that. You're only a common little imp."

Shangois showed his teeth in a malicious smile.

"Why did you set me the riddle, then?" Ferrol continued, his eyes fixed with apparent carelessness on the other's face.

"I thought she might have told you the answer."

"I never asked her the puzzle. Have you?"

By instinct, and from the notary's reputation, Ferrol knew that he was in the presence of an honest man at least, and he waited most anxiously for an answer, for his fate might hang on it.

"M'sieu', I have not seen her since yesterday morning."

"Well, what would you do if you found out about the five thousand dollars?"

"I would see what happened to it; and afterwards I would see that a girl of Bonaventure did not marry a Protestant, and a thief."

Ferrol rose from his chair, coughing a little. Walking over to Shangois, he caught him by both ears and shook the shaggy head back and forth.

"You little scrap of hell," he said in a rage, "if you ever come within fifty feet of me again I'll send you where you came from!"

Though Shangois's eyes bulged from his head, he answered:

"I was only ten feet away from you last night under the elm!"

Suddenly Ferrol's hand slipped down to Shangois's throat. Ferrol's fingers tightened, pressed inwards.

"Now, see, I know what you mean. Some one has robbed Nicolas Lavilette of five thousand dollars. You dare to charge me with it, curse you. Let me see if there's any more lies on your tongue!"

With the violence of the pressure Shangois's tongue was forced out of his mouth.

Suddenly a paroxysm of coughing seized Ferrol, and he let go and staggered back against the window ledge. Shangois was transformed--an animal. No human being had ever seen him as he was at this moment. The fingers of his one hand opened and shut convulsively, his arms worked up and down, his face twitched, his teeth showed like a beast's as he glared at Ferrol. He looked as though he were about to spring upon the now helpless man. But up from the garden below there came the sound of a voice--Christine's--singing.

His face quieted, and his body came to its natural pose again, though his eyes retained an active malice. He turned to go.

"Remember what I tell you," said Ferrol: "if you publish that lie, you'll not live to hear it go about. I mean what I say." Blood showed upon his lips, and a tiny little stream flowed down the corner of his mouth. Whenever he felt that warm fluid on his tongue he was certain of his doom, and the horror of slowly dying oppressed him, angered him. It begot in him a desire to end it all. He had a hatred of suicide; but there were other ways. "I'll have your life, or you'll have mine. I'm not to be played with," he added.

The sentences were broken by coughing, and his handkerchief was wet and red.

"It is no concern of the world," answered Shangois, stretching up his throat, for he still felt the pressure of Ferrol's fingers--"only of the girl and her brother. The girl--I saved her once before from your friend Vanne Castine, and I will save her from you--but, yes! It is nothing to the world, to Bonaventure, that you are a robber; it is everything to her. You are all robbers--you English--cochons!"

He opened the door and went out. Ferrol was about to follow him, but he had a sudden fit of weakness, and he caught up a pillow, and, throwing it on the chest where Shangois had sat, stretched himself upon it. He lay still for quite a long time, and presently fell into a doze. In those days no event made a lasting impression on him. When it was over it ended, so far as concerned any disturbing remembrances of it. He was awakened (he could not have slept for more than fifteen minutes) by a tapping at his door, and his name spoken softly. He went to the door and opened it. It was Christine. He thought she seemed pale, also that she seemed nervous; but her eyes were full of light and fire, and there was no mistaking the look in her face: it was all for him. He set down her agitation to the adventure they were about to make together. He stepped back, as if inviting her to enter, but she shook her head.

"No, not this morning. I will meet you at the old mill in half an hour. The parish is all mad about the Rebellion, and no one will notice or talk of anything else. I have the best pair of horses in the stable; and we can drive it in two hours, easy."

She took a paper from her pocket.

"This is--the--license," she added, and she blushed. Then, with a sudden impulse, she stepped inside the room, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and he clasped her to his breast.

"My darling Tom!" she said, and then hastened away, with tears in her eyes.

He saw the tears. "I wonder what they were for?" he said musingly, as he opened up the official blue paper. "For joy?" He laughed a little uneasily as he said it. His eyes ran through the document.

"The Honourable Tom Ferrol, of Stavely Castle, County Galway, Ireland, bachelor, and Christine Marie Lavilette, of the Township of Bonaventure, in the Province of Lower Canada, spinster, Are hereby granted," etc., etc., etc., "according to the laws of the Province of Upper Canada," etc., etc., etc.

He put it in his pocket.

"For better or for worse, then," he said, and descended the stairs.

Presently, as he went through the village, he noticed signs of hostility to himself. Cries of *Vive la Canada! Vive la France! a bas l'Anglais!* came to him out of the murmuring and excitement. But the Regimental Surgeon took off his cap to him, very conspicuously advancing to meet him, and they exchanged a few words.

"By the way, monsieur," the Regimental Surgeon added, as he took his leave, "I knew of this some days ago, and, being a justice of the peace, it was my duty to inform the authorities--yes of course! One must do one's duty in any case," he said, in imitation of English bluffness, and took his leave.

Ten minutes later Christine and Ferrol were on their way to the English province to be married.

That afternoon at three o'clock, as they left the little English-speaking village man and wife, they heard something which startled them both. It was a bear-trainer, singing to his bear the same weird song, without words, which Vanne Castine sang to Michael. Over in another street they could see the bear on his hind feet, dancing, but they could not see the man.

