

The Lane That Had No Turning, Volume 1.

Gilbert Parker

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THE LANE THAT HAD NO TURNING

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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The Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier G.C.M.G.

Dear Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Since I first began to write these tales in 1892, I have had it in my mind to dedicate to you the "bundle of life" when it should be complete. It seemed to me--and it seems so still--that to put your name upon the covering of my parcel, as one should say, "In care of," when it went forth, was to secure its safe and considerate delivery to that public of the Empire which is so much in your debt.

But with other feelings also do I dedicate this volume to yourself. For many years your name has stood for a high and noble compromise between the temperaments and the intellectual and social habits of two races; and I am not singular in thinking that you have done more than most other men to make the English and French of the Dominion understand each other

better. There are somewhat awkward limits to true understanding as yet, but that sympathetic service which you render to both peoples, with a conscientious striving for impartiality, tempers even the wind of party warfare to the shorn lamb of political opposition.

In a sincere sympathy with French life and character, as exhibited in the democratic yet monarchical province of Quebec, or Lower Canada (as, historically, I still love to think of it), moved by friendly observation, and seeking to be truthful and impartial, I have made this book and others dealing with the life of the proud province, which a century and a half of English governance has not Anglicised. This series of more or less connected stories, however, has been the most cherished of all my labours, covering, as it has done, so many years, and being the accepted of my anxious judgment out of a much larger gathering, so many numbers of which are retired to the seclusion of copyright, while reserved from publication. In passing, I need hardly say that the "Pontiac" of this book is an imaginary place, and has no association with the real Pontiac of the Province.

I had meant to call the volume, "Born with a Golden Spoon," a title stolen from the old phrase, "Born with a golden spoon in the mouth"; but at the last moment I have given the book the name of the tale which is, chronologically, the climax of the series, and the end of my narratives of French Canadian life and character. I had chosen the former title because of an inherent meaning in it relation to my subject. A man born in the purple--in comfort wealth, and secure estate--is said to have the golden spoon in his mouth. In the eyes of the world, however, the phrase has a some what ironical suggestiveness, and to have luxury, wealth, and place as a birthright is not thought to be the most fortunate incident of mortality. My application of the phrase is, therefore, different.

I have, as you know, travelled far and wide during the past seventeen years, and though I have seen people as frugal and industrious as the French Canadians, I have never seen frugality and industry associated with so much domestic virtue, so much education and intelligence, and so deep and simple a religious life; nor have I ever seen a priesthood at once so devoted and high-minded in all the concerns the home life of their people, as in French Canada. A land without poverty and yet without riches, French Canada stands alone, too well educated to have a peasantry, too poor to have an aristocracy; as though in her the ancient prayer had been answered "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me." And it is of the habitant of Quebec, before a man else, I should say, "Born with the golden spoon in his mouth."

To you I come with this book, which contains the first thing I ever wrote out of the life of the Province so dear to you, and the last things also that I shall ever write about it. I beg you to receive it as the loving recreation of one who sympathises with the people of who you come, and honours their virtues, and who has no fear for the unity, and no doubt as to the splendid future, of the nation, whose fibre is got of the two great civilising races of Europe.

Lastly, you will know with what admiration and regard I place your name on the fore page of my book, and greet in you the statesman, the litterateur, and the personal friend.

Believe me,
Dear Sir Wilfrid Laurier,

Yours very sincerely,
GILBERT PARKER.

20 CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE,
LONDON, S. W.,
14th August, 1900.

INTRODUCTION

The story with which this book opens, 'The Lane That Had No Turning', gives the title to a collection which has a large share in whatever importance my work may possess. Contemporaneous with the Pierre series, which deal with the Far West and the Far North, I began in the 'Illustrated London News', at the request of the then editor, Mr. Clement K. Shorter, a series of French Canadian sketches of which the first was 'The Tragic Comedy of Annette'. It was followed by 'The Marriage of the Miller, The House with the Tall Porch, The Absurd Romance of P'tite Louison, and The Woodsman's Story of the Great White Chief'. They were begun and finished in the autumn of 1892 in lodgings which I had taken on Hampstead Heath. Each--for they were all very short--was written at a sitting, and all had their origin in true stories which had been told me in the heart of Quebec itself. They were all beautifully illustrated in the Illustrated London News, and in their almost monosyllabic narrative, and their almost domestic simplicity, they were in marked contrast to the more strenuous episodes of the Pierre series. They were indeed in keeping with the happily simple and uncomplicated life of French Canada as I knew it then; and I had perhaps greater joy in writing them and the purely French Canadian stories that followed them, such as 'Paron the Dwarf, A Worker in Stone, The Little Bell of Honour, and The Prisoner', than in almost anything else I have written, except perhaps 'The Right of Way and Valmond', so far as Canada is concerned.

I think the book has harmony, although the first story in it covers eighty-two pages, while some of the others, like 'The Marriage of the Miller', are less than four pages in length. At the end also there are nine fantasies or stories which I called 'Parables of Provinces'. All of these, I think, possessed the spirit of French Canada, though all are more or less mystical in nature. They have nothing of the simple realism of 'The Tragic Comedy of Annette', and the earlier series. These nine stories could not be called popular, and they were the only stories I have ever written which did not have an immediate welcome from the editors to whom they were sent. In the United States I offered them to 'Harper's Magazine', but the editor, Henry M. Alden, while, as I know, caring for them personally, still hesitated to publish them. He thought them too symbolic for the every-day reader. He had been offered four of them at once because I declined to dispose of them separately, though the editor of another magazine was willing to publish two of them. Messrs. Stone & Kimball, however, who had plenty of fearlessness where literature was concerned, immediately bought the series for The Chap Book, long since dead, and they were published in that wonderful little short-lived magazine, which contained some things of permanent value to literature. They published four of the series, namely: 'The Golden Pipes, The Guardian of the Fire, By that Place Called Peradventure, The Singing of the Bees, and The Tent of the Purple Mat'. In England, because I would not separate the first five, and publish them individually, two or three of the editors who were taking the Pierre series and other stories

appearing in this volume would not publish them. They, also, were frightened by the mystery and allusiveness of the tales, and had an apprehension that they would not be popular.

Perhaps they were right. They were all fantasies, but I do not wish them other than they are. One has to write according to the impulse that seizes one and after the fashion of one's own mind. This at least can be said of all my books, that not a page of them has ever been written to order, and there is not a story published in all the pages bearing my name which does not represent one or two other stories rejected by myself. The art of rejection is the hardest art which an author has to learn; but I have never had a doubt as to my being justified in publishing these little symbolic things.

Eventually the whole series was published in England. W. E. Henley gave 'There Was a Little City' a home in 'The New Review', and expressed himself as happy in having it. 'The Forge in the Valley' was published by Sir Wemyss Reid in the weekly paper called 'The Speaker', now known as 'The Nation', in which 'Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch' made his name and helped the fame of others. 'There Was a Little City' was published in 'The Chap Book' in the United States, but 'The Forge in the Valley' had (I think) no American public until it appeared within the pages of 'The Lane That Had No Turning'. The rest of the series were published in the 'English Illustrated Magazine', which was such a good friend to my work at the start. As was perhaps natural, there was some criticism, but very little, in French Canada itself, upon the stories in this volume. It soon died away, however, and almost as I write these words there has come to me an appreciation which I value as much as anything that has befallen me in my career, and that is, the degree of Doctor of Letters from the French Catholic University of Laval at Quebec. It is the seal of French Canada upon the work which I have tried to do for her and for the whole Dominion.

THE LANE THAT HAD NO TURNING

CHAPTER I

THE RETURN OF MADELINETTE

His Excellency the Governor--the English Governor of French Canada--was come to Pontiac, accompanied by a goodly retinue; by private secretary, military secretary, aide-de-camp, cabinet minister, and all that. He was making a tour of the Province, but it was obvious that he had gone out of his way to visit Pontiac, for there were disquieting rumours in the air concerning the loyalty of the district. Indeed, the Governor had arrived but twenty-four hours after a meeting had been held under the presidency of the Seigneur, at which resolutions easily translatable into sedition were presented. The Cure and the Avocat, arriving in the nick of time, had both spoken against these resolutions; with the result that the new-born ardour in the minds of the simple habitants had died down, and the Seigneur had parted from the Cure and the Avocat in anger.

Pontiac had been involved in an illegal demonstration once before.

Valmond, the bizarre but popular Napoleonic pretender, had raised his standard there; the stones before the parish church had been stained with his blood; and he lay in the churchyard of St. Saviour's forgiven and unforgotten. How was it possible for Pontiac to forget him? Had he not left his little fortune to the parish? and had he not also left twenty thousand francs for the musical education of Madelinette Lajeunesse, the daughter of the village forgeron, to learn singing of the best masters in Paris? Pontiac's wrong-doings had brought it more profit than penalty, more praise than punishment: for, after five years in France in the care of the Little Chemist's widow, Madelinette Lajeunesse had become the greatest singer of her day. But what had put the severest strain upon the modesty of Pontiac was the fact that, on the morrow of Madelinette's first triumph in Paris, she had married M. Louis Racine, the new Seigneur of Pontiac.

What more could Pontiac wish? It had been rewarded for its mistakes; it had not even been chastened, save that it was marked Suspicious as to its loyalty, at the headquarters of the English Government in Quebec. It should have worn a crown of thorns, but it flaunted a crown of roses. A most unreasonable good fortune seemed to pursue it. It had been led to expect that its new Seigneur would be an Englishman, one George Fournel, to whom, as the late Seigneur had more than once declared, the property was devised by will; but at his death no will had been found, and Louis Racine, the direct heir in blood, had succeeded to the property and the title.

Brilliant, enthusiastic, fanatically French, the new Seigneur had set himself to revive certain old traditions, customs, and privileges of the Seigneurial position. He was reactionary, seductive, generous, and at first he captivated the hearts of Pontiac. He did more than that. He captivated Madelinette Lajeunesse. In spite of her years in Paris--severe, studious years, which shut out the social world and the temptations of Bohemian life--Madelinette retained a strange simplicity of heart and mind, a desperate love for her old home which would not be gainsaid, a passionate loyalty to her past, which was an illusory attempt to arrest the inevitable changes that come with growth; and, with a sudden impulse, she had sealed herself to her past at the very outset of her great career by marriage with Louis Racine.

On the very day of their marriage Louis Racine had made a painful discovery. A heritage of his fathers, which had skipped two generations, suddenly appeared in himself: he was becoming a hunchback.

Terror, despair, gloom, anxiety had settled upon him. Three months later Madelinette had gone to Paris alone. The Seigneur had invented excuses for not accompanying her, so she went instead in the care of the Little Chemist's widow, as of old Louis had promised to follow within another three months, but had not done so. The surgical operation performed upon him was unsuccessful; the strange growth increased. Sensitive, fearful, and morose, he would not go to Europe to be known as the hunchback husband of Lajeunesse, the great singer. He dreaded the hour when Madelinette and he should meet again. A thousand times he pictured her as turning from him in loathing and contempt. He had married her because he loved her, but he knew well enough that ten thousand other men could love her just as well, and be something more than a deformed Seigneur of an obscure manor in Quebec.

As his gloomy imagination pictured the future, when Madelinette should return and see him as he was and cease to love him--to build up his

Seigneurial honour to an undue importance, to give his position a fictitious splendour, became a mania with him. No ruler of a Grand Duchy ever cherished his honour dearer or exacted homage more persistently than did Louis Racine in the Seigneurie of Pontiac. Coincident with the increase of these futile extravagances was the increase of his fanatical patriotism, which at last found vent in seditious writings, agitations, the purchase of rifles, incitement to rebellion, and the formation of an armed, liveried troop of dependants at the Manor. On the very eve of the Governor's coming, despite the Cure's and the Avocat's warnings, he had held a patriotic meeting intended to foster a stubborn, if silent, disregard of the Governor's presence amongst them.

The speech of the Cure, who had given guarantee for the good behaviour of his people to the Government, had been so tinged with sorrowful appeal, had recalled to them so acutely the foolish demonstration which had ended in the death of Valmond; that the people had turned from the exasperated Seigneur with the fire of monomania in his eyes, and had left him alone in the hall, passionately protesting that the souls of Frenchmen were not in them.

Next day, upon the church, upon the Louis Quinze Hotel, and elsewhere, the Union Jack flew--the British colours flaunted it in Pontiac with welcome to the Governor. But upon the Seigneurie was another flag--it of the golden-lilies. Within the Manor House M. Louis Racine sat in the great Seigneurial chair, returned from the gates of death. As he had come home from the futile public meeting, galloping through the streets and out upon the Seigneurie road in the dusk, his horse had shied upon a bridge, where mischievous lads waylaid travellers with ghostly heads made of lighted candles in hollowed pumpkins, and horse and man had been plunged into the stream beneath. His faithful servant Havel had seen the accident and dragged his insensible master from the water.

Now the Seigneur sat in the great arm-chair glowering out upon the cheerful day. As he brooded, shaken and weak and bitter--all his thoughts were bitter now--a flash of scarlet, a glint of white plumes crossed his line of vision, disappeared, then again came into view, and horses' hoofs rang out on the hard road below. He started to his feet, but fell back again, so feeble was he, then rang the bell at his side with nervous insistence. A door opened quickly behind him, and his voice said imperiously:

"Quick, Havel--to the door. The Governor and his suite have come. Call Tardif, and have wine and cake brought at once. When the Governor enters, let Tardif stand at the door, and you beside my chair. Have the men-at-arms get into livery, and make a guard of honour for the Governor when he leaves. Their new rifles too--and let old Fashode wear his medal! See that Lucre is not filthy--ha! ha! very good. I must let the Governor hear that. Quick--quick, Havel. They are entering the grounds. Let the Manor bell be rung, and every one mustered. He shall see that to be a Seigneur is not an empty honour. I am something in the state, something by my own right." His lips moved restlessly; he frowned; his hands nervously clasped the arms of the chair. "Madelinette too shall see that I am to be reckoned with, that I am not a nobody. By God, then, but she shall see it!" he added, bringing his clasped hand down hard upon the wood.

There was a stir outside, a clanking of chains, a champing of bits, and the murmurs of the crowd who were gathering fast in the grounds.

Presently the door was thrown open and Havel announced the Governor. Louis Racine got to his feet, but the Governor hastened forward, and, taking both his hands, forced him gently back into the chair.

"No, no, my dear Seigneur. You must not rise. This is no state visit, but a friendly call to offer congratulations on your happy escape, and to inquire how you are."

The Governor said his sentences easily, but he suddenly flushed and was embarrassed, for Louis Racine's deformity, of which he had not known-- Pontiac kept its troubles to itself--stared him in the face; and he felt the Seigneur's eyes fastened on him with strange intensity.

"I have to thank your Excellency," the Seigneur said in a hasty nervous voice. "I fell on my shoulders--that saved me. If I had fallen on my head I should have been killed, no doubt. My shoulders saved me!" he added, with a petulant insistence in his voice, a morbid anxiety in his face.

"Most providential," responded the Governor. "It grieves me that it should have happened on the occasion of my visit. I missed the Seigneur's loyal public welcome. But I am happy," he continued, with smooth deliberation, "to have it here in this old Manor House, where other loyal French subjects of England have done honour to their Sovereign's representative."

"This place is sacred to hospitality and patriotism, your Excellency," said Louis Racine, nervousness passing from his voice and a curious hard look coming into his face.

The Governor was determined not to see the double meaning. "It is a privilege to hear you say so. I shall recall the fact to her Majesty's Government in the report I shall make upon my tour of the province. I have a feeling that the Queen's pleasure in the devotion of her distinguished French subjects may take some concrete form."

The Governor's suite looked at each other significantly, for never before in his journeys had his Excellency hinted so strongly that an honour might be conferred. Veiled as it was, it was still patent as the sun. Spots of colour shot into the Seigneur's cheeks. An honour from the young English Queen--that would mate with Madelinette's fame. After all, it was only his due. He suddenly found it hard to be consistent. His mind was in a whirl. The Governor continued:

"It must have given you great pleasure to know that at Windsor her Majesty has given tokens of honour to the famous singer, the wife of a notable French subject, who, while passionately eager to keep alive French sentiment, has, as we believe, a deep loyalty to England."

The Governor had said too much. He had thought to give the Seigneur an opportunity to recede from his seditious position there and then, and to win his future loyalty. M. Racine's situation had peril, and the Governor had here shown him the way of escape. But he had said one thing that drove Louis Racine mad. He had given him unknown information about his own wife. Louis did not know that Madelinette had been received by the Queen, or that she had received "tokens of honour." Wild with resentment, he saw in the Governor's words a consideration for himself based only on the fact that he was the husband of the great singer. He trembled to his feet.

At that moment there was a cheering outside--great cheering--but he did not heed it; he was scarcely aware of it. If it touched his understanding at all, it only meant to him a demonstration in honour of the Governor.

"Loyalty to the flag of England, your Excellency!" he said, in a hoarse acrid voice--"you speak of loyalty to us whose lives for two centuries--" He paused, for he heard a voice calling his name.

"Louis! Louis! Louis!"

The fierce words he had been about to utter died on his lips, his eyes stared at the open window, bewildered and even frightened.

"Louis! Louis!"

Now the voice was inside the house. He stood trembling, both hands grasping the arms of the chair. Every eye in the room was now turned towards the door. As it opened, the Seigneur sank back in the chair, a look of helpless misery, touched by a fierce pride, covering his face.

"Louis!"

It was Madelinette, who, disregarding the assembled company, ran forward to him and caught both his hands in hers.

"O Louis, I have heard of your accident, and--" she stopped suddenly short. The Governor turned away his head. Every person in the room did the same. For as she bent over him--she saw. She saw for the first time; for the first time knew!

A look of horrified amazement, of shrinking anguish, crossed over her face. He felt the lightning-like silence, he knew that she had seen; he struggled to his feet, staring fiercely at her.

That one torturing instant had taken all the colour from her face, but there was a strange brightness in her eyes, a new power in her bearing. She gently forced him into the seat again.

"You are not strong enough, Louis. You must be tranquil."

She turned now to the Governor. He made a sign to his suite, who, bowing, slowly left the room. "Permit me to welcome you to your native land again, Madame," he said. "You have won for it a distinction it could never have earned, and the world gives you many honours."

She was smiling and still, and with one hand clasping her husband's, she said:

"The honour I value most my native land has given me: I am lady of the Manor here, and wife of the Seigneur Racine."

Agitated triumph came upon Louis Racine's face; a weird painful vanity entered into him. He stood up beside his wife, as she turned and looked at him, showing not a sign that what she saw disturbed her.

"It is no mushroom honour to be Seigneur of Pontiac, your Excellency," he said, in a tone that jarred. "The barony is two hundred years old. By

rights granted from the crown of France, I am Baron of Pontiac."

"I think England has not yet recognised the title," said the Governor suggestively, for he was here to make peace, and in the presence of this man, whose mental torture was extreme, he would not allow himself to be irritated.

"Our baronies have never been recognised," said the Seigneur harshly. "And yet we are asked to love the flag of England and--"

"And to show that we are too proud to ask for a right that none can take away," interposed Madelinette graciously and eagerly, as though to prevent Louis from saying what he intended. All at once she had had to order her life anew, to replace old thoughts by new ones. "We honour and obey the rulers of our land, and fly the English flag, and welcome the English Governor gladly when he comes to us--will your Excellency have some refreshment?" she added quickly, for she saw the cloud on the Seigneur's brow. "Louis," she added quickly, "will you--"

"I have ordered refreshment," said the Seigneur excitedly, the storm passing from his face, however. "Havel, Tardif--where are you, fellows!" He stamped his foot imperiously.

Havel entered with a tray of wine and glasses, followed by Tardif loaded with cakes and comfits, and set them on the table.

Ten minutes later the Governor took his leave. At the front door he stopped surprised, for a guard of honour of twenty men were drawn up. He turned to the Seigneur.

"What soldiers are these?" he asked.

"The Seigneury company, your Excellency," replied Louis.

"What uniform is it they wear?" he asked in an even tone, but with a black look in his eye, which did not escape Madelinette.

"The livery of the Barony of Pontiac," answered the Seigneur.

The Governor looked at them a moment without speaking. "It is French uniform of the time of Louis Quinze," he said. "Picturesque, but informal," he added.

He went over, and taking a carbine from one of the men, examined it. "Your carbines are not so unconventional and antique," he said meaningly, and with a frosty smile. "The compromise of the centuries--hein?" he added to the Cure, who, with the Avocat, was now looking on with some trepidation. "I am wondering if it is quite legal. It is charming to have such a guard of honour, but I am wondering--wondering--eh, monsieur l'avocat, is it legal?"

The Avocat made no reply, but the Cure's face was greatly troubled. The Seigneur's momentary placidity passed.

"I answer for their legality, your Excellency," he said, in a high, assertive voice.

"Of course, of course, you will answer for it," said the Governor, smiling enigmatically. He came forward and held out his hand to

Madelinette.

"Madame, I shall remember your kindness, and I appreciate the simple honours done me here. Your arrival at the moment of my visit is a happy circumstance."

There was a meaning in his eye--not in his voice--which went straight to Madelinette's understanding. She murmured something in reply, and a moment afterwards the Governor, his suite, and the crowd were gone; and the men-at-arms--the fantastic body of men in their antique livery--armed with the latest modern weapons, had gone back to civic life again.

Inside the house once more, Madelinette laid her hand upon Louis' arm with a smile that wholly deceived him for a moment. He thought now that she must have known of his deformity before she came--the world was so full of tale-bearers--and no doubt had long since reconciled herself to the painful fact. She had shown no surprise, no shrinking. There had been only the one lightning instant in which he had felt a kind of suspension of her breath and being, but when he had looked her in the face, she was composed and smiling. After all his frightened anticipation the great moment had come and gone without tragedy. With satisfaction he looked in the mirror in the hall as they passed inside the house. He saw no reason to quarrel with his face. Was it possible that the deformity did not matter after all?

He felt Madelinette's hand on his arm. He turned and clasped her to his breast.

He did not notice that she kept her hands under her chin as he drew her to him, that she did not, as had been her wont, put them on his shoulders. He did not feel her shrink, and no one, seeing, could have said that she shrank from him in ever so little.

"How beautiful you are!" he said, as he looked into her face.

"How glad I am to be here again, and how tired I am, Louis!" she said. "I've driven thirty miles since daylight." She disengaged herself. "I am going to sleep now," she added. "I am going to turn the key in my door till evening. Please tell Madame Marie so, Louis."

Inside her room alone she flung herself on her bed in agony and despair.

"Louis--Oh, my God!" she cried, and sobbed and sobbed her strength away.

CHAPTER II

WHEN THE RED-COATS CAME

A month later there was a sale of the household effects, the horses and general possessions of Medallion the auctioneer, who, though a Protestant and an Englishman, had, by his wits and goodness of heart, endeared himself to the parish. Therefore the notables among the habitants had gathered in his empty house for a last drink of good-fellowship--Muroc the charcoalman, Duclosse the mealman, Benoit the ne'er-do-weel, Gingras the one-eyed shoemaker, and a few others. They had drunk the health of Medallion, they had drunk the health of the Cure, and now Duclosse the

mealman raised his glass. "Here's to--"

"Wait a minute, porridge-pot," cried Muroc. "The best man here should raise the glass first and say the *votre sante*. 'Tis M'sieu' Medallion should speak and sip now."

Medallion was half-sitting on the window-sill, abstractedly listening. He had been thinking that his ships were burned behind him, and that in middle-age he was starting out to make another camp for himself in the world, all because of the new Seigneur of Pontiac. Time was when he had been successful here, but Louis Racine had changed all that. His hand was against the English, and he had brought a French auctioneer to Pontiac. Medallion might have divided the parish as to patronage, but he had other views.

So he was going. Madelinette had urged him to stay, but he had replied that it was too late. The harm was not to be undone.

As Muroc spoke, every one turned towards Medallion. He came over and filled a glass at the table, and raised it.

"I drink to Madelinette, daughter of that fine old puffing forgeron Lajeunesse," he added, as the big blacksmith now entered the room. Lajeunesse grinned and ducked his head. "I knew Madelinette, as did you all, when I could take her on my knee and tell her English stories, and listen to her sing French chansons--the best in the world. She has gone on; we stay where we were. But she proves her love to us, by taking her husband from Pontiac and coming back to us. May she never find a spot so good to come to and so hard to leave as Pontiac!"

He drank, and they all did the same. Draining his glass, Medallion let it fall on the stone floor. It broke into a score of pieces.

He came and shook hands with Lajeunesse. "Give her my love," he said. "Tell her the highest bidder on earth could not buy one of the kisses she gave me when she was five and I was twenty."

Then he shook hands with them all and went into the next room.

"Why did he drop his glass?" asked Gingras the shoemaker.

"That's the way of the aristocrats when it's the damnedest toast that ever was," said Duclosse the mealman. "Eh, Lajeunesse, that's so, isn't it?"

"What the devil do I know about aristocrats!" said Lajeunesse.

"You're among the best of the land, now that Madelinette's married to the Seigneur. You ought to wear a collar every day."

"Bah!" answered the blacksmith. "I'm only old Lajeunesse the blacksmith, though she's my girl, dear lads. I was Joe Lajeunesse yesterday, and I'll be Joe Lajeunesse to-morrow, and I'll die Joe Lajeunesse the forgeron--bagosh! So you take me as you find me. M'sieu' Racine doesn't marry me. And Madelinette doesn't take me to Paris and lead me round the stage and say, 'This is M'sieu' Lajeunesse, my father.' No. I'm myself, and a damn good blacksmith and nothing else am I"

"Tut, tut, old leather-belly," said Gingras the shoemaker, whose liquor

had mounted high, "you'll not need to work now. Madelinette's got double fortune. She gets thousands for a song, and she's lady of the Manor here. What's too good for you, tell me that, my forgeron?"

"Not working between meals--that's too good for me, Gingras. I'm here to earn my bread with the hands I was born with, and to eat what they earn, and live by it. Let a man live according to his gifts--bagosh! Till I'm sent for, that's what I'll do; and when time's up I'll take my hand off the bellows, and my leather apron can go to you, Gingras, for boots for a bigger fool than me."

"There's only one," said Benolt, the ne'er-do-weel, who had been to college as a boy.

"Who's that?" said Muroc.

"You wouldn't know his name. He's trying to find eggs in last year's nest," answered Benolt with a leer.

"He means the Seigneur," said Muroc. "Look to your son-in-law, Lajeunesse. He's kicking up a dust that'll choke Pontiac yet. It's as if there was an imp in him driving him on."

"We've had enough of the devil's dust here," said Lajeunesse. "Has he been talking to you, Muroc?"

Muroc nodded. "Treason, or thereabouts. Once, with him that's dead in the graveyard yonder, it was France we were to save and bring back the Napoleons--I have my sword yet. Now it's save Quebec. It's stand alone and have our own flag, and shout, and fight, maybe, to be free of England. Independence--that's it! One by one the English have had to go from Pontiac. Now it's M'sieu' Medallion."

"There's Shandon the Irishman gone too. M'sieu' sold him up and shipped him off," said Gingras the shoemaker.

"Tiens! the Seigneur gave him fifty dollars when he left, to help him along. He smacks and then kisses, does M'sieu' Racine."

"We've to pay tribute to the Seigneur every year, as they did in the days of Vaudreuil and Louis the Saint," said Duclosse. "I've got my notice--a bag of meal under the big tree at the Manor door."

"I've to bring a pullet and a bag of charcoal," said Muroc. "'Tis the rights of the Seigneur as of old."

"Tiens! it is my mind," said Benoit, "that a man that nature twists in back, or leg, or body anywhere, gets a twist in's brain too. There's Parpon the dwarf--God knows, Parpon is a nut to crack!"

"But Parpon isn't married to the greatest singer in the world, though she's only the daughter of old leather-belly there," said Gingras.

"Something doesn't come of nothing, snub-nose," said Lajeunesse. "Mark you, I was born a man of fame, walking bloody paths to glory; but, by the grace of Heaven and my baptism, I became a forgeron. Let others ride to glory, I'll shoe their horses for the gallop."

"You'll be in Parliament yet, Lajeunesse," said Duclosse the mealman, who

had been dozing on a pile of untired cart-wheels.

"I'll be hanged first, comrade."

"One in the family at a time," said Muroc. "There's the Seigneur. He's going into Parliament."

"He's a magistrate--that's enough," said Duclosse. "He's started the court under the big tree, as the Seigneurs did two hundred years ago. He'll want a gibbet and a gallows next."

"I should think he'd stay at home and not take more on his shoulders!" said the one-eyed shoemaker. Without a word, Lajeunesse threw a dish of water in Gingras's face. This reference to the Seigneur's deformity was unpalatable.

Gingras had not recovered from his discomfiture when all were startled by the distant blare of a bugle. They rushed to the door, and were met by Parpon the dwarf, who announced that a regiment of soldiers was marching on the village.