Christine glanced at Ferrol anxiously, for she was nervous and excited, though her face had also a look of exultant happiness.

"No, it's not Castine!" he said, as if in reply to her look.

In a vague way, however, she felt it to be ominous.

CHAPTER XV

The village had no thought or care for anything except the Rebellion and news of it; and for several days Ferrol and Christine lived their new life unobserved by the people of the village, even by the household of Manor Casimbault.

It almost seemed that Ferrol's prophecy regarding himself was coming true, for his cheek took on a heightened colour, his step a greater elasticity, and he flung his shoulders out with a little of the old military swagger: cheerful, forgetful of all the world, and buoyant in what he thought to be his new-found health and permanent happiness.

Vague reports came to the village concerning the Rebellion. There were not a dozen people in the village who espoused the British cause; and these few were silent. For the moment the Lavillettes were popular. Nicolas had made for them a sort of grand coup. He had for the moment redeemed the snobbishness of two generations.

After his secret marriage, Ferrol was not seen in the village for some days, and his presence and nationality were almost forgotten by the people: they only thought of what was actively before their eyes. On the fifth day after his marriage, which was Saturday, he walked down to the village, attracted by shouting and unusual excitement. When he saw the

cause of the demonstration he had a sudden flush of anger. A flag-staff had been erected in the centre of the village, and upon it had been run up the French tricolour. He stood and looked at the shouting crowd a moment, then swung round and went to the office of the Regimental Surgeon, who met him at the door. When he came out again he carried a little bundle under his left arm. He made straight for the crowd, which was scattered in groups, and pushed or threaded his way to the flag-staff. He was at least a head taller than any man there, and though he was not so upright as he had been, the lines of his figure were still those of a commanding personality. A sort of platform had been erected around the flag-staff and on it a drunken little habitant was talking treason. Without a word, Ferrol stepped upon the platform, and, loosening the rope, dropped the tricolour half-way down the staff before his action was quite comprehended by the crowd. Presently a hoarse shout proclaimed the anger and consternation of the habitants.

"Leave that flag alone," shouted a dozen voices. "Leave it where it is!" others repeated with oaths.

He dropped it the full length of the staff, whipped it off the string, and put his foot upon it. Then he unrolled the bundle which he had carried under his arm. It was the British flag. He slipped it upon the string, and was about to haul it up, when the drunken orator on the platform caught him by the arm with fiery courage.

"Here, you leave that alone: that's not our flag, and if you string it up, we'll string you up, bagosh!" he roared.

Ferrol's heavy walking-stick was in his right hand. "Let go my arm-quick!" he said quietly.

He was no coward, and these people were, and he knew it. The habitant drew back.

"Get off the platform," he said with quiet menace.

He turned quickly to the crowd, for some had sprung towards the platform to pull him off. Raising his voice, he said:

"Stand back, and hear what I've got to say. You're a hundred to one. You can probably kill me; but before you do that I shall kill three or four of you. I've had to do with rioters before. You little handful of people here--little more than half a million--imagine that you can defeat thirty-five millions, with an army of half a million, a hundred battle-ships, ten thousand cannon and a million rifles. Come now, don't be fools. The Governor alone up there in Montreal has enough men to drive you all into the hills of Maine in a week. You think you've got the start of Colborne? Why, he has known every movement of Papineau and your rebels for the last two months. You can bluster and riot to-day, but look out for to-morrow. I am the only Englishman here among you. Kill me; but watch what your end will be! For every hair of my head there will be one less habitant in this province. You haul down the British flag, and string up your tricolour in this British village while there is one Britisher to say, 'Put up that flag again!--You fools!'"

He suddenly gave the rope a pull, and the flag ran up half-way; but as he did so a stone was thrown. It flew past his head, grazing his temple. A sharp point lacerated the flesh, and the blood flowed down his cheek. He ran the flag up to its full height, swiftly knotted the cord and put

his back against the pole. Grasping his stick he prepared himself for an attack.

"Mind what I say," he cried; "the first man that comes will get what for!"

There was a commotion in the crowd; consternation and dismay behind Ferrol, and excitement and anger in front of him. Three men were pushing their way through to him. Two of them were armed. They reached the platform and mounted it. It was the Regimental Surgeon and two British soldiers. The Regimental Surgeon held a paper in his hand.

"I have here," he said to the crowd, "a proclamation by Sir John Colborne. The rebels have been defeated at three points, and half of the men from Bonaventure who joined Papineau have been killed. The ringleader, Nicolas Lavilette, when found, will be put on trial for his life. Now, disperse to your homes, or every man of you will be arrested and tried by court-martial."

The crowd melted away like snow, and they hurried not the less because the stone which some one had thrown at Ferrol had struck a lad in the head, and brought him senseless and bleeding to the ground.

Ferrol picked up the tricolour and handed it to the Regimental Surgeon.

"I could have done it alone, I believe," he said; "and, upon my soul, I'm sorry for the poor devils. Suppose we were Englishmen in France, eh?"

CHAPTER XVI

The fight was over. The childish struggle against misrule had come to a childish end. The little toy loyalists had been broken all to pieces. A few thousand Frenchmen, with a vague patriotism, had shied some harmless stones at the British flag-staff on the citadel: that was all. Obeying the instincts of blood, religion, race, and language, they had made a haphazard, sidelong charge upon their ancient conquerors, had spluttered and kicked a little, and had then turned tail upon disaster and defeat. An incoherent little army had been shattered into fugitive factors, and every one of these hurried and scurried for a hole of safety into which he could hide. Some were mounted, but most were on foot.

Officers fared little better than men. It was "Save who can": they were all on a dead level of misfortune. Hundreds reached no cover, but were overtaken and driven back to British headquarters. In their terror, twenty brave rebels of two hours ago were to be captured by a single British officer of infantry speaking bad French.

Two of these hopeless fugitives were still fortunate enough to get a start of the hounds of retaliation and revenge. They were both mounted, and had far to go to reach their destination. Home was the one word in the mind of each; and they both came from Bonaventure.

The one was a tall, athletic young man, who had borne a captain's commission in Papineau's patriot army. He rode a sorel horse--a great, wiry raw-bone, with a lunge like a moose, and legs that struck the ground with the precision of a piston-rod. As soon as his nose was turned

towards Bonaventure he smelt the wind of home in his nostrils; his hatchet head jerked till he got the bit straight between his teeth; then, gripping it as a fretful dog clamps the bone which his master pretends to wrest from him, he leaned down to his work, and the mud, the new-fallen snow and the slush flew like dirty sparks, and covered man and horse.

Above, an uncertain, watery moon flew in and out among the shifting clouds; and now and then a shot came through the mist and the half dusk, telling of some poor fugitive fighting, overtaken, or killed.

The horse neither turned head nor slackened gait. He was like a living machine, obeying neither call nor spur, but travelling with an unchanging speed along the level road, and up and down hill, mile after mile.

In the rider's heart were a hundred things; among them fear, that miserable depression which comes with the first defeats of life, the falling of the mercury from passionate activity to that frozen numbness which betrays the exhausted nerve and despairing mind. The horse could not go fast enough; the panic of flight was on him. He was conscious of it, despised himself for it; but he could not help it. Yet, if he were overtaken, he would fight; yes, fight to the end, whatever it might be. Nicolas Lavilette had begun to unwind the coil of fortune and ambition which his mother had long been engaged in winding.

A mile or two behind was another horse and another rider. The animal was clean of limb, straight and shapely of body, with a leg like a lady's, and heart and wind to travel till she dropped. This mare the little black notary, Shangois, had cheerfully stolen from beside the tent of the English general. The bridle-rein hung upon the wrist of the notary's palsied left hand, and in his right hand he carried the long sabre of an artillery officer, which he had picked up on the battlefield. He rode like a monkey clinging to the back of a hound, his shoulder hunched, his body bent forward even with the mare's neck, his knees gripping the saddle with a frightened tenacity, his small, black eyes peering into the darkness before him, and his ears alert to the sound of pursuers.

Twenty men of the British artillery were also off on a chase that pleased them well. The hunt was up. It was not only the joy of killing, but the joy of gain, that spurred them on; for they would have that little black thief who stole the general's brown mare, or they would know the reason why.

As the night wore on, Lavilette could hear hoof-beats behind him; those of the mare growing clearer and clearer, and those of the artillerymen remaining about the same, monotonously steady. He looked back, and saw the mare lightly leaning to her work, and a little man hanging to her back. He did not know who it was; and if he had known he would have wondered. Shangois had ridden to camp to fetch him back to Bonaventure for two purposes: to secure the five thousand dollars from Ferrol, and to save Nic's sister from marrying a highwayman. These reasons he would have given to Nic Lavilette, but other ulterior and malicious ideas were in his mind. He had no fear, no real fear. His body shrank, but that was because he had been little used to rough riding and to peril. But he loved this game too, though there was a troop of foes behind him; and as long as they rode behind him he would ride on.

He foresaw a moment when he would stop, slide to the ground, and with his sabre kill one man--or more. Yes, he would kill one man. He had a devilish feeling of delight in thinking how he would do it, and how red

the sabre would look when he had done it. He wished he had a hundred hands and a hundred sabres in those hands. More than once he had been in danger of his life, and yet he had had no fear.

He had in him the power of hatred; and he hated Ferrol as he had never hated anything in his life. He hated him as much as, in a furtive sort of way, he loved the rebellious, primitive and violent Christine.

As he rode on a hundred fancies passed through his brain, and they all had to do with killing or torturing. As a boy dreams of magnificent deeds of prowess, so he dreamed of deeds of violence and cruelty. In his life he had been secret, not vicious; he had enjoyed the power which comes from holding the secrets of others, and that had given him pleasure enough. But now, as if the true passion, the vital principle, asserted itself at the very last, so with the shadow of death behind him, his real nature was dominant. He was entirely sane, entirely natural, only malicious.

The night wore on, and lifted higher into the sky, and the grey dawn crept slowly up: first a glimmer, then a neutral glow, then a sort of darkness again, and presently the candid beginning of day.

As they neared the Parish of Bonaventure, Lavilette looked back again, and saw the little black notary a few hundred yards behind. He recognised him this time, waved a hand, and then called to his own fagged horse. Shangois's mare was not fagged; her heart and body were like steel.