"'Tis what I expected after that meeting, and the Governor's visit, and the lily-flag of France on the Manor, and the body-guard and the carbines," said Muroc nervously.

"We're all in trouble again-sure," said Benoit, and drained his glass to the last drop. "Some of us will go to gaol."

The coming of the militia had been wholly unexpected by the people of Pontiac, but the cause was not far to seek. Ever since the Governor's visit there had been sinister rumours abroad concerning Louis Racine, which the Cure and the Avocat and others had taken pains to contradict. It was known that the Seigneur had been requested to disband his so-called company of soldiers with their ancient livery and their modern arms, and to give them up. He had disbanded the corps, but he had not given up the arms, and, for reasons unknown, the Government had not pressed the point, so far as the world knew. But it had decided to hold a district drill in this far-off portion of the Province; and this summer morning two thousand men marched 'upon the town and through it, horse, foot, and commissariat, and Pontiac was roused out of the last-century romance the Seigneur had sought to continue, to face the actual presence of modern force and the machinery of war. Twice before had British soldiers marched into the town, the last time but a few years ago, when blood had been shed on the stones in front of the parish church. But here were large numbers of well-armed men from the Eastern parishes, English and French, with four hundred regulars to leaven the mass. Lajeunesse knew only too well what this demonstration meant.

Before the last soldier had passed through the street, he was on his way to the Seigneury.

He found Madelinette alone in the great dining-room, mending a rent in the British flag, which she was preparing for a flag-staff. When she saw him, she dropped the flag, as if startled, came quickly to him, took both his hands in hers, and kissed his cheek.

"Wonder of wonders!" she said.

"It's these soldiers," he replied shortly. "What of them?" she asked

brightly.

"Do you mean to say you don't know what their coming here means?" he asked.

"They must drill somewhere, and they are honouring Pontiac," she replied gaily, but her face flushed as she bent over the flag again.

He came and stood in front of her. "I don't know what's in your mind; I don't know what you mean to do; but I do know that M'sieu' Racine is making trouble here, and out of it you'll come more hurt than anybody."

"What has Louis done?"

"What has he done! He's been stirring up feeling against the British. What has he done!--Look at the silly customs he's got out of old coffins, to make us believe they're alive. Why did he ever try to marry you? Why did you ever marry him? You are the great singer of the world. He's a mad hunchback habitant seigneur!"

She stamped her foot indignantly, but presently she ruled herself to composure, and said quietly: "He is my husband. He is a brave man, with foolish dreams." Then with a sudden burst of tender feeling, she said: "Oh, father, father, can't you see, I loved him--that is why I married him. You ask me what I am going to do? I am going to give the rest of my life to him. I am going to stay with him, and be to him all that he may never have in this world, never--never. I am going to be to him what my mother was to you, a slave to the end--a slave who loved you, and who gave you a daughter who will do the same for her husband--"

"No matter what he does or is--eh?"

"No matter what he is."

Lajeunesse gasped. "You will give up singing! Not sing again before kings and courts, and not earn ten thousand dollars a month--more than I've earned in twenty years? You don't mean that, Madelinette."

He was hoarse with feeling, and he held out his hand pleadingly. To him it seemed that his daughter was mad; that she was throwing her life away.

"I mean that, father," she answered quietly. "There are things worth more than money."

"You don't mean to say that you can love him as he is. It isn't natural. But no, it isn't."

"What would you have said, if any one had asked you if you loved my mother that last year of her life, when she was a cripple, and we wheeled her about in a chair you made for her?"

"Don't say any more," he said slowly, and took up his hat, and kept turning it round in his hand. "But you'll prevent him getting into trouble with the Gover'nment?" he urged at last.

"I have done what I could," she answered. Then with a little gasp: "They came to arrest him a fortnight ago, but I said they should not enter the house. Havel and I prevented them--refused to let them enter. The men did not know what to do, and so they went back. And now this--!" she

pointed to where the soldiers were pitching their tents in the valley below. "Since then Louis has done nothing to give trouble. He only writes and dreams. If he would but dream and no more--!" she added, half under her breath.

"We've dreamt too much in Pontiac already," said Lajeunesse, shaking his head.

Madelinette reached up her hand and laid it on his shaggy black hair. "You are a good little father, big smithy-man," she said lovingly. "You make me think of the strong men in the Niebelungen legends. It must be a big horse that will take you to Walhalla with the heroes," she added.

"Such notions--there in your head," he laughed. "Try to frighten me with your big names--hein?" There was a new look in the face of father and of daughter. No mist or cloud was between them. The things they had long wished to say were uttered at last. A new faith was established between them. Since her return they had laughed and talked as of old when they had met, though her own heart was aching, and he was bitter against the Seigneur. She had kept him and the whole parish in good humour by her unconventional ways, as though people were not beginning to make pilgrimages to Pontiac to see her--people who stared at the name over the blacksmith's door, and eyed her curiously, or lay in wait about the Seigneury, that they might get a glimpse of Madame and her deformed husband. Out in the world where she was now so important, the newspapers told strange romantic tales of the great singer, wove wild and wonderful legends of her life. To her it did not matter. If she knew, she did not heed. If she heeded it--even in her heart--she showed nothing of it before the world. She knew that soon there would be wilder tales still when it was announced that she was bidding farewell to the great working world, and would live on in retirement. She had made up her mind quite how the announcement should read, and, once it was given out, nothing would induce her to change her mind. Her life was now the life of the Seigneur.

A struggle in her heart went on, but she fought it down. The lure of a great temptation from that far-off outside world was before her, but she had resolved her heart against it. In his rough but tender way her father now understood, and that was a comfort to her. He felt what he could not reason upon or put into adequate words. But the confidence made him happy, and his eyes said so to her now.

"See, big smithy-man," she said gaily, "soon will be the fete of St. Jean Baptiste, and we shall all be happy then. Louis has promised me to make a speech that will not be against the English, but only words which will tell how dear the old land is to us."

"Ten to one against it!" said Lajeunesse anxiously. Then he brightened as he saw a shadow cross her face. "But you can make him do anything--as you always made me," he added, shaking his tousled head and taking with a droll eagerness the glass of wine she offered him.

CHAPTER III

"MAN TO MAN AND STEEL TO STEEL"

One evening a fortnight later Louis Racine and George Fournel, the Englishman, stood face to face in the library of the Manor House. There was antagonism and animosity in the attitude of both. Apart from the fact that Louis had succeeded to the Seignery promised to Fournel, and sealed to him by a reputed will which had never been found, there was cause for hatred on the Englishman's part. Fournel had been an incredibly successful man. Things had come his way--wealth, and the power that wealth brings. He had but two set-backs, and the man before him in the Manor House of Pontiac was the cause of both. The last rebuff had been the succession to the Seignery, which, curious as it might seem, had been the cherished dream of the rich man's retirement. It had been his fancy to play the Seigneur, the lord magnificent and bountiful, and he had determined to use wealth and all manner of influence to have the title of Baron of Pontiac revived--it had been obsolete for a hundred years. He leaned towards the grace of an hereditary dignity, as other retired millionaires cultivate art and letters, vainly imagining that they can wheedle civilisation and the humanities into giving them what they do not possess by nature, and fool the world at the same time.

The loss of the Seignery had therefore cut deep, but there had been a more hateful affront still. Four years before, Louis Racine, when spasmodically practising law in Quebec, had been approached by two poor Frenchmen, who laid claim to thousands of acres of land which a Land Company, whereof George Fournel was president, was publicly exploiting for the woods and valuable minerals discovered on it. The Land Company had been composed of Englishmen only. Louis Racine, reactionary and imaginative, brilliant and free from sordidness, and openly hating the English, had taken up the case, and for two years fought it tooth and nail without pay or reward. The matter had become a cause celebre, the Land Company engaging the greatest lawyers in both the English and French province. In the Supreme Court the case was lost to Louis' clients. Louis took it over to the Privy Council in London, and carried it through triumphantly and alone, proving his clients' title. His two poor Frenchmen regained their land. In payment he would accept nothing save the ordinary fees, as though it were some petty case in a county court. He had, however, made a reputation, which he had seemed not to value, save as a means of showing hostility to the governing race, and the Seignery of Pontiac, when it fell to him, had more charms for him than any celebrity to be won at the bar. His love of the history of his country was a mania with him, and he looked forward, on arriving at Pontiac, to being the apostle of French independence on the continent. Madelinette had crossed his path in his most enthusiastic moment, when his brilliant tongue and great dreams surrounded him with a kind of glamour. He had caught her to himself out of the girl's first triumph, when her nature, tried by the strain of her first challenge to the judgment of the world, cried out for rest, for Pontiac and home, and all that was of the old life among her people.

Fournel's antipathy had only been increased by the fact that Louis Racine had married the now famous Madelinette, and his animosity extended to her.

It was not in him to understand the nature of the Frenchman, volatile, moody, chivalrous, unreasonable, the slave of ideas, the victim of sentiment. Not understanding, when he began to see that he could not attain the object of his visit, which was to secure some relics of the late Seigneur's household, he chose to be disdainful.

"You are bound to give me these things I ask for, as a matter of justice

--if you know what justice means," he said at last.

"You should be aware of that," answered the Seigneur, with a kindling look. He felt every glance of Fournel's eye a contemptuous comment upon his deformity, now so egregious and humiliating. "I taught you justice once."

Fournel was not to be moved from his phlegm. He knew he could torture the man before him, and he was determined to do so, if he did not get his way upon the matter of his visit.

"You can teach me justice twice and be thanked once," he answered. "These things I ask for were much prized by my friend, the late Seigneur. I was led to expect that this Seigneury and all in it and on it should be mine. I know it was intended so. The law gives it you instead. Your technical claim has overridden my rights--you have a gift for making successful technical claims. But these old personal relics, of no monetary value--you should waive your avaricious and indelicate claim to them." He added the last words with a malicious smile, for the hardening look in Racine's face told him his request was hopeless, and he could not resist the temptation to put the matter with cutting force. Racine rose to the bait with a jump.

"Not one single thing--not one single solitary thing--!"

"The sentiment is strong if the grammar is bad," interrupted Fournel, meaning to wound wherever he found an opportunity, for the Seigneur's deformity excited in him no pity; it rather incensed him against the man, as an affront to decency and to his own just claims to the honours the Frenchman enjoyed. It was a petty resentment, but George Fournel had set his heart upon playing the grand-seigneur over the Frenchmen of Pontiac, and of ultimately leaving his fortune to the parish, if they all fell down and worshipped him and his "golden calf."

"The grammar is suitable to the case," retorted the Seigneur, his voice rising. "Everything is mine by law, and everything I will keep. If you think different, produce a will--produce a will!"

Truth was, Louis Racine would rather have parted with the Seigneury itself than with these relics asked for. They were reminiscent of the time when France and her golden-lilies brooded over his land, of the days when Louis Quatorze was king. He cherished everything that had association with the days of the old regime, as a miner hugs his gold, or a woman her jewels. The request to give them up to this unsympathetic Englishman, who valued them because they had belonged to his friend the late Seigneur, only exasperated him.

"I am ready to pay the highest possible price for them, as I have said," urged the Englishman, realising as he spoke that it was futile to urge the sale upon that basis.

"Money cannot buy the things that Frenchmen love. We are not a race of hucksters," retorted the Seigneur.

"That accounts for your envious dispositions then. You can't buy what you want--you love such curious things, I assume. So you play the dog in the manger, and won't let other decent folk buy what they want." He wilfully distorted the other's meaning, and was delighted to see the Seigneur's fingers twitch with fury. "But since you can't buy the things

you love--and you seem to think you should--how do you get them? Do you come by them honestly? or do you work miracles? When a spider makes love to his lady he dances before her to infatuate her, and then in a moment of her delighted aberration snatches at her affections. Is it the way of the spider then?"

With a snarl as of a wild beast, Louis Racine sprang forward and struck Fournel in the face with his clinched fist. Then, as Fournel, blinded, staggered back upon the book-shelves, he snatched two antique swords from the wall. Throwing one on the floor in front of the Englishman, he ran to the door and locked it, and turned round, the sword grasped firmly in his hand, and white with rage.

"Spider! Spider! By Heaven, you shall have the spider dance before you!" he said hoarsely. He had mistaken Fournel's meaning. He had put the most horrible construction upon it. He thought that Fournel referred to his deformity, and had ruthlessly dragged in Madelinette as well.

He was like a being distraught. His long brown hair was tossed over his blanched forehead and piercing black eyes. His head was thrown forward even more than his deformity compelled, his white teeth showed in a grimace of hatred; he was half-crouched, like an animal ready to spring.

"Take up the sword, or I'll run you through the heart where you stand," he continued, in a hoarse whisper. "I will give you till I can count three. Then by the God in Heaven--!"

Fournel felt that he had to deal with a man demented. The blow he had received had laid open the flesh on his cheek-bone, and blood was flowing from the wound. Never in his life before had he been so humiliated. And by a Frenchman--it roused every instinct of race-hatred in him. Yet he wanted not to go at him with a sword, but with his two honest hands, and beat him into a whining submission. But the man was deformed, he had none of his own robust strength--he was not to be struck, but to be tossed out of the way like an offending child.

He staunched the blood from his face and made a step forward without a word, determined not to fight, but to take the weapon from the other's hands. "Coward!" said the Seigneur. "You dare not fight with the sword. With the sword we are even. I am as strong as you there--stronger, and I will have your blood. Coward! Coward! Coward! I will give you till I count three. One! . . . Two! . . ."

Fournel did not stir. He could not make up his mind what to do. Cry out? No one could come in time to prevent the onslaught--and onslaught there would be, he knew. There was a merciless hatred in the Seigneur's face, a deadly purpose in his eyes; the wild determination of a man who did not care whether he lived or died, ready to throw himself upon a hundred in his hungry rage. It seemed so mad, so monstrous, that the beautiful summer day through which came the sharp whetting of the scythe, the song of the birds, and the smell of ripening fruit and grain, should be invaded by this tragic absurdity, this human fury which must spend itself in blood.

Fournel's mind was conscious of this feeling, this sense of futile, foolish waste and disfigurement, even as the Seigneur said "Three!" and, rushing forward, thrust.

As Fournel saw the blade spring at him, he dropped on one knee, caught it

with his left hand as it came, and wrenched it aside. The blade lacerated his fingers and his palm, but he did not let go till he had seized the sword at his feet with his right hand. Then, springing up with it, he stepped back quickly and grasped his weapon fiercely enough now.