Not a quarter of a mile behind them both were three of the twenty artillerymen. Lavilette came to the bridge shouting for Baby, the keeper. Baby recognised him, and ran to the lever even as the sorel galloped up. For the first time in the ride, Nic stuck spurs harshly into the sorel's side. With a grunt of pain the horse sprang madly on. A half-dozen leaps more and they were across, even as the bridge began to turn; for Baby had not recognised the little black notary, and supposed him to be one of Nic's pursuers; the others he saw further back in the road. It was only when Shangois was a third of the way across, that he knew the mare's rider. There was no time to turn the bridge back, and there was no time for Shangois to stop the headlong pace of the mare. She gave a wild whinny of fright, and jumped cornerwise, clear out across the chasm, towards the moving bridge. Her front feet struck the timbers, and then, without a cry, mare and rider dropped headlong down to the river beneath, swollen by the autumn rains.

Baby looked down and saw the mare's head thrust above the water, once, twice; then there was a flash of a sabre--and nothing more.

Shangois, with his dreams of malice and fighting, and the secrets of a half-dozen parishes strapped to his back, had dropped out of Bonaventure, as a stone crumbles from a bank into a stream, and many waters pass over it, and no one inquires whither it has gone, and no one mourns for it.

CHAPTER XVII

ON Sunday morning Ferrol lay resting on a sofa in a little room off the saloon. He had suffered somewhat from the bruise on his head, and while

the Lavillettes, including Christine, were at mass, he remained behind, alone in the house, save for two servants in the kitchen. From where he lay he could look down into the village. He was thinking of the tangle into which things had got. Feeling was bitter against him, and against the Lavillettes also, now that the patriots were defeated. It had gone about that he had warned the Governor. The habitants, in their blind way, blamed him for the consequences of their own misdoing. They blamed Nicolas Lavilette. They blamed the Lavillettes for their friendship with Ferrol. They talked and blustered, yet they did not interfere with the two soldiers who kept guard at the home of the Regimental Surgeon. It was expected that the Cure would speak of the Rebellion from the altar this morning. It was also rumoured that he would have something to say about the Lavillettes; and Christine had insisted upon going. He laughed to think of her fury when he suggested that the Cure would probably have something unpleasant to say about himself. She would go and see to that herself, she said. He was amused, and yet he was not in high spirits, for he had coughed a great deal since the incident of the day before, and his strength was much weakened.

Presently he heard a footstep in the room, and turned over so that he might see. It was Sophie Farcinelle.

Before he had time to speak or to sit up, she had dropped a hand on his shoulder. Her face was aflame.

"You have been badly hurt, and I'm very sorry," she said. "Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you. I looked every day, and you didn't come, and--and I thought you had forgotten. Have you? Have you, Mr. Ferrol?"

He had raised himself on his elbow, and his face was near hers. It was not in him to resist the appealing of a pretty woman, and he had scarcely grasped the fact that he was a married man, his clandestine meetings with his wife having had, to this point, rather an air of adventure and irresponsibility. It is hard to say what he might have done or left undone; but, as Sophie's face was within an inch of his own, the door of the room suddenly opened, and Christine appeared. The indignation that had sent her back from mass to Ferrol was turned into another indignation now.

Sophie, frightened, turned round and met her infuriated look. She did not move, however.

"Leave this room at once. What do you want here?" Christine said, between gasps of anger.

"The room is as much mine as yours," answered Sophie, sullenly.

"The man isn't," retorted Christine, with a vicious snap of her teeth.

"Come, come," said Ferrol, in a soothing tone, rising from the sofa and advancing.

"What's he to you?" said Sophie, scornfully.

"My husband: that's all!" answered Christine. "And now, if you please, will you go to yours? You'll find him at mass. He'll have plenty of praying to do if he prays for you both--voila!"

"Your husband!" said Sophie, in a husky voice, dumfounded and miserable. "Is that so?" she added to Ferrol. "Is she-your wife?"

"That's the case," he answered, "and, of course," he added in a mollifying tone, "being my sister as well as Christine's, there's no reason why you shouldn't be alone with me in the room a few moments. Is there now?" he added to Christine.

The acting was clever enough, but not quite convincing, and Christine was too excited to respond to his blarney.

"He can't be your real husband," said Sophie, hardly above a whisper. "The Cure didn't marry you, did he?" She looked at Ferrol doubtfully.

"Well, no," he said; "we were married over in Upper Canada."

"By a Protestant?" asked Sophie.

Christine interrupted. "What's that to you? I hope I'll never see your face again while I live. I want to be alone with my husband, and your husband wants to be alone with his wife: won't you oblige us and him--Hein?"

Sophie gave Ferrol a look which haunted him while he lived. One idle afternoon he had sowed the seeds of a little storm in the heart of a woman, and a whirlwind was driving through her life to parch and make desolate the green fields of her youth and womanhood. He had loitered and dallied without motive; but the idle and unmeaning sinner is the most dangerous to others and to himself, and he realised it at that moment, so far as it was in him to realise anything of the kind.

Sophie's figure as it left the room had that drooping, beaten look which only comes to the stricken and the incurably humiliated.

"What have you said to her?" asked Christine of Ferrol, "what have you done to her?"

"I didn't do a thing, upon my soul. I didn't say a thing. She'd only just come in."

"What did she say to you?"

"As near as I can remember, she said: 'You have been hurt, and I'm very sorry. Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you; but you didn't come, and I thought you had forgotten me.'"

"What did she mean by that? How dared she!"