Yet, enraged as he was, he had no wish to fight; to involve himself in a fracas which might end in tragedy and the courts of the land. It was a high price to pay for any satisfaction he might have in this affair. If the Seigneur were killed in the encounter--he must defend himself now--what a miserable notoriety and possible legal penalty and public punishment! For who could vouch for the truth of his story? Even if he wounded Racine only, what a wretched story to go abroad: that he had fought with a hunchback--a hunchback who knew the use of the sword, which he did not, but still a hunchback!

"Stop this nonsense," he said, as Louis Racine prepared to attack again. "Don't be a fool. The game isn't worth the candle."

"One of us does not leave this room alive," said the Seigneur. "You care for life. You love it, and you can't buy what you love from me. I don't care for life, and I would gladly die, to see your blood flow. Look, it's flowing down your face; it's dripping from your hand, and there shall be more dripping soon. On guard!"

He suddenly attacked with a fierce energy, forcing Fournel back upon the wall. He was not a first-class swordsman, but he had far more knowledge of the weapon than his opponent, and he had no scruple about using his knowledge. Fournel fought with desperate alertness, yet awkwardly, and he could not attack; it was all that he could do, all that he knew how to do, to defend himself. Twice again did the Seigneur's weapon draw blood, once from the shoulder and once from the leg of his opponent, and the blood was flowing from each wound. After the second injury they stood panting for a moment. Now the outside world was shut out from Fournel's senses as it was from Louis Racine's. The only world they knew was this cool room, whose oak floors were browned by the slow searching stains of Time, and darkened by the footsteps of six generations that had come and gone through the old house. The books along the walls seemed to cry out against the unseemly and unholy strife. But now both men were in that atmosphere of supreme egoism where only their two selves moved, and where the only thing that mattered on earth was the issue of this strife. Fournel could only think of how to save his life, and to do that he must become the aggressor, for his wounds were bleeding hard, and he must have more wounds, if the fight went on without harm to the Seigneur.

"You know now what it is to insult a Frenchman--On guard!" again cried the Seigneur, in a shriller voice, for everything in him was pitched to the highest note.

He again attacked, and the sound of the large swords meeting clashed on the soft air. As they struggled, a voice came ringing through the passages, singing a bar from an opera:

"Oh eager golden day, Oh happy evening hour,
Behold my lover cometh from fields of wrath and hate!
Sheathed is his sword; he cometh to my bower;
In war he findeth honour, and love within the gate."

The voice came nearer and nearer. It pierced the tragic separateness of

the scene of blood. It reached the ears of the Seigneur, and a look of pain shot across his face. Fournel was only dimly aware of the voice, for he was hard pressed, and it seemed to come from infinite distances. Presently the voice stopped, and some one tried the door of the room.

It was Madelinette. Astonished at finding it locked, she stood still a moment uncertain what to do. Then the sounds of the struggle within came to her ears. She shook the door, leaned her shoulders against it, and called, "Louis! Louis!" Suddenly she darted away, found Havel the faithful servant in the passage, and brought him swiftly to the door. The man sprang upon it, striking with his shoulder. The lock gave, the door flew open, and Madelinette stepped swiftly into the room, in time to see George Fournel sway and fall, his sword rattling on the hard oak floor.

"Oh, what have you done, Louis!" she cried, then added hurriedly to Havel: "Draw the blind there, shut the door, and tell Madame Marie to bring some water quickly."

The silent servant vanished, and she dropped on her knees beside the bleeding and insensible man, and lifted his head.

"He insulted you and me, and I've killed him, Madelinette," said Louis hoarsely.

A horrified look came to her face, and she hurriedly and tremblingly opened Fournel's waistcoat and shirt, and felt his heart.

She was freshly startled by a struggle behind her, and, turning quickly, she saw Madame Marie holding the Seigneur's arm to prevent him from ending his own life.

She sprang up and laid her hand upon her husband's arm. "He is not dead--you need not do it, Louis," she said quietly. There was no alarm, no undue excitement in her face now. She was acting with good presence of mind. A new sense was working in her. Something had gone from her suddenly where her husband was concerned, and something else had taken its place. An infinite pity, a bitter sorrow, and a gentle command were in her eyes all at once--new vistas of life opened before her, all in an instant.

"He is not dead, and there is no need to kill yourself, Louis," she repeated, and her voice had a command in it that was not to be gainsaid. "Since you have vindicated your honour, you will now help me to set this business right."

Madame Marie was on her knees beside the insensible man. "No, he is not dead, thank God!" she murmured, and while Havel stripped the arm and leg, she poured some water between Fournel's lips. Her long experience as the Little Chemist's wife served her well now.

Now that the excitement was over, Louis collapsed. He swayed and would have fallen, but Madelinette caught him, helped him to the sofa, and, forcing him gently down on his side, adjusted a pillow for him, and turned to the wounded man again.

An hour went busily by in the closely-curtained room, and at last George Fournel, conscious, and with wounds well bandaged, sat in a big arm-chair, glowering round him. At his first coming-to, Louis Racine, at his

wife's insistence, had come and offered his hand, and made apology for assaulting him in his own house.

Fournel's reply had been that he wanted to hear no more fool's talk and to have no more fool's doings, and that one day he hoped to take his pay for the day's business in a satisfactory way.

Madelinette made no apology, said nothing, save that she hoped he would remain for a few days till he was recovered enough to be moved. He replied that he would leave as soon as his horses were ready, and refused to take food or drink from their hands. His servant was brought from the Louis Quinze Hotel, and through him he got what was needed for refreshment, and requested that no one of the household should come near him. At night, in the darkness, he took his departure, no servant of the household in attendance. But as he got into the carriage, Madelinette came quickly to him, and said:

"I would give ten years of my life to undo to-day's work."

"I have no quarrel with you, Madame," he said gloomily, raised his hat, and was driven away.

CHAPTER IV

MADELINETTE MAKES A DISCOVERY

The national fete of the summer was over. The day had been successful, more successful indeed than any within the memory of the inhabitants; for the English and French soldiers joined in the festivities without any intrusion of racial spirit, but in the very essence and soul of good-fellowship. The General had called at the Manor, and paid his respects to the Seigneur, who received him abstractedly if not coolly, but Madelinette had captured his imagination and his sympathies. He was fond of music for an Englishman, and with a ravishing charm she sang for him a bergerette of the eighteenth century and then a ballad of Shakespeare's set to her own music. She was so anxious that the great holiday should pass off without one untoward incident, that she would have resorted to any fair device to attain the desired end. The General could help her by his influence and instructions, and if the soldiers--regulars and militia--joined in the celebrations harmoniously, and with goodwill, a long step would be made towards undoing the harm that Louis had done, and maybe influencing him towards a saner, wiser view of things. He had changed much since the fateful day when he had forced George Fournel to fight him; had grown more silent, and had turned grey. His eyes had become by turns watchful and suspicious, gloomy and abstracted; and his speech knew the same variations; now bitter and cynical, now sad and distant, and all the time his eyes seemed to grow darker and his face paler. But however moody and variable and irascible he might be with others, however unappeasable, with Madelinette he struggled to be gentle, and his petulance gave way under the intangible persuasiveness of her words and will, which had the effect of command. Under this influence he had prepared the words which he was to deliver at the Fete. They were full of veneration for past traditions, but were not at variance with a proper loyalty to the flag under which they lived, and if the English soldiery met the speech with genial appreciation the day might end in a blessing--and surely blessings were overdue in Madelinette's life in

Pontiac.

It had been as she worked for and desired, thanks to herself and the English General's sympathetic help. Perhaps his love of music made him better understand what she wanted, made him even forgiving of the Seigneur's strained manner; but certain it is that the day, begun with uneasiness on the part of the people of Pontiac, who felt themselves under surveillance, ended in great good-feeling and harmless revelry; and it was also certain that the Seigneur's speech gained him an applause that surprised him and momentarily appeased his vanity. The General gave him a guard of honour of the French Militia in keeping with his position as Seigneur; and this, with Madelinette's presence at his elbow, restrained him in his speech when he would have broken from the limits of propriety in the intoxication of his eager eloquence. But he spoke with moderation, standing under the British Flag on the platform, and at the last he said:

"A flag not our own floats over us now; guarantees us against the malice of the world and assures us in our laws and religion; but there is another flag which in our tearful memories is as dear to us now as it was at Carillon and Levis. It is the flag of memory--of language and of race, the emblem of our past upon our hearthstones; and the great country that rules us does not deny us reverence to it. Seeing it, we see the history of our race from Charlemagne to this day, and we have a pride in that history which England does not rebuke, a pride which is just and right. It is fitting that we should have a day of commemoration. Far off in France burns the light our fathers saw and were glad. And we in Pontiac have a link that binds us to the old home. We have ever given her proud remembrance--we now give her art and song."

With these words, and turning to his wife, he ended, and cries of "Madame Madelinette! Madame Madelinette!" were heard everywhere. Even the English soldiers cheered, and Madelinette sang a la Claire Fontaine, three verses in French and one in English, and the whole valley rang with the refrain sung at the topmost pitch by five thousand voices:

"I'ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

The day of pleasure done and dusk settled on Pontiac and on the encampment of soldiers in the valley, a light still burned in the library at the Manor House long after midnight. Madelinette had gone to bed, but, excited by the events of the day, she could not sleep, and she went down to the library to read. But her mind wandered still, and she sat mechanically looking before her at a picture of the father of the late Seigneur, which was let into the moulding of the oak wall. As she looked abstractedly and yet with the intensity of the preoccupied mind, her eye became aware of a little piece of wood let into the moulding of the frame. The light of the hanging lamp was full on it.

This irregularity began to perplex her eye. Presently it intruded on her reverie. Still busy with her thoughts, she knelt upon the table beneath the picture and pressed the irregular piece of wood. A spring gave, the picture came slowly away from the frame, and disclosed a small cupboard behind. In this cupboard were a few books, an old silver-handled pistol, and a packet. Madelinette's reverie was broken now. She was face to face with discovery and mystery. Her heart stood still with fear. After an instant of suspense, she took out the packet and held it to the light. She gave a smothered cry.

It was the will of the late Seigneur.

CHAPTER V

WHAT WILL SHE DO WITH IT?

George Fournel was the heir to the Seigneury of Pontiac, not Louis Racine. There it was in the will of Monsieur de la Riviere, duly signed and attested.

Madelinette's heart stood still. Louis was no longer--indeed, never had been--Seigneur of Pontiac, and they had no right there, had never had any right there. They must leave this place which was to Louis the fetich of his soul, the small compensation fate had made him for the trouble nature had cynically laid upon him. He had clung to it as a drowning man clings to a spar. To him it was the charter from which he could appeal to the world as the husband of Madelinette Lajeunesse. To him it was the name, the dignity, and the fortune he brought her. It was the one thing that saved him from a dire humiliation; it was the vantage-ground from which he appealed to her respect, the flaming testimony of his own self-esteem. Every hour since his trouble had come upon him, since Madelinette's great fame had come to her, he had protested to himself that it was honour for honour; and every day he had laboured, sometimes how fantastically, how futilely! to dignify his position, to enhance his importance in her eyes. She had understood it all, had read him to the last letter in the alphabet of his mind and heart. She had realised the consternation of the people, and she knew that, for her sake, and because the Cure had commanded, all the obsolete claims he had made were responded to by the people. Certainly he had affected them by his eloquence and his fiery kindness, but at the same time they had shrewdly smelt the treason underneath his ardour. There was a definite limit to their loyalty to him; and, deprived of the Seigneury, he would count for nothing.

A hundred thoughts like these went through her mind as she stood by the table under the hanging lamp, her face white as the loose robe she wore, her eyes hot and staring, her figure rigid as stone.

To-morrow--how could she face to-morrow, and Louis! How could she tell him this! How could she say to him, "Louis, you are no longer Seigneur. The man you hate, he who is your inveterate enemy, who has every reason to exact from you the last tribute of humiliation, is Seigneur here!" How could she face the despair of the man whose life was one inward fever, one long illusion, which was yet only half an illusion, since he was forever tortured by suspicion; whose body was wearing itself out, and spirit was destroying itself in the struggle of a vexed imagination!

She knew that Louis' years were numbered. She knew that this blow would break him body and soul. He could never survive the humiliation. His sensitiveness was a disease, his pride was the only thing that kept him going; his love of her, strong as it was, would be drowned in an imagined shame!

It was midnight. She was alone with this secret. She held the paper in her hand, which was at once Louis' sentence or his charter of liberty. A candle was at her hand, the doors were shut, the blinds drawn, the

house a frozen silence--how cold she was, though it was the deep of summer! She shivered from head to foot, and yet all day the harvest sun had drenched the room in its heat.

Yet her blood might run warm again, her cold cheeks might regain their colour, her heart beat quietly, if this paper were no more! The thought made her shrink away from herself, as it were, yet she caught up the candle and lighted it.

For Louis. For Louis, though she would rather have died than do it for herself. To save to Louis what was, to his imagination, the one claim he had upon her respect and the world's. After all, how little was it in value or in dignity! How little she cared for it! One year of her voice could earn two such Seigneuries as this. And the honour--save that it was Pontiac--it was naught to her. In all her life she had never done or said a dishonourable thing. She had never lied, she had never deceived, she had never done aught that might not have been written down and published to all the world. Yet here, all at once, she was faced with a vast temptation, to do a deed, the penalty of which was an indelible shame.

What injury would it do to George Fournel! He was used now to his disappointment; he was rich; he had no claims upon Pontiac; there was no one but himself to whom it mattered, this little Seigneury. What he did not know did not exist, so far as himself was concerned. How easily could it all be made right some day! She felt as though she were suffocating, and she opened the window a little very softly. Then she lit the candle tremblingly, watched the flame gather strength, and opened out the will. As she did so, however, the smell of a clover field, which is as honey, came stealing through the room, and all at once a strange association of ideas flashed into her brain.

She recalled one summer day long ago, when, in the church of St. Saviour's, the smell of the clover fields came through the open doors and windows, and her mind had kept repeating mechanically, till she fell asleep, the text of the Curb's sermon--"As ye sow, so also shall ye reap."

That placid hour which had no problems, no cares, no fears, no penalties in view, which was filled with the richness of a blessed harvest and the plenitude of innocent youth, came back on her now in the moment of her fierce temptation.

She folded up the paper slowly, a sob came in her throat, she blew out the candle, and put the will back in the cupboard. The faint click of the spring as she closed the panel seemed terribly loud to her. She started and looked timorously round. The blood came back to her face--she flushed crimson with guilt. Then she turned out the lighted lamp and crept away up the stairs to her room.

She paused beside Louis' bed. He was moving restlessly in his sleep; he was murmuring her name. With a breaking sigh she crept into bed slowly and lay like one who had been beaten, bruised, and shamed.

At last, before the dawn, she fell asleep. She dreamed that she was in prison and that George Fournel was her jailor.

She waked to find Louis at her bedside.

"I am holding my seigneurial court to-day," he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE ONE WHO SAW

All day and every day Madelinette's mind kept fastening itself upon one theme, kept turning to one spot. In her dreams she saw the hanging lamp, the moving panel, the little cupboard, the fatal paper. Waking and restlessly busy, she sometimes forgot it for a moment, but remembrance would come back with painful force, and her will must govern her hurt spirit into quiet resolution. She had such a sense of humiliation as though some one dear to her had committed a crime against herself. Two persons were in her--Madelinette Lajeunesse, the daughter of the village blacksmith, brought up in the peaceful discipline of her religion, shunning falsehood and dishonour with a simple proud self-respect; and Madame Racine, the great singer, who had touched at last the heart of things; and, with the knowledge, had thrown aside past principles and convictions to save her stricken husband from misery and humiliation--to save his health, his mind, his life maybe.

The struggle of conscience and expediency, of principle and womanliness wore upon her, taking away the colour from her cheeks, but spiritualising her face, giving the large black eyes an expression of rare intensity, so that the Avocat in his admiration called her Madonna, and the Cure came oftener to the Manor House with a fear in his heart that all was not well. Yet he was met by her cheerful smile, by her quiet sense of humour, by the touching yet not demonstrative devotion of the wife to the husband, and a varying and impulsive adoration of the wife by the husband. One day when the Cure was with the Seigneur, Madelinette entered upon them. Her face was pale though composed, yet her eyes had a look of abstraction or detachment. The Cure's face brightened at her approach. She wore a simple white gown with a bunch of roses at the belt, and a broad hat lined with red that shaded her face and gave it a warmth it did not possess.

"Dear Madame!" said the Cure, rising to his feet and coming towards her.

"I have told you before that I will have nothing but 'Madelinette,' dear Cure," she replied, with a smile, and gave him her hand. She turned to Louis, who had risen also, and putting a hand on his arm pressed him gently into his chair, then, with a swift, almost casual, caress of his hair, placed on the table the basket of flowers she was carrying, and began to arrange them.

"Dear Louis," she said presently, and as though en passant, "I have dismissed Tardif to-day--I hope you won't mind these dull domestic details, Cure," she added.

The Cure nodded and turned his head towards the window musingly. He was thinking that she had done a wise thing in dismissing Tardif, for the man had evil qualities, and he was hoping that he would leave the parish now.

The Seigneur nodded. "Then he will go. I have dismissed him--I have a temper--many times, but he never went. It is foolish to dismiss a man in a temper. He thinks you do not mean it. But our Madelinette there"--

he turned towards the Cure now--"she is never in a temper, and every one always knows she means what she says; and she says it as even as a clock." Then the egoist in him added: "I have power and imagination and the faculty for great things; but Madelinette has serene judgment--a tribute to you, Cure, who taught her in the old days."

"In any case, Tardif is going," she repeated quietly. "What did he do?" said the Seigneur. "What was your grievance, beautiful Madame?"

He was looking at her with unfeigned admiration--with just such a look as was in his face the first day they met in the Avocat's house on his arrival in Pontiac. She turned and saw it, and remembered. The scene flashed before her mind. The thought of herself then, with the flush of a sunrise love suddenly rising in her heart, roused a torrent of feeling now, and it required every bit of strength she had to prevent her bursting into a passion of tears. In imagination she saw him there, a straight, slim, handsome figure, with the very vanity of proud health upon him, and ambition and passionate purpose in every line of his figure, every glance of his eyes. Now--there he was, bent, frail, and thin, with restless eyes and deep discontent in voice and manner; the curved shoulder and the head grown suddenly old; the only thing, speaking of the past, the graceful hand, filled with the illusory courage of a declining vitality. But for the nervous force in him, the latent vitality which renewed with stubborn persistence the failing forces, he was dead. The brain kept commanding the body back to life and manhood daily.

"What did Tardif do?" the Seigneur again questioned, holding out a hand to her.

She did not dare to take his hand lest her feelings should overcome her; so with an assumed gaiety she put in it a rose from her basket and said:

"He has been pilfering. Also he was insolent. I suppose he could not help remembering that I lived at the smithy once--the dear smithy," she added softly.

"I will go at once and pay the scoundrel his wages," said the Seigneur, rising, and with a nod to the Cure and his wife opened the door.

"Do not see him yourself, Louis," said Madelinette. "Not I. Havel shall pay him and he shall take himself off to-morrow morning."

The door closed, and Madelinette was left alone with the Cure. She came to him and said with a quivering in her voice:

"He mocked Louis."

"It is well that he should go. He is a bad man and a bad servant. I know him too well."

"You see, he keeps saying"--she spoke very slowly--"that he witnessed a will the Seigneur made in favour of Monsieur Fournel. He thinks us interlopers, I suppose."

The Cure put a hand on hers gently. "There was a time when I felt that Monsieur Fournel was the legal heir to the Seigneurie, for Monsieur de la Riviere had told me there was such a will; but since then I have changed my mind. Your husband is the natural heir, and it is only just that the

Seigneury should go on in the direct line. It is best."

"Even with all Louis' mistakes?"

"Even with them. You have set them right, and you will keep him within the bounds of wisdom and prudence. You are his guardian angel, Madelinette."

She looked up at him with a pensive smile and a glance of gratitude.

"But suppose that will--if there is one--exists, see how false our position!"

"Do you think it is mere accident that the will has never been found--if it was not destroyed by the Seigneur himself before he died? No, there is purpose behind it, with which neither you or I or Louis have anything to do. Ah, it is good to have you here in this Seigneury, my child! What you give us will return to you a thousandfold. Do not regret the world and your work there. You will go back all too soon."

She was about to reply when the Seigneur again entered the room.

"I made up my mind that he should go at once, and so I've sent him word --the rat!"

"I will leave you two to be drowned in the depths of your own intelligence," said Madelinette; and taking her empty basket left the room.

A strange compelling feeling drove her to the library where the fateful panel was. With a strange sense that her wrong-doing was modified by the fact, she had left the will where she had found it. She had a superstition that fate would deal less harshly with her if she did. It was not her way to temporise. She had concealed the discovery of the will with an unswerving determination. It was for Louis, it was for his peace, for the ease of his fading life, and she had no repentance. Yet there it was, that curious, useless concession to old prejudices, the little touch of hypocrisy--she left the will where she had found it. She had never looked at it since, no matter how great the temptation, and sometimes this was overpowering.

To-day it overpowered her. The house was very still and the blinds were drawn to shut out the heat, but the soft din of the locusts came through the windows. Her household were all engaged elsewhere. She shut the doors of the little room, and kneeling on the table touched the spring. The panel came back and disclosed the cupboard. There lay the will. She took it up and opened it. Her eyes went dim on the instant, and she leaned her forehead against the wall sick at heart.

As she did so a sudden gust of wind drove in the blind of the window. She started, but saw what it was, and hastily putting the will back, closed the panel, and with a fast-beating heart, left the room.

Late that evening she found a letter on her table addressed to herself. It ran:

You've shipped me off like dirt. You'll be shipped off, Madame, double quick. I've got what'll bring the right owner here. You'll soon hear from

Tardif.

In terror she hastened to the library and sprung the panel. The will was gone.

Tardif was on his way with it to George Fournel.

CHAPTER VII

THE PURSUIT

There was but one thing to do. She must go straight to George Fournel at Quebec. She knew only too well that Tardif was speeding thither as fast as horses could carry him. He had had several hours' start, but there was still a chance of overtaking him. And suppose she overtook him? She could not decide definitely what she should do, but she would do anything, sacrifice anything, to secure again that fatal document which, in George Fournel's hands, must bring a collapse worse than death. A dozen plans flashed before her, and now that her mind was set upon the thing, compunction would not stay her. She had gone so far, she was prepared to go further to save this Seigneury to Louis. She put in her pocket the silver-handled pistol from the fatal cupboard.

In an hour from the time she found the note, the horses and coach were at the door, and the faithful Havel, cloaked and armed, was ready for the journey. A note to Louis, with the excuse of a sudden and important call to Quebec, which he was to construe into business concerning her profession; hurried yet careful arrangements for his comfort during her absence; a letter to the Cure begging of him a daily visit to the Manor House; and then, with the flurried Madame Marie, she entered the coach with Havel on the box, and they were off.

The coach rattled through the village and stopped for a moment at the smithy. A few words of cheerful good-bye to her father--she carried the spring in her face and the summer of gaiety in her face however sore her heart was--and they were once more upon the road.

Their first stage was twenty-five miles, and it led through the ravine where Parpon and his comrades had once sought to frighten George Fournel. As they passed the place Madelinette shuddered, and she remembered Fournel's cynical face as he left the house three months ago. She felt that it would not easily soften to mercy or look upon her trouble with a human eye, if once the will were in his hands. It was a silent journey, but Madame Marie asked no questions, and there was comfort in her unspoken sympathy.

Five hours, and at midnight they arrived at the end of the first stage of their journey, at the village tavern of St. Stanislaus. Here Madame Marie urged Madelinette to stay and sleep, but this she refused to do, if horses could be got to go forward. The sight of two gold pieces made the thing possible in the landlord's eyes, and Madame Marie urged no more, but found some refreshment, of which she gently insisted that Madelinette should partake. In another hour from their arrival they were on the road again, with the knowledge that Tardif had changed horses and gone forward four hours before, boasting as he went that when the bombshell he was carrying should burst, the country would stay awake

o' nights for a year.

Madelinette herself had made the inquiries of the landlord, whose easily-bought obsequiousness now knew no bounds, and he gave a letter to Havel to hand to his cousin the landlord at the next change, which, he said, would be sure to secure them the best of accommodation and good horses.

As the night grew to morning, Madelinette drooped a little, and Madame Marie, who had, to her own anger and disgust, slept three hours or more, quietly drew Madelinette towards her. With a little sob the girl--for what was she but a girl--let her head drop on the old woman's shoulder, and she fell into a troubled sleep, which lasted till, in the flush of sunrise, they drew up at the solitary inn on the outskirts of the village of Beaugard. They had come fifty miles since the evening before.

Here Madelinette took Havel into her confidence, in so far as to tell him that Tardif had stolen a valuable paper from her, the loss of which might bring most serious consequences.

Whatever Havel had suspected he was the last man in the world to show or tell. But before leaving the Manor House of Pontiac he had armed himself with pistols, in the grim hope that he might be required to use them. Havel had been used hard in the world, Madelinette had been kind to him, and he was ready to show his gratitude--and he little recked what form it might take. When he found that they were following Tardif, and for what purpose, an ugly joy filled his heart, and he determined on revenge--so long delayed--on the scoundrel who had once tried to turn the parish against him by evil means. He saw that his pistols were duly primed, he learned that Tardif had passed but two hours before, boasting again that Europe would have gossip for a year, once he reached Quebec. Tardif too had paid liberally for his refreshment and his horses, for here he had taken a carriage, and had swaggered like a trooper in a conquered country.

Havel had every hope of overtaking Tardif, and so he told Madelinette, adding that he would secure the paper for her at any cost. She did not quite know what Havel meant, but she read purpose in his eye, and when Havel said: "I won't say 'Stop thief' many times," she turned away without speaking--she was choked with anxiety. Yet in her own pocket was a little silver-handled pistol.

It was true that Tardif was a thief, but she knew that his theft would be counted a virtue before the world. This she could not tell Havel, but when the critical moment came--if it did come--she would then act upon the moment's inspiration. If Tardif was a thief, what was she!--But this she could not tell Havel or the world. Even as she thought it for this thousandth time, her face flushed deeply, and a mist came before her eyes. But she hardened her heart and gave orders to proceed as soon as the horses were ready. After a hasty breakfast they were again on their way, and reached the third stage of their journey by eleven o'clock. Tardif had passed two hours before.

So, for two days they travelled, with no sleep save what they could catch as the coach rolled on. They were delayed three hours at one inn because of the trouble in getting horses, since it appeared that Tardif had taken the only available pair in the place; but a few gold pieces brought another pair galloping from a farm two miles away, and they were again on the road. Fifty miles to go, and Tardif with three hours' start of them! Unless he had an accident there was faint chance of overtaking him, for

at this stage he had taken to the saddle again. As time had gone on, and the distance between them and Quebec had decreased, Madelinette had grown paler and stiller. Yet she was considerate of Madame Marie, and more than once insisted on Havel lying down for a couple of hours, and herself made him a strengthening bowl of soup at the kitchen fire of the inn. Meanwhile she inquired whether it might be possible to get four horses at the next change, and she offered five gold pieces to a man who would ride on ahead of them and secure the team.

Some magic seemed to bring her the accomplishment of the impossible, for even as she made the offer, and the downcast looks of the landlord were assuring her that her request was futile, there was the rattle of hoofs without, and a petty Government official rode up. He had come a journey of three miles only, and his horse was fresh. Agitated, yet ruling herself to composure, Madelinette approached him and made her proposal to him. He was suspicious, as became a petty Government official, and replied sullenly. She offered him money--before the landlord, unhappily --and his refusal was now unnecessarily bitter. She turned away sadly, but Madame Marie had been roused by the official's churlishness, and for once the placid little body spoke in that vulgar tongue which needs no interpretation. She asked the fellow if he knew to whom he had been impolite, to whom he had refused a kindly act.

"You--you, a habitant road-watcher, a pound-keeper, a village tax-collector, or something less!" she said. "You to refuse the great singer Madelinette Lajeunesse, the wife of the Seigneur of Pontiac, the greatest patriot in the land; to refuse her whom princes are glad to serve--" She stopped and gasped her indignation.

A hundred speeches and a hundred pounds could not have done so much. The habitant official stared in blank amazement, the landlord took a glass of brandy to steady himself.

"The Lajeunesse--the Lajeunesse, the singer of all the world--ah, why did she not say so then!" said the churl. "What would I not do for her! Money--no, it is nothing, but the Lajeunesse, I myself would give my horse to hear her sing."

"Tell her she can have M'sieu's horse," said the landlord, excitedly interposing.

"Tiens, who the devil--the horse is mine! If Madame--if she will but let me offer it to her myself!" said the agitated official. "I sing myself --I know what singing is. I have sung in an opera--a sentinel in armour I was. Ah, but bring me to her, and you shall see what I will do, by grace of heaven! I will marry you if you haven't a husband," he added with ardour to the dumfounded Madame Marie, who hurried to the adjoining room.