"See here, Christine," he said, laying his hand on her quivering shoulder, "I didn't say much to her. I was over there one afternoon, the afternoon I asked you to marry me. I drank a lot of liqueur; she looked very pretty, and before she had a chance to say yes or no about it I kissed her. Now that's a fact. I've never spent five minutes with her alone since; I haven't even seen her since, until this morning. Now that's the honest truth. I know it was scampish; but I never pretended to be good. It is nothing for you to make a fuss about, because, whatever I am--and it isn't much one way or another--I am all yours, straight as a die, Christine. I suppose, if we lived together fifty

years, I'd probably kiss fifty women--once a year isn't a high average; but those kisses wouldn't mean anything; and you, you, my girl"--he bent his head down to her "why, you mean everything to me, and I wouldn't give one kiss of yours for a hundred thousand of any other woman's in the world! What you've done for me, and what you'd do for me--"

There was a strange pathos in his voice, an uncommon thing, because his usual eloquence was, as a rule, more pleasing than touching. A quick change of feeling passed over her, and her eyes filled with tears. He ran his arm round her shoulder.

"Ah, come, come!" he said, with a touch of insinuating brogue, and kissed her. "Come, it's all right. I didn't mean anything, and she didn't mean anything; and let's start fresh again."

She looked up at him with quick intelligence. "That's just what we'll have to do," she said. "The Cure this morning at mass scolded the people about the Rebellion, and said that Nic and you had brought all this trouble upon Bonaventure; and everybody looked at our pew and snickered. Oh, how I hate them all! Then I jumped up--"

"Well?" asked Ferrol, "and what then?"

"I told them that my brother wasn't a coward, and that you were my husband."

"And then--then what happened?"

"Oh, then there was a great fuss in the church, and the Cure said ugly things, and I left and came home quick. And now--"

"Well, and now?" Ferrol interrupted.

"Well, now we'll have to do something."

"You mean, to go away?" he asked, with a little shrug of his shoulder. She nodded her head.

He was depressed: he had had a hemorrhage that morning, and the road seemed to close in on him on all sides.

"How are we to live?" he asked, with a pitiful sort of smile.

She looked up at him steadily for a moment, without speaking. He did not understand the look in her eyes, until she said:

"You have that five thousand dollars!"

He drew back a step from her, and met her unwavering look a little fearfully. She knew that--she--! "When did you find it out?" he asked.

"The morning we were married," she replied.

"And you--you, Christine, you married me, a thief!" She nodded again.

"What difference could it make?" she asked. "I wouldn't have been happy if I hadn't married you. And I loved you!"

"Look here, Christine," he said, "that five thousand dollars is not for

you or for me. You will be safe enough if anything should happen to me; your people would look after you, and you have some money in your own right. But I've a sister, and she's lame. She never had to do a stroke of work in her life, and she can't do it now. I have shared with her anything I have had since times went wrong with us and our family. I needed money badly enough, but I didn't care very much whether I got it for myself or not--only for her. I wanted that five thousand dollars for her, and to her it shall go; not one penny to you, or to me, or to any other human being. The Rebellion is over: that money wouldn't have altered things one way or another. It's mine, and if anything happens to me--"

He suddenly stooped down and caught her hands, looking her in the eyes steadily.

"Christine," he said, "I want you never to ask me to spend a penny of that money; and I want you to promise me, by the name of the Virgin Mary, that you'll see my sister gets it, and that you'll never let her or any one else know where it came from. Come, Christine, will you do it for me? I know it's very little indeed I give you, and you're giving me everything; but some people are born to be debtors in this world, and some to be creditors, and some give all and get little, because--"

She interrupted him.

"Because they love as I love you," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "Show me where the money is, and I'll do all you say, if--"

"Yes, if anything happens to me," he said, and dropped his hand caressingly upon her head. He loved her in that moment.

She raised her eyes to his. He stooped and kissed her. She was still in his arms as the door opened and Monsieur and Madame Lavilette entered, pale and angry.

CHAPTER XVIII

That night the British soldiers camped in the village. All over the country the rebels had been scattered and beaten, and Bonaventure had been humbled and injured. After the blind injustice of the fearful and the beaten, Nicolas Lavilette and his family were blamed for the miseries which had come upon the place. They had emerged from their isolation to tempt popular favour, had contrived many designs and ambitions, and in the midst of their largest hopes were humiliated, and were followed by resentment. The position was intolerable. In happy circumstances, Christine's marriage with Ferrol might have been a completion of their glory, but in reality it was the last blow to their progress.

In the dusk, Ferrol and Christine sat in his room: she, defiant, indignant, courageous; he hiding his real feelings, and knowing that all she now planned and arranged would come to naught. Three times that day he had had violent paroxysms of coughing; and at last had thrown himself on his bed, exhausted, helplessly wishing that something would end it all. Illusion had passed for ever. He no longer had a cold, but a mortal trouble that was killing him inch by inch. He remembered how a brother officer of his, dying of an incurable disease, and abhorring

suicide, had gone into a cafe and slapped an unoffending bully and duellist in the face, inviting a combat. The end was sure, easy and honourable. For himself--he looked at Christine. Not all her abounding vitality, her warm, healthy body, or her overwhelming love, could give him one extra day of life, not one day. What a fool he had been to think that she could do so! And she must sit and watch him--she, with her primitive fierceness of love, must watch him sinking, fading helplessly out of life, sight and being.

A bottle of whiskey was beside him. During the two hours just gone he had drunk a whole pint of it. He poured out another half-glass, filled it up with milk, and drank it off slowly. At that moment a knock came to the door. Christine opened it, and admitted one of the fugitives of Nicolas's company of rebels. He saw Ferrol, and came straight to him.

"A letter for M'sieu' the Honourable," said he "from M'sieu' le Capitaine Lavilette."

Ferrol opened the paper. It contained only a few lines. Nicolas was hiding in the store-room of the vacant farmhouse, and Ferrol must assist him to escape to the State of New York.

He had stolen into the village from the north, and, afraid to trust any one except this faithful member of his company, had taken refuge in a place where, if the worst came to the worst, he could defend himself, for a time at least. Twenty rifles of the rebels had been stored in the farmhouse, and they were all loaded! Ferrol, of course, could go where he liked, being a Britisher, and nobody would notice him. Would he not try to get him away?

While Christine questioned the fugitive, Ferrol thought the matter over. One thing he knew: the solution of the great problem had come; and the means to the solution ran through his head like lightning. He rose to his feet, drank off a few mouthfuls of undiluted whiskey, filled a flask and put it in his pocket. Then he found his pistols, and put on his greatcoat, muffler and cap, before he spoke a word.

Christine stood watching him intently.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" she said quietly. "I am going to save your brother, if I can," was his reply, as he handed her Nic's letter.

CHAPTER XIX

Half an hour later, as Ferrol was passing from Louis Lavilette's stables into the road leading to the Seigneury he met Sophie Farcinelle, face to face. In a vague sort of way he was conscious that a look of despair and misery had suddenly wasted the bloom upon her cheek, and given to the large, cow-like eyes an expression of child-like hopelessness. An apathy had settled upon his nerves. He saw things as in a dream. His brain worked swiftly, but everything that passed before his eyes was, as it were, in a kaleidoscope, vivid and glowing, but yet intangible. His brain told him that here before him was a woman into whose life he had brought its first ordeal and humiliation. But his heart only felt a reflective sort of pity: it was not a personal or immediate realisation, that is, not at first.

He was scarcely conscious that he stood and looked at her for quite two minutes, without motion or speech on the part of either; but the dumb, desolate look in her eyes--a look of appeal, astonishment, horror and shame combined, presently clarified his senses, and he slowly grew to look at her as at his punishment, the punishment of his life. Before --always before--Sophie had been vague and indistinct: seen to-day, forgotten tomorrow; and previous to meeting her scores had affected his senses, affected them not at all deeply.

She was like a date in history to a boy who remembers that it meant something, but what, is not quite sure. But the meaning and definiteness were his own. Out of the irresponsibility of his nature, out of the moral ineptitude to which he had been born, moral knowledge came to him at last. Love had not done it; neither the love of Christine, as strong as death, nor the love of his sister, the deepest thing he ever knew--but the look of a woman wronged. He had inflicted on her the deepest wrong that may be done a woman. A woman can forgive passion and ruin, and worse, if the man loves her, and she can forgive herself, remembering that to her who loved much, much was forgiven. But out of wilful idleness, the mere flattery of the senses, a vampire feeding upon the spirits and souls of others, for nothing save emotion for emotion's sake --that was shameless, it was the last humiliation of a woman. As it were, to lose joy, and glow, and fervour of young, sincere and healthy life, to whip up the dying vitality and morbid brain of a consumptive!

All in a flash he saw it, realised it, and hated himself for it. He knew that as long as he lived, an hour or ten years, he never could redeem himself; never could forgive himself, and never buy back the life that he had injured. Many a time in his life he had kissed and ridden away, and had been unannoyed by conscience. But in proportion as conscience had neglected him before, it ground him now between the stones, and he saw himself as he was. Come of a gentleman's family, he knew he was no gentleman. Having learned the forms and courtesies of life, having infused his whole career with a spirit of gay bonhomie, he knew that in truth he was a swaggerer; that bad taste, infamous bad taste, had marked almost everything that he had done in his life. He had passed as one of the nobility, but he knew that all true men, all he had ever met, must have read him through and through. He had understood this before to a certain point, had read himself to a certain mark of gauge, but he had never been honestly and truly a man until this moment. His soul was naked before his eyes. It had been naked before, but he had laughed. Born without real remorse, he felt it at last. The true thing started within him. God, the avenger, the revealer and the healer, had held up this woman as a glass to him that he might see himself.

He saw her as she had been, a docile, soft-eyed girl, untouched by anything that defames or shames, and all in a moment the man that had never been in him until now, from the time he laughed first into his mother's eyes as a babe, spoke out as simply as a child would have spoken, and told the truth. There were no ameliorating phrases to soften it to her ears; there was no tact, there was no blarney, there was no suave suggestion now, no cheap gaiety, no cynicism of the social vampire --only the direct statement of a self-reproachful, dying man.

"I didn't fully know what I was doing," he said to her. "If I had understood then as I do now, I would never have come near you. It was the worst wickedness I ever did."

The new note in his voice, the new fashion of his words, the new look of his eyes, startled her, confused her. She could scarcely believe he was the same man. The dumb desolation lifted a little, and a look of understanding seemed to pierce her tragic apathy. As if a current of thought had been suddenly sent through her, she drew herself up with a little shiver, and looked at him as if she were about to speak; but instead of doing so, a strange, unhappy smile passed across her lips.