An instant afterwards the official was making an oration in tangled sentences which brought him a grateful smile and a hand-clasp from Madelinette. She could not prevent him from kissing her hand, she could not refrain from laughing when, outside the room, he tried to kiss Madame Marie. She was astounded, however, an hour later, to see him still at the inn door, marching up and down, a whip in his hand. She looked at him reproachfully, indignantly.

"Why are you not on the way?" she asked.

"Your man, that M'sieu' Havel, has rode on; I am to drive," he said.
"Yes, Madame, it is my everlasting honour that I am to drive you. Havel has a good horse, the horse has a good rider, you have a good servant in me. I, Madame, have a good mistress in you--I am content. I am overjoyed--I am proud--I am ready, I, Pierre Lapierre."

The churlish official had gone back to the natural state of an excitable habitant, ready to give away his heart or lose his head at an instant's notice, the temptation being sufficient. Madelinette was frightened. She knew well why Havel had ridden on ahead without her permission, and shaking hands with the landlord and getting into the coach, she said hastily to her new coachman: "Lose not an instant. Drive hard."

They reached the next change by noon, and here they found four horses awaiting them. Tardif, and Havel also, had come and gone. An hour's rest, and they were away again upon the last stage of the journey. They should reach Quebec soon after dusk, all being well. At first, Lapierre the official had been inclined to babble, but at last he relieved his mind by interjections only. He kept shaking his head wisely, as though debating on great problems, and he drove his horses with a master-hand--he had once been a coach driver on that long river-road, which in summer makes a narrow ribbon of white, mile for mile with the St. Lawrence from east to west. This was the proudest moment of his life. He knew great things were at stake, and they had to do with the famous singer, Lajeunesse; and what tales for his grandchildren in years to come!

The flushed and comfortable Madame Marie sat upright in the coach, holding the hand of her mistress, and Madelinette grew paler as the miles diminished between her and Quebec. Yet she was quiet and unmoving, now and then saying an encouraging word to Lapierre, who smacked his lips for miles afterwards, and took out of his horses their strength and paces by masterly degrees. So that when, at last, on the hill they saw far off the spires of Quebec, the team was swinging as steadily on as though they had not come twenty-five miles already. This was a moment of pride for Lapierre, but of apprehension for Madelinette. At the last two inns on the road she had got news of both Tardif and Havel. Tardif had had the final start of half-an-hour. A half-hour's start, and fifteen miles to go! But one thing was sure, Havel, the wiry Havel, was the better man, with sounder nerve and a fostered strength.

Yet, as they descended the hill and plunged into the wild wooded valley, untenanted and uncivilised, where the road wound and curved among giant boulders and twisted through ravines and gorges, her heart fell within her. Evening was at hand, and in the thick forest the shadows were heavy, and night was settling upon them before its time.

They had not gone a mile, however, when, as they swung creaking round a great boulder, Lapierre pulled up his horses with a loud exclamation, for almost under his horses' feet lay a man apparently dead, his horse dead beside him.

It was Havel. In an instant Madelinette and Ma dame Marie were bending over him. The widow of the Little Chemist had skill and presence of mind.

"He is not dead, dear mine," said she in a low voice, feeling Havel's heart.

"Thank God," was all that Madelinette could say. "Let us lift him into

the coach."

Now Lapierre was standing beside them, the reins in his hand. "Leave that to me," he said, and passed the reins into Madame Marie's hands, then with muttered imprecations on persons unmentioned he lifted up the slight form of Havel, and carried him to the coach. Meanwhile Madelinette had stooped to a little stream at the side of the road, and filled her silver drinking-cup with water.

As she bent over Havel and sprinkled his face, Lapierre examined the insensible man.

"He is but stunned," he said. "He will come to in a moment."

Then he went to the spot where Havel had lain, and found a pistol lying at the side of the road. Examining it, he found it had been discharged--both barrels. Rustling with importance he brought it to Madelinette, nodding and looking wise, yet half timorous too in sharing in so remarkable a business. Madelinette glanced at the pistol, her lips tightened, and she shuddered. Havel had evidently failed, and she must face the worst. Yet now that it had come, she was none the less determined to fight on.

Havel opened his eyes and looked round in a startled way. He saw Madelinette.

"Ah, Madame, Madame, pardon! He got away. I fired twice and winged him, but he shot my horse and I fell on my head. He has got away. What time is it, Madame?" he suddenly asked. She told him. "Ah, it is too late," he added. "It happened over half-an-hour ago. Unless he is badly hurt and has fallen by the way, he is now in the city. Madame, I have failed you--pardon, Madame!"

She helped him to sit up, and made a cushion of her cloak for his head, in a corner of the coach. "There is nothing to ask pardon for, Havel," she said; "you did your best. It was to be--that's all. Drink the brandy now."

A moment afterwards Lapierre was on the box, Madame Marie was inside, and Madelinette said to the coachman:

"Drive hard--the White Calvary by the church of St. Mary Magdalene."

In another hour the coach drew up by the White Calvary, where a soft light burned in memory of some departed soul.

The three alighted. Madelinette whispered to Havel, he got up on the box beside Lapierre, and the coach rattled away to a tavern, as the two women disappeared swiftly into the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

FACE TO FACE

As the two approached the mansion where George Fournel lived, they saw the door open and a man come hurriedly out into the street. He wore his

wrist in a sling.

Madelinette caught Madame Marie's arm. She did not speak, but her heart sank within her. The man was Tardif.

He saw them and shuffled over.

"Ha, Madame," he said, "he has the will, and I've not done with you yet --you'll see." Then, shaking a fist in Madelinette's face, he clattered off into the darkness.

They crossed the street, and Madame Marie knocked at Fournel's door. It was at once opened, and Madelinette announced herself. The servant stared stonily at first, then, as she mentioned her name and he saw her face, he suddenly became servile, and asked them into a small waiting-room. Monsieur Fournel was at home, and should be informed at once of Madame's arrival.

A few moments later the servant, somewhat graver, but as courteous still, came to say that Monsieur would receive her in his library. Madelinette turned towards Madame Marie. The servant understood.

"I shall see that the lady has refreshment," he said. "Will Madame perhaps care for refreshment--and a mirror, before Monsieur has the honour?--Madame has travelled far."

In spite of the anxiety of the moment and the great matters at stake, Madelinette could not but smile. "Thank you," she said, "I hope I'm not so unrepresentable."

"A little dust here and there perhaps, Madame," he said, with humble courtesy.

Madelinette was not so heroic as to undervalue the suggestion. Lives perhaps were in the balance, but she was a woman, and who could tell what slight influences might turn the scale!

The servant saw her hesitation. "If Madame will but remain here, I will bring what is necessary," he said, and was gone. In a moment he appeared again with a silver basin, a mirror, and a few necessaries of the toilet.

"I suppose, Madame," said the servant, with fluttered anxiety, to show that he knew who she was, "I suppose you have had sometimes to make rough shifts, even in palaces."

She gave him a gold piece. It cheered her in the moment to think that in this forbidding house, on a forbidding mission, to a forbidding man, she had one friend. She made a hasty toilet, and but for the great paleness of her cheeks, no traces remained of the three days' travel with their hardship and anxiety. Presently, as the servant ushered her into the presence of George Fournel, even the paleness was warmed a little by the excitement of the moment.

Fournel was standing with his back to the door, looking out into the moonlit night. As she entered he quickly drew the curtains of the windows and turned towards his visitor, a curious, hard, disdainful look in his face. In his hands he held a paper which she knew only too well.

"Madame," he said, and bowed. Then he motioned her to a chair. He took

one himself and sat down beside the great oak writing-desk and waited for her to speak--waited with a look which sent the blood from her heart to colour her cheeks and forehead.

She did not speak, however, but looked at him fearlessly. It was impossible for her to humble herself before the latent insolence of his look. It seemed to degrade her out of all consideration. He felt the courage of her defiance, and it moved him. Yet he could but speak in cynical suggestion.

"You had a long, hard, and adventurous journey," he said. He rose suddenly and drew a tray towards him. "Will you not have some refreshment?" he added, in an even voice. "I fear you have not had time to seek it at an inn. Your messenger has but just gone."

It was impossible for him to do justice to himself, or to let his hospitality rest upon its basis of natural courtesy. It was clear that he was moved with accumulated malice, and he could not hide it.

"Your servant has been hospitable," she said, her voice trembling a little. She plunged at once into the business of her visit.

"Monsieur, that paper you hold--" she stopped for an instant, able to go no further.

"Ah, this--this document you have sent me," he said, opening it with an assumed carelessness. "Your servant had an accident--I suppose we may call it that privately--as he came. He was fired at--was wounded. You will share with me the hope that the highwayman who stopped him may be brought to justice, though, indeed, your man Tardif left him behind in the dust. Perhaps you came upon him, Madame--hein?"

She steeled herself. Too much was at stake; she could not resent his hateful implications now.

"Tardif was not my messenger, Monsieur, as you know. Tardif was the thief of that document in your hands."

"Yes, this--will!" he said musingly, an evil glitter in his eyes. "Its delivery has been long delayed. Posts and messengers are slow from Pontiac."

"Monsieur will hear what I have to say? You have the will, your rights are in your hands. Is not that enough?"

"It is not enough," he answered, in a grating voice. "Let us be plain then, Madame, and as simple as you please. You concealed this will. Not Tardif but yourself is open to the law."

She shrank under the brutality of his manner, but she ruled herself to outward composure. She was about to reply when he added, with a sneer: "Avarice is a debasing vice--Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house! Thou shalt not steal!"

"Monsieur," she said calmly, "it would have been easy to destroy the will. Have you not thought of that?"

For a moment he was taken aback, but he said harshly: "If crime were always intelligent, it would have fewer penalties."

She shrank again under the roughness of his words. But she was fighting for an end that was dear to her soul, and she answered:

"It was not lack of intelligence, but a sense of honour--yes, a sense of honour," she insisted, as he threw back his head and laughed. "What do you think might be my reason for concealing the will--if I did conceal it?"

"The answer seems obvious. Why does the wild ass forage with a strange herd, or the pig put his feet in the trough? Not for his neighbour's gain, Madame, not in a thousand years."

"Monsieur, I have never been spoken to so coarsely. I am a blacksmith's daughter, and I have heard rough men talk in my day, but I have never heard a man--of my own race at least--so rude to a woman. But I am here not for my own sake; I will not go till I have said and done all I have come to say and do. Will you listen to me, Monsieur?"

"I have made my charges--answer them. Disprove this theft"--he held up the will--"of concealment, and enjoyment of property not your own, and then ask of me that politeness which makes so beautiful stable and forge at Pontiac."

"Monsieur, you cannot think that the will was concealed for profit, for the value of the Seigneury of Pontiac. I can earn two such seigneuries in one year, Monsieur."

"Nevertheless you do not."

"For the same reason that I did not bring or send that will to you when I found it, Monsieur. And for that same reason I have come to ask you not to take advantage of that will."

He was about to interpose angrily, but she continued: "Whatever the rental may be that you in justice feel should be put upon the Seigneury, I will pay--from the hour my husband entered on the property, its heir as he believed. Put such rental on the property, do not disturb Monsieur Racine in his position as it is, and I will double that rental."

"Do not think, Madame, that I am as avaricious as you."

"Is it avaricious to offer double the worth of the rental?"

"There is the title and distinction. You married a mad nobody; you wish to retain an honour that belongs to me."

"I am asking it for my husband's sake, not my own, believe me, Monsieur."

"And what do you expect me to do for his sake, Madame?"

"What humanity would suggest. Ah, I know what you would say: he tried to kill you; he made you fight him. But, Monsieur, he has repented of that. He is ill, he is--crippled, he cherishes the Seigneury beyond its worth a thousand times."

"He cherishes it at my expense. So, you must not disturb the man who robs you of house and land, and tries to murder you, lest he should be disturbed and not sleep o' nights. Come, Madame, that is too thin."

"He might kill you, but he would not rob you, Monsieur. Do you think that if he knew that will existed, he would be now at the Seigneury, or I here? I know you hate Louis Racine."

"With ample reason."

"You hate him more because he defeated you than because he once tried to kill you. Oh, I do not know the rights or wrongs of that great case at law; I only know that Louis Racine was not the judge or jury, but the avocat only, whose duty it was to do as he did. That he did it the more gladly because he was a Frenchman and you an Englishman, is not his fault or yours either. Louis Racine's people came here two hundred years ago, yours not sixty years ago. You, the great business man, have had practical power which gave you riches. You have sacrificed all for power. Louis Racine has only genius, and no practical power."

"A dangerous fanatic and dreamer," he interjected. "A dreamer, if you will, with no practical power, for he never thought of himself, and 'practical power' is usually all self. He dreamed--he gave his heart and soul up for ideas. Englishmen do not understand that. Do you not know--you do know--that, had he chosen, he might have been rich too, for his brains would have been of great use to men of practical power like yourself."

She paused; Fournel did not answer, but sat as though reading the will intently.

"Was it strange that he should dream of a French sovereign state here, where his people came and first possessed the land? Can you wonder that this dreamer, when the Seigneury of Pontiac came to him, felt as if a new life were opened up to him, and saw a way to some of his ambitions. They were sad, mistaken ambitions, doomed to failure, but they were also his very heart, which he would empty out gladly for an idea. The Seigneury of Pontiac came to him, and I married him."

"Evidently bent upon wrecking the chances of a great career," interrupted Fournel over the paper.

"But no; I also cared more for ideas than for the sordid things of life. It is in our blood, you see" she was talking with less restraint now, for she saw he was listening, despite assumed indifference--"and Pontiac was dearer to me than all else in the world. Louis Racine belonged there. You--what sort of place would you, an Englishman, have occupied at the Seigneury of Pontiac! What kind--"

He got suddenly to his feet. He was a man of strange whims and vanities, and his resentment at his exclusion from the Seigneury of Pontiac had become a fixed idea. He had hugged the thought of its possession before M. de la Riviere died, as a man humbly born prides himself on the distinguished lineage of his wife. His great schemes were completed, he was a rich man, and he had pictured himself retiring to this Seigneury, a peaceful and practical figure, living out his days in a refined repose which his earlier life had never known. She had touched the raw nerves of his secret vanity.

"What kind of Seigneur would I make, eh? What sort of figure would I cut in Pontiac!" He laughed loudly. "By heaven, Madame, you shall see! I did not move against his outrage and assault, but I will move to

purpose now. For you and he shall leave there in disgrace before another week goes round. I have you both in my 'practical power,' and I will squeeze satisfaction out of you. He is a ruffianly interloper, and you, Madame, the law would call by another name."