He saw that all the goodness of her nature was trying to arouse itself and assure him of forgiveness. It did not deceive him in the least.

"I won't be so mean now as to say I was weak," he added. "I was not weak; I was bad. I always felt I was born a liar and a thief. I've lied to myself all my life; and I've lied to other people because I never was a true man."

"A thief!" she said at last, scarcely above a whisper, and looking at him with a flash of horror in her eyes. "A thief!"

It was no use; he could not allow her to think he meant a thief in the vulgar, common sense, though that was what he was: just a common criminal.

"I have stolen the kind thoughts and love of people to whom I gave nothing in return," he said steadily. "There is nothing good in me. I used to think I was good-natured; but I was not, or I wouldn't have brought misery to a girl like you."

His truth broke down the barriers of her anger and despair. Something welled up in her heart: it may have been love, it may have been inherent womanliness.

"Why did you marry Christine?" she asked.

All at once he saw that she never could quite understand. Her stand-point would still, in the end, be the stand-point of a woman. He saw that she would have forgiven him, even had he not loved her, if he had not married Christine. For the first time he knew something, the real something, of a woman's heart. He had never known it before, because he had been so false himself. He might have been evil and had a conscience too; then he would have been wise. But he had been evil, and had had no conscience or moral mentor from the beginning; so he had never known anything real in his life. He thought he had known Christine, but now he saw her in a new light, through the eyes of her sister from whose heart he had gathered a harvest of passion and affection, and had burnt the stubble and seared the soil forever. Sophie could never justify herself in the eyes of her husband, or in her own eyes, because this man did not love her. Even as he stood before her there, declaring himself to her as wilfully wicked in all that he had said and done, she still longed passionately for the thing that was denied her: not her lost truth back, but the love that would have compensated for her suffering, and in some poor sense have justified her in years to come. She did not put it into words, but the thought was bluntly in her mind. She looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears, which dropped down her cheek to the ground.

He was about to answer her question, when, all at once, her honest eyes looked into his mournfully, and she said with an incredible pathos and simplicity:

"I don't know how I am going to live on with Magon. I suppose I'll have to keep pretending till I die!"

The bell in the church was ringing for vespers. It sounded peaceful and quiet, as though no war, or rebellion, or misery and shame, were anywhere within the radius of its travel.

Just where they stood there was a tall calvary. Behind it was some shrubbery. Ferrol was going to answer her, when he saw, coming along the road, the Cure in his robes, bearing the host. In front of him trotted an acolyte, swinging the censer.

Ferrol quickly drew Sophie aside behind the bushes, where they should not be seen; for he was no longer reckless. He wished to be careful for the woman's sake.

The Curb did not turn his head to the right or left, but came along chanting something slowly. The smell of the incense floated past them. When the priest and the lad reached the calvary they turned towards it, bowed, crossed themselves, and the lad rang a little silver bell. Then the two passed on, the lad still ringing. When they were out of sight the sound of the bell came softly, softly up the road, while the bell in the church tower still called to prayer.

The words the priest chanted seemed to ring through the air after he had gone.

"God have mercy upon the passing soul!
God have mercy upon the passing soul!
Hear the prayer of the sinner, O Lord;
Listen to the voice of those that mourn;
Have mercy upon the sinner, O Lord!"

When Ferrol turned to Sophie again, both her hands were clasping the calvary, and she had dropped her head upon them.

"I must go," he said. She did not move.

Again he spoke to her; but she did not lift her head. Presently, however, as he stood watching her, she moved away from the calvary, and, with her back still turned to him, stepped out into the road and hurried on towards her home, never once turning her head.

He stood looking after her for a moment, then turned and, sitting on a log behind the shrubbery, he tore a few pieces of paper out of a note-book and began writing. He wrote swiftly for about twenty minutes or more, then, arising, he moved on towards the village, where crowds had gathered--excited, fearful, tumultuous; for the British soldiers had just entered the place.

Ferrol seemed almost oblivious of the threatening crowd, which once or twice jostled him more than was accidental. He came into the post-office, got an envelope, put his letter inside it, stamped it, addressed it to Christine, and dropped it into the letter-box.

An hour later he stood among a few companies of British soldiers in front of the massive stone store-house of the Lavillettes' abandoned farmhouse, with its thick shuttered windows and its solid oak doors. It was too late to attempt the fugitive's escape, save by strategy. Over half an hour Nic had kept them at bay. He had made loopholes in the shutters and the door, and from these he fired upon his assailants. Already he had wounded five and killed two.

Men had been sent for timber to batter down the door and windows. Meanwhile, the troops stood at a respectful distance, out of the range of Nic's firing, awaiting developments.

Ferrol consulted with the officers, advising a truce and parley, offering himself as mediator to induce Nic to surrender. To this the officers assented, but warned him that his life might pay the price of his temerity. He laughed at this. He had been talking, with his head and throat well muffled, and the collar of his greatcoat drawn about his ears. Once or twice he coughed, a hacking, wrenching cough, which struck the ears of more than one of the officers painfully; for they had known him in his best and gayest days at Quebec.

It was arranged that he should advance, holding out a flag of truce. Before he went he drew aside one of the younger lieutenants, in whose home at Quebec his sister had always been a welcome visitor, and told him briefly the story of his marriage, of his wife and of Nicolas. He sent Christine a message, that she should not forget to carry his last token to his sister! Then turning, he muffled up his face against the crisp, harsh air (there was design in this also), and, waving a white handkerchief, advanced to the door of the store-room.

The soldiers waited anxiously, fearing that Nic would fire, in spite of all; but presently a spot of white appeared at one of the loopholes; then the door was slowly opened. Ferrol entered, and it was closed again.

Nicolas Lavilette grasped his hand.

"I knew you wouldn't go back on me," said he. "I knew you were my friend. What the devil do they want out there?"

"I am more than your friend: I'm your brother," answered Ferrol, meaningly. Then, quickly taking off his greatcoat, cap, muffler and boots: "Quick, on with these!" he said. "There's no time to lose!"

"What's all this?" asked Nic.

"Never mind; do exactly as I say, and there's a chance for you."

Nic put on the overcoat. Ferrol placed the cap on his head, and muffled him up exactly as he himself had been, then made him put on his own top-boots.

"Now, see," he said, "everything depends upon how you do this thing. You are about my height. Pass yourself off for me. Walk loose and long as I do, and cough like me as you go."

There was no difficulty in showing him what the cough was like: he involuntarily offered an illustration as he spoke.

"As soon as I shut the door and you start forward, I'll fire on them. That'll divert their attention from you. They'll take you for me, and think I've failed in persuading you to give yourself up. Go straight on--don't hurry--coughing all the time; and if you can make the dark, just beyond the soldiers, by the garden bench, you'll find two men. They'll help you. Make for the big tree on the Seigneury road--you know: where you were robbed. There you'll find the fastest horse from your father's stables. Then ride, my boy, ride for your life to the State of New York!"

"And you--you?" asked Nicolas. Ferrol laughed.

"You needn't worry about me, Nic. I'll get out of this all right; as right as rain! Are you ready? Steady now, steady. Let me hear you cough." Nic coughed.

"No, that isn't it. Listen and watch." Ferrol coughed. "Here," he said, taking something from his pocket, "open your mouth." He threw some pepper down the other's throat. "Now try it."

Nic coughed almost convulsively.

"Yes, that's it, that's it! Just keep that up. Come along now. Quick--not a moment to lose! Steady! You're all right, my boy; you've got nerve, and that's the thing. Good-bye, Nic, good luck to you!"

They grasped hands: the door opened swiftly, and Nic stepped outside. In an instant Ferrol was at the loophole. Raising a rifle, he fired, then again and again. Through the loophole he could see a half-dozen men lift a log to advance on the door as Nic passed a couple of officers, coughing hard, and making spasmodic motions with his hand, as though exhausted and unable to speak.

He fired again, and a soldier fell. The lust of fighting was on him now. It was not a question of country or of race, but only a man crowding the power of old instincts into the last moments of his life. The vigour and valour of a reconquered youth seemed to inspire him; he felt as he did when a mere boy fighting on the Danube. His blood rioted in his veins; his eyes flashed. He lifted the flask of whiskey and gulped down great mouthfuls of it, and fired again and again, laughing madly.

"Let them come on, let them come on," he cried. "By God, I'll settle them!" The frenzy of war possessed him. He heard the timber crash against the door--once, twice, thrice, and then give away. He swung round and saw men's faces glowing in the light of the fire, and then another face shot in before the others--that of Vanne Castine.

With a cry of fury he ran forward into the doorway. Castine saw him at the same moment. With a similar instinct each sprang for the other's throat, Castine with a knife in his hand.

A cry of astonishment went up from the officers and the men without. They had expected to see Nic; but Nic was on his way to the horse beneath the great elm tree, and from the elm tree to the State of New York--and safety.

The men and the officers fell back as Castine and Ferrol clinched in a death struggle. Ferrol knew that his end had come. He had expected it, hoped for it. But, before the end, he wanted to kill this man, if he

could. He caught Castine's head in his hands, and, with a last effort, twisted it back with a sudden jerk.

All at once, with the effort, blood spurted from his mouth into the other's face. He shivered, tottered and fell back, as Castine struck blindly into space. For a moment Ferrol swayed back and forth, stretched out his hands convulsively and gasped, trying to speak, the blood welling from his lips. His eyes were wild, anxious and yearning, his face deadly pale and covered with a cold sweat. Presently he collapsed, like a loosened bundle, upon the steps.

Castine, blinded with blood, turned round, and the light of the fire upon his open mouth made him appear to grin painfully--an involuntary grimace of terror.

At that instant a rifle shot rang out from the shrubbery, and Castine sprang from the ground and fell at Ferrol's feet. Then, with a contortive shudder, he rolled over and over the steps, and lay face downward upon the ground--dead.

A girl ran forward from the trees, with a cry, pushing her way through to Ferrol's body. Lifting up his head, she called to him in an agony of entreaty. But he made no answer.

"That's the woman who fired the shot!" said a subaltern officer excitedly. "I saw her!"

"Shut up, you fool--it was his wife!" exclaimed the young captain to whom Ferrol had given his last message for Christine.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

After which comes steady happiness or the devil to pay (wedding)
All men are worse than most women
I always did what was wrong, and liked it--nearly always
Men feel surer of women than women feel of men

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