She got quickly to her feet and came a step nearer to him. Leaning a hand on the table, she bent towards him slightly. Something seemed to possess her that transfigured her face, and gave it a sense of power and confidence. Her eyes fixed themselves steadily on him.

"Monsieur," she said, "you may call me what you will, and I will bear it, for you have been sorely injured. You are angry because I seemed to think an Englishman was not fitted to be Seigneur of Pontiac. We French are a people of sentiments and ideas; we make idols of trifles, and we die for fancies. We dream, we have shrines for memories. These things you despise. You would give us justice and make us rich by what you call progress. Monsieur, that is not enough. We are not born to appreciate you. Our hearts are higher than our heads, and, under a flag that conquered us, they cling together. Was it strange that I should think Louis Racine better suited to be Seigneur at Pontiac?"

She paused as though expecting him to answer, but he only looked inquiringly at her, and she continued "My husband used you ill, but he is no interloper. He took what the law gave him, what has been in his family for over two hundred years. Monsieur, it has meant more to him than a hundred times greater honour could to you. When his trouble came, when--" she paused, as though it was difficult to speak--"when the other --legacy--of his family descended on him, that Seigneury became to him the one compensation of his life. By right of it only could he look the world in the face--or me."

She stopped suddenly, for her voice choked her. "Will you please continue?" said Fournel, opening and shutting the will in his hand, and looking at her with a curious new consideration.

"Fame came to me as his trouble came to him. It was hard for him to go among men, but, ah, can you think how he dreaded the day when I should return to Pontiac! . . . I will tell you the whole truth, Monsieur." She drew herself up proudly. "I loved--Louis. He came into my heart with its first great dream, and before life--the business of life--really began. He was one with the best part of me, the girlhood in me which is dead."

Fournel rose and in a low voice said: "Will you not sit down?" He motioned to a chair.

She shook her head. "Ah no, please! Let me say all quickly and while I have the courage. I loved him, and he loved and loves me. I love that love in which I married him, and I love his love for me. It is indestructible, because it is in the fibre of my life. It has nothing to do with ugliness or beauty, or fortune or misfortune, or shame or happiness, or sin or holiness. When it becomes part of us, it must go on in one form or another, but it cannot die. It lives in breath and song and thought and work and words. That is the wonder of it, the pity of it, and the joy of it. Because it is so, because love would shield the beloved from itself if need be, and from all the terrors of the world at any cost, I have done what I have done. I did it at cost of my honour, but it was for his sake; at the price of my peace, but to spare him. Ah, Monsieur, the days of life are not many for him: his shame and his futile

aims are killing him. The clouds will soon close over, and his vexed brain and body will be still. To spare him the last turn of the wheel of torture, to give him the one bare honour left him yet a little while, I have given up my work of life to comfort him. I concealed, I stole, if you will, the document you hold. And, God help me! I would do it again and yet again, if I lost my soul for ever, Monsieur. Monsieur, I know that in his madness he would have killed you, but it was his suffering, not a bad heart, that made him do it. Do a sorrowful woman a great kindness and spare him, Monsieur."

She had held the man motionless and staring. When she ended, he got to his feet and came near to her. There was a curious look in his face, half struggle, half mysterious purpose. "The way is easy to a hundred times as much," he said, in a low meaning voice, and his eyes boldly held hers. "You are doing a chivalrous sort of thing that only a woman would do--for duty; do something for another reason: for what a woman would do --for the blood of youth that is in her." He reached out a hand to lay it on her arm. "Ask of me what you will, if you but put your hand in mine and--"

"Monsieur," she said, pale and gasping, "do you think so ill of me then? Do I seem to you like--!" She turned away, her eyes dry and burning, her body trembling with shame.

"You are here alone with me at night," he persisted. "It would not be easy to--"

"Death would be easy, Monsieur," she said calmly and coldly. "My husband tried to kill you. You would do--ah, but let me pass!" she said, with a sudden fury. "You--if you were a million times richer, if you could ruin me for ever, do you think--"

"Hush, Madame," he said, with a sudden change of voice and a manner all reverence. "I do not think. I spoke only to hear you speak in reply: only to know to the uttermost what you were. Madame," he added, in a shaking voice, "I did not know that such a woman lived. Madame, I could have sworn there was none in the world." Then in a quicker, huskier note he added: "Eighteen years ago a woman nearly spoiled my life. She was as beautiful as you, but her heart was tainted. Since then I have never believed in any woman--never till now. I have said that all were purchasable--at a price. I unsay that now. I have not believed in any one--"

"Oh, Monsieur!" she said, with a quick impulsive gesture towards him, and her face lighting with sympathy.

"I was struck too hard--"

She touched his arm and said gently: "Some are hurt in one way and some in another; all are hurt some time, but--"

"You shall have your way," he interrupted, and moved apart.

"Ah, Monsieur, Monsieur, it is a noble act!--" she hurriedly rejoined, then with a sudden cry rushed towards him, for he was lighting the will at the flame of a candle near him.

"But no, no, no, you shall not do it," she cried. "I only asked it for while he lives--ah!"

She collapsed with a cry of despair, for he had held the flaming paper above her reach, and its ashes were now scattering on the floor.

"You will let me give you some wine?" he said quietly, and poured out a glassful.

CHAPTER IX

THE BITER BITTEN

Madelinette was faint, and, sitting down, she drank the wine feebly, then leaned her head against the back of the chair, her face turned from Fournel.

"Forgive me, if you can," he said. "You have this to comfort you, that if friendship is a boon in this world you have an honest friend in George Fournel."

She made a gesture of assent with her hand, but she did not speak. Tears were stealing quietly down her cold face. For a moment so, in silence, and then she rose to her feet, and pulled down over her face the veil she wore. She was about to hold out her hand to him to say good-bye, when there was a noise without, a knocking at the door, then it was flung open, and Tardif, intoxicated, entered followed by two constables, with Fournel's servant vainly protesting.

"Here she is," Tardif said to the officers of the law, pointing to Madelinette. "It was her set the fellow on to shoot me. I had the will she stole from him," he added, pointing to Fournel.

Distressed as Madelinette was, she was composed and ready.

"The man was dismissed my employ--" she began, but Fournel interposed.

"What is this I hear about shooting and a will?" he said sternly.

"What will!" cried Tardif. "The will I brought you from Pontiac, and Madame there followed, and her servant shot me. The will I brought you, M'sieu'. The will leaving the Manor of Pontiac to you!"

Fournel turned as though with sudden anger to the officers. "You come here--you enter my house to interfere with a guest of mine, on the charge of a drunken scoundrel like this! What is this talk of wills! The vapourings of his drunken brain. The Seigneury of Pontiac belongs to Monsieur Racine, and but three days since Madame here dismissed this fellow for pilfering and other misdemeanours. As for shooting--the man is a liar, and--"

"Ah, do you deny that I came to you?--" began Tardif.

"Constables," said Fournel, "I give this fellow in charge. Take him to gaol, and I will appear at court against him when called upon."

Tardif's rage choked him. He tried to speak once or twice, then began to shriek an imprecation at Fournel; but the constables clapped hands on his

mouth, and dragged him out of the room and out of the house.

Fournel saw him safely out, then returned to Madelinette. "Do not fear for the fellow. A little gaol will do him good. I will see to it that he gives no trouble, Madame," he said. "You may trust me."

"I do trust you, Monsieur," Madelinette answered quietly. "I pray that you may be right, and that--" "It will all come out right," he firmly insisted. "Will you ask for Madame Marie?" she said. Then with a smile: "We will go happier than we came."

As she and Madame Marie passed from the house, Fournel shook Madelinette's hand warmly, and said: "'All's well that ends well.'"

"That ends well," answered Madelinette, with a sorrowful questioning in her voice.

"We will make it so," he rejoined, and then they parted.

CHAPTER X

THE DOOR THAT WOULD NOT OPEN

The old Manor House of Pontiac was alive with light and merriment. It was the early autumn; not cool enough for the doors and windows to be shut, but cool enough to make dancing a pleasure, and to give spirit to the gaiety that filled the old house. The occasion was a notable one for Pontiac. An address of congratulation and appreciation and a splendid gift of silver had been brought to the Manor from the capital by certain high officials of the Government and the Army, representing the people of the Province. At first Madelinette had shrunk from the honour to be done her, and had so written to certain quarters whence the movement had proceeded; but a letter had come to her which had changed her mind. This letter was signed George Fournel. Fournel had a right to ask a favour of her; and one that was to do her honour seemed the least that she might grant. He had suffered much at Louis' hands; he had forborne much; and by an act of noble forgiveness and generosity, had left Louis undisturbed in an honour which was not his, and the enjoyment of an estate to which he had no claim. He had given much, suffered much, and had had nothing in return save her measureless and voiceless gratitude. Friendship she could give him; but it was a silent friendship, an incompanionable friendship, founded upon a secret and chivalrous act. He was in Quebec and she in Pontiac; and since that day when he had burned the will before her eyes she had not seen him. She had heard from him but twice; once to tell her that she need have no fear of Tardif, and again, when he urged her to accept the testimonial and the gift to be offered by her grateful fellow-citizens.

The deputation, distinguished and important, had been received by the people of Pontiac with the flaunting of flags, playing of bands, and every demonstration of delight. The honour done to Madelinette was an honour done to Pontiac, and Pontiac had never felt itself so important. It realised that this kind of demonstration was less expensive, and less dangerous, than sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion. The vanity of the habitants could be better exercised in applauding Madelinette and in show of welcome to the great men of the land, than in cultivating a

dangerous patriotism under the leadership of Louis Racine. Temptations to conspiracy had been few since the day George Fournel, wounded and morose, left the Manor House secretly one night, and carried back to Quebec his resentment and his injuries. Treasonable gossip filtered no longer from doorway to doorway; carbines were not to be had for a song; no more nightly drills and weekly meetings gave a spice of great expectations to their life. Their Seigneur, silent, and pale, and stooped, lived a life apart. If he walked through the town, it was with bitter, abstracted eyes that took little heed of their presence. If he drove, his horses travelled like the wind. At Mass, he looked at no one, saw no one, and, as it would seem, heard no one.

But Madelinette--she was the Madelinette of old, simple, gracious, kind, with a smile here and a kind word there: a little child to be caressed or an old woman to be comforted; the sick to be fed and doctored; the poor to be helped; the idle to be rebuked with a persuasive smile; the angry to be coaxed by a humorous word; the evil to be reproved by a fearless friendliness; the spiteful to be hushed by a still, commanding presence. She never seemed to remember that she was the daughter of old Joe Lajeunesse the blacksmith, yet she never seemed to forget it. She was the wife of the Seigneur, and she was the daughter of the smithy-man too. She sat in the smithy-man's doorway with her hand in his; and she sat at the Manor table with its silver glitter, and its antique garnishings, with as real an unconsciousness.

Her influence seemed to pierce far and wide. The Cure and the Avocat adored her; and the proudest, happiest moment of their lives was when they sat at the Manor table, or, in the sombre drawing-room, watched her give it light and grace and charm, and fill their hearts with the piercing delight of her song. So her life had gone on; to the outward world serene and happy, full of simplicity, charity, and good works. What it was in reality no one could know, not even herself. Since the day when Louis had tried to kill George Fournel, life had been a different thing for them both. On her part she had been deeply hurt; wounded beyond repair. He had failed her from every vital stand-point, he had not fulfilled one hope she had ever had of him. But she laid the blame not at his door; she rather shrank with inner bitterness from the cynical cruelty of nature, which, in deforming the body, with a merciless cruelty had deformed a noble mind. These things were between her and her inmost soul.

To Louis she was ever the same, affectionate, gentle, and unselfish; but her stronger soul ruled him without his knowledge, commanded his perturbed spirit into the abstracted quiet and bitter silence wherein he lived, and which she sought to cheer by a thousand happy devices. She did not let him think that she was giving up anything for him; no word or act of hers could have suggested to him the sacrifices she had made. He knew them, still he did not know them in their fulness; he was grateful, but his gratitude did not compass the splendid self-effacing devotion with which she denied herself the glorious career that had lain before her. Morbid and self-centred, he could not understand. Since her return from Quebec she had sought to give a little touch of gaiety to their life, and she had not the heart to interfere with his constant insistence on the little dignities of the position of Seigneur, ironical as they all were in her eyes. She had sacrificed everything; and since another also had sacrificed himself to give her husband the honours and estate he possessed, the game should be delicately played to the unseen end.

So it had gone on until the coming of the deputation with the testimonial

and the gift. She had proposed the gaieties of the occasion to Louis with so simple a cheerfulness, that he had no idea of the torture it meant to her; no realisation of how she would be brought face to face with the life that she had given up for his sake. But neither he nor she was aware of one thing, that the beautiful embossed address contained an appeal to her to return to the world of song which she had renounced, to go forth once more and contribute to the happiness of humanity.

When, therefore, in the drawing-room of the Manor, the address was read to her, and this appeal rang upon her ears, she felt herself turn dizzy and faint: her whole life seemed to reel backwards to all she had lost, and the tyranny of the present bore down upon her with a cruel weight. It needed all her courage and all her innate strength to rule herself to composure. For an instant the people in the room were a confused mass, floating away into a blind distance. She heard, however, the quick breathing of the Seigneur beside her, and it called her back to an active and necessary confidence.

With a smile she received the address, and, turning, handed it to Louis, smiling at him too with a winning duplicity, for which she might never have to ask forgiveness in this world or the next. Then she turned and spoke. Eloquently, simply, she gave out her thanks for the gift of silver and the greater gift of kind words; and said that in her quiet life, apart from that active world of the stage, where sorrow and sordid experience went hand in hand with song, where the delights of home were sacrificed to the applause of the world, she would cherish their gift as a reward that she might have earned, had she chosen the public instead of the private way of life. They had told her of the paths of glory, but she was walking the homeward way.

Thus deftly, and without strain, and with an air of happiness even, did she set aside the words and the appeal which had created a storm in her soul. A few moments afterwards, as the old house rang to the laughter of old and young, with dancing well begun, no one would have thought that the Manor of Pontiac was not the home of peace and joy. Even Louis himself, who had had his moments of torture and suspicion when the appeal was read, was now in a kind of happy reaction. He moved about among the guests with less abstraction and more cheerfulness than he had shown for months. He carried in his hand the address which Madelinette had handed him. Again and again he showed it to eager guests.

Suddenly, as he was about to fold it up for the last time and carry it to the library, he saw the name of George Fournel among the signatures. Stunned, dumfounded, he left the room. George Fournel, whom he had tried to kill, had signed this address of congratulation to his wife! Was it Fournel's intention thus to show that he had forgiven and forgotten? It was not like the man to either forgive or forget. What did it mean? He left the house buried in morbid speculation, and involuntarily made his way to a little hut of two rooms which he had built in the Seigneurie grounds. Here it was he read and wrote, here he had spent moody hours alone, day after day, for months past. He was not aware that some one left the crowd about the house and followed him. Arrived at the hut, he entered and shut the door; lighted candles, and spread the embossed parchment out before him upon the table. As he stood looking at it, he heard the door open behind him. Tardif stood before him.

The face of Tardif had an evil hunted look. Before the astonished and suspicious Seigneur had chance to challenge him, he said in a low insolent tone:

"Good evening, M'sieu! Fine doings at the Manor--eh?"

"What are you doing at the Manor, and what are you doing here?" asked the Seigneur, scanning the face of the man closely; for there was a look in it he did not understand.

"I have as much right to be here as you, M'sieu'."

"You have no right at all to be here. You were dismissed your place by the mistress of this Manor."

"There is no mistress of this Manor."

"Madame Racine dismissed you."

"And I dismissed Madame Racine," answered the man with a sneer.

"You are training for the horsewhip. You forget that, as Seigneur, I have power to give you summary punishment."

"You haven't power to do anything at all, M'sieu'!" The Seigneur started. He thought the remark had reference to his physical disability. His fingers itched to take the creature by the throat, and choke the tongue from his mouth. Before he could speak, the man continued with a half-drunken grimace:

"You, with your tributes, and your courts, and your body-guards! Bah! You'd have a gibbet if you could, wouldn't you? You with your rebellion and your tinpot honours! A puling baby could conspire as well as you. And all the world laughing at you--v'la!"

"Get out of this room and take your feet from my Manor, Tardif," said the Seigneur with a deadly quietness, "or it will be the worse for you."

"Your Manor--pish!" The man laughed a hateful laugh. "Your Manor? You haven't any Manor. You haven't anything but what you carry on your back."

A flush passed swiftly over the Seigneur's face, then left it cold and white, and the eyes shone fiery in his head. He felt some shameful meaning in the man's words, beyond this gross reference to his deformity.

"I am Seigneur of this Manor, and you have taken wages from me, and eaten my bread, slept under my roof, and--"

"I've no more eaten your bread and slept under your roof than you have. Pish! You were living then on another man's fortune, now you're living on what your wife earns."

The Seigneur did not understand yet. But there was a strange light of suspicion in his eyes, a nervous rage knotting his forehead.

"My land and my earnings are my own, and I have never lived on another man's fortune. If you mean that the late Seigneur made a will--that canard--"

"It was no canard." Tardif laughed hatefully. "There was a will right enough."

"Where is it? I've heard that fool's gossip before."

"Where is it? Ask your wife; she knows. Ask your loving Tardif, he knows."

"Where is the will, Tardif?" asked the Seigneur in a voice that, in his own ears, seemed to come from an infinite distance; to Tardif's ears it was merely tuneless and harsh.

"In M'sieu' Fournel's pocket, or Madame's. What's the difference? The price is the same, and you keep your eyes shut and play the Seigneur, and eat and drink what they give you just the same."

Now the Seigneur understood. His eyes went blind for a moment, and his hands twitched convulsively on the embossed address he had been rolling and unrolling. A terror, a shame, a dreadful cruelty entered into him, but he was still and numb, and his tongue was thick. He spoke heavily.

"Tell me all," he said. "You shall be well paid."

"I don't want your money. I want to see you squirm. I want to see her put where she deserves. Bah! Do you think Fournel forgave you for putting his feet in his shoes, and for that case at law, for nothing? Why should he? He hated you, and you hated him. His name's on that paper in your hand among all the rest. Do you think he eats humble pie and crawls to Madame and lets you stay here for nothing?"

The Seigneur was painfully quiet and intent, yet his brain was like some great lens, refracting and magnifying things to monstrous proportions.

"A will was found?" he asked.

"By Madame in the library. She left it where she found it--behind the picture over the Louis Seize table. The day you dismissed me, I saw her at the cupboard. I found the will and started with it to M'sieu' Fournel. She followed. You remember when she went--eh? On business--and such business! she and Havel and the old slut Marie. You remember, eh; Louis?" he added with unnamable insolence. The Seigneur inclined his head. "V'la! they followed me, overtook me, and Havel shot me in the wrist. See there!"--he held out his wrist. The Seigneur nodded. "But I got to Fournel's first. I put the will into his hands.

"I told him Madame Madelinette was following. Then I went to bring the constables to his house to arrest her when he had finished with her." He laughed a brutal laugh, which deepened the strange glittering look in Louis' eyes. "When I came an hour later, she was there. But--now you shall see what stuff they are both made of! He laughed at me, said I had lied; that there was no will; that I was a thief; and had me locked up in gaol. For a month I was in gaol without trial. Then one day I was let out without trial. His servant met me and brought me to his house. He gave me money and told me to leave the country. If I didn't, I would be arrested again for trying to shoot Havel, and for blackmail. They could all swear me off my feet and into prison--what was I to do! I took the money and went. But I came back to have my revenge. I could cut their hearts out and eat them."

"You are drunk," said the Seigneur quietly. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I'm not drunk. I'm always trying to get drunk now. I couldn't have come here if I hadn't been drinking. I couldn't have told you the truth, if I hadn't been drinking. But I'm sober enough to know that I've done for him and for her! And I'm even with you too--bah! Did you think she cared a fig for you? She's only waiting till you die. Then she'll go to her lover. He's a man of life and limb. Youpish! a hunchback, that all the world laughs at, a worm--" he turned towards the door laughing hideously, his evil face gloating. "You've not got a stick or stone. She"--jerking a finger towards the house--"she earns what you eat, she--"

It was the last word he ever spoke, for, with a low terrible cry, the Seigneur snatched up a knife from the table and sprang upon him, catching him by the throat. Once, twice, thrice, the knife went home, and the ruffian collapsed under it with one loud cry. Not letting go his grasp of the dying man's collar, the Seigneur dragged him across the floor, and, opening the door of the small inner room, pulled him inside. For a moment he stood beside the body, panting, then he went to the other room and, bringing a candle, looked at the dead thing in silence. Presently he stooped, held the candle to the wide-staring eyes, then felt the heart. "He is gone," he said in an even voice. Stooping for the knife he had dropped on the floor, he laid it on the body. He looked at his hands. There was one spot of blood on his fingers. He wiped it off with his handkerchief, then blowing out the light, he calmly opened the door of the hut, locked it, went out, and moved on slowly towards the house.

As he left the hut he was conscious that some one was moving under the trees by the window, but his mind was not concerned with things outside himself and the one other thing left for him to do.

He entered the house and went in search of Madelinette. When he reached the drawing-room, surrounded by eager listeners, she was beginning to sing. Her bearing was eager and almost tremulous, for, with this crowd round her and in the flush of this gaiety and excitement, there was something of that exhilarating air that greets the singer upon the stage. Her eyes were shining with a look, half-sorrowful, half-triumphant. Within the past half-hour she had overcome herself; she had fought down the blind, wild rebellion that, for one moment as it were, had surged up in her heart. She was proud and glad, and piteous and triumphant and deeply womanly all at once.

Going to the piano she had looked round for Louis, but he was not visible. She smiled to herself, however, for she knew that her singing would bring him--he worshipped it. Her heart was warm towards him, because of that moment when she rebelled and was hard at soul. She played her own accompaniment, and he was hidden from her by the piano as she sang--sang more touchingly and more humanly, if not more artistically, than she had ever done in her life. The old art was not so perfect, perhaps, but there was in the voice all that she had learned and loved and suffered and hoped. When she rose from the piano to a storm of applause, and saw the shining faces and tearful eyes round her, her own eyes filled with tears. These people--most of them--had known and loved her since she was a child, and loved her still without envy or any taint. Her father was standing near, and with smiling face she caught from his hand the handkerchief with which he was mopping his eyes, and kissed him, saying:

"I learned that from the tunes you played on your anvil, dear smithy-man."

Then she turned again to look for Louis. Near the door she saw him, and with so strange a face, so wild a look, that, unheeding eager requests to sing again, she responded to the gesture he made, made her way through the crowd to the hall-way, and followed him up the stairs, and to the little boudoir beside her bedroom. As she entered and shut the door, a low sound like a moan broke from him. She went quickly to lay a hand upon his arm, but he waved her back. "What is it, Louis?" she asked, in a bewildered voice. "Where is the will?" he said.

"Where is the will, Louis," she repeated after him mechanically, staring at his face, ghostly in the moonlight.

"The will you found behind the picture in the library."

"O Louis!" she cried, and made a gesture of despair. "O Louis!"

"You found it, and Tardif stole it and took it to Quebec."

"Yes, Louis, but Louis--ah, what is the matter, dear! I cannot bear that look in your face. What is the matter, Louis?"

"Tardif took it to Fournel, and you followed. And I have been living in another man's house, on another's bread--"

"O Louis, no--no--no! Our money has paid for all."

"Your money, Madelinette!" His voice rose.

"Ah, don't speak like that! See, Louis. It can make no difference. How you have found out I do not know, but it can make no difference. I did not want you to know--you loved the Seigneury so. I concealed the will; Tardif found it, as you say. But, Louis, dear, it is all right. Monsieur Fournel would not take the place, and--and I have bought it."

She told her falsehood fearlessly. This man's trouble, this man's peace, if she might but win it, was the purpose of her life.

"Tardif said that--he said that you--that you and Fournel--"

She read his meaning in his tone, and shrank back in terror, then with a flush, straightened herself, and took a step towards him.

"It was natural that you should not care for a hunchback like me," he continued, "but--"

"Louis!" she cried, in a voice of anguish and reproach.

"But I did not doubt you. I believed in you when he said it, as I believe in you now when you stand there like that. I know what you have done for me--"

"I pleaded with Monsieur Fournel, knowing how you loved the Seigneury--pleaded and offered to pay three times the price--"

"Yourself would have been a hundred million times the price. Ah, I know you, Madelinette--I know you now! I have been selfish, but I see all now. Now when all is over--" he seemed listening to noises with out--
"I see what you have done for me. I know how you have sacrificed all for

me--all but honour--all but honour," he added, a wild fire in his eyes, a trembling seizing him. "Your honour is yours forever. I say so. I say so, and I have proved it. Kiss me, Madelinette--kiss me once," he added, in a quick whisper.

"My poor, poor Louis!" she said, laid a soothing hand upon his arm, and leaned towards him. He snatched her to his breast, and kissed her twice in a very agony of joy, then let her go. He listened for an instant to the growing noise without, then said in a hoarse voice:

"Now, I will tell you, Madelinette. They are coming for me--don't you hear them? They are coming to take me; but they shall not have me. They shall not have me--" he glanced to a little door that led into a bath-room at his right.

"Louis-Louis!" she said in a sudden fright, for though his words seemed mad, a strange quiet sanity was in all he did. "What have you done? Who are coming?" she asked in agony, and caught him by the arm.

"I killed Tardif. He is there in the hut in the garden--dead! I was seen, and they are coming to take me."

With a cry she ran to the door that led into the hall, and locked it. She listened, then turned her face to Louis.

"You killed him!" she gasped. "Louis! Louis!" Her face was like ashes.

"I stabbed him to death. It was all I could do, and I did it. He slandered you. I went mad, and did it. Now--"

There was a knocking at the door, and a voice calling--a peremptory voice.

"There is only one way," he said. "They shall not take me. I will not be dragged to gaol for crowds to jeer at. I will not be sent to the scaffold, to your shame."

He ran to the door of the bath-room and flung it open. "If my life is to pay the price, then--!"

She came blindly towards him, stretching out her hands.

"Louis! Louis!" was all that she could say.

He caught her hands and kissed them, then stepped swiftly back into the little bath-room, and locked the door, as the door of the room she was in was burst open, and two constables and a half-dozen men crowded into the room.

She stood with her back to the bath-room door, panting, and white, and anguished, and her ears strained to the terrible thing inside the place behind her.

The men understood, and came towards her. "Stand back," she said. "You shall not have him. You shall not have him. Ah, don't you hear? He is dying--O God, O God!" she cried, with tearless eyes and upturned face--"Ah, let it be soon! Ah, let him die soon!"

The men stood abashed before her agony. Behind the little door where she stood there was a muffled groaning. She trembled, but her arms were spread out before the door as though on a cross, and her lips kept murmuring: "O God, let him die! Let him die! Oh spare him agony!"

Suddenly she stood still and listened-listened, with staring eyes that saw nothing. In the room men shrank back, for they knew that death was behind the little door, and that they were in the presence of a sorrow greater than death.

Suddenly she turned upon them with a gesture of piteous triumph and said:

"You cannot have him now."

Then she swayed and fell forward to the floor as the Cure and George Fournel entered the room. The Cure hastened to her side and lifted up her head.

George Fournel pushed the men back who would have entered the bath-room, and himself, bursting the door open, entered. Louis lay dead upon the floor. He turned to the constables.

"As she said, you cannot have him now. You have no right here. Go. I had a warning from the man he killed. I knew there would be trouble. But I have come too late," he added bitterly.

An hour later the house was as still as the grave. Madame Marie sat with the doctor beside the bed of her dear mistress, and in another room, George Fournel, with the Avocat, kept watch beside the body of the Seigneur of Pontiac. The face of the dead man was as peaceful as that of a little child.

.....

At ninety years of age, the present Seigneur of Pontiac, one Baron Fournel, lives in the Manor House left him by Madelinette Lajeunesse the great singer, when she died a quarter of a century ago. For thirty years he followed her from capital to capital of Europe and America to hear her sing; and to this day he talks of her in language more French than English in its ardour. Perhaps that is because his heart beats in sympathy with the Frenchmen he once disdained.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Ah, let it be soon! Ah, let him die soon!
All are hurt some time
Did not let him think that she was giving up anything for him
Duplicity, for which she might never have to ask forgiveness
Frenchman, slave of ideas, the victim of sentiment
Frenchman, volatile, moody, chivalrous, unreasonable
Her stronger soul ruled him without his knowledge
I love that love in which I married him
Let others ride to glory, I'll shoe their horses for the gallop
Lighted candles in hollowed pumpkins
Love has nothing to do with ugliness or beauty, or fortune
Nature twists in back, or anywhere, gets a twist in's brain too

Rewarded for its mistakes
Some are hurt in one way and some in another
Struggle of conscience and expediency

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