

The Lane That Had No Turning, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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THE LANE THAT HAD NO TURNING

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

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THE TRAGIC COMEDY OF ANNETTE

The chest of drawers, the bed, the bedding, the pieces of linen, and the pile of yarn had been ready for many months. Annette had made inventory of them every day since the dot was complete--at first with a great deal of pride, after a time more shyly and wistfully: Benoit did not come. He had said he would be down with the first drive of logs in the summer, and at the little church of St. Saviour's they would settle everything and get the Cure's blessing. Almost anybody would have believed in Benoit. He had the brightest scarf, the merriest laugh, the quickest eyes, and the blackest head in Pontiac; and no one among the river drivers could sing like him. That was, he said gaily, because his earrings were gold, and not brass like those of his comrades. Thus Benoit was a little vain, and something more; but old ladies such as the Little Chemist's wife said he was galant. Probably only Medallion the auctioneer and the Cure did not lose themselves in the general admiration; they thought he was to Annette like a farthing dip to a holy candle.

Annette was the youngest of twelve, and one of a family of thirty--for some of her married brothers and sisters and their children lived in her father's long white house by the river. When Benoit failed to come in the spring, they showed their pity for her by abusing him; and when she pleaded for him they said things which had an edge. They ended by offering to marry her to Farette, the old miller, to whom they owed money for flour. They brought Farette to the house at last, and she was patient while he ogled her, and smoked his strong tabac, and tried to sing. She was kind to him, and said nothing until, one day, urged by her brother Solime, he mumbled the childish chanson Benoit sang the day he left, as he passed their house going up the river:

"High in a nest of the tam'rac tree,
Swing under, so free, and swing over;
Swing under the sun and swing over the world,
My snow-bird, my gay little lover
My gay little lover, don, don! . . . don, don!

"When the winter is done I will come back home,
To the nest swinging under and over,
Swinging under and over and waiting for me,

Your rover, my snow-bird, your rover--
Your lover and rover, don, don! . . . don, don!"

It was all very well in the mouth of the sprightly, sentimental Benoit; it was hateful foolishness in Farette. Annette now came to her feet suddenly, her pale face showing defiance, and her big brown eyes flicking anger. She walked up to the miller and said: "You are old and ugly and a fool. But I do not hate you; I hate Solime, my brother, for bringing you here. There is the bill for the flour? Well, I will pay it myself--and you can go as soon as you like."

Then she put on her coat and capote and mittens, and went to the door. "Where are you going, Ma'm'selle?" cried Solime, in high rage.

"I am going to M'sieu' Medallion," she said.

Hard profane words followed her, but she ran, and never stopped till she came to Medallion's house. He was not there. She found him at the Little Chemist's. That night a pony and cart took away from the house of Annette's father the chest of drawers, the bed, the bedding, the pieces of linen, and the pile of yarn which had been made ready so long against Benoit's coming. Medallion had said he could sell them at once, and he gave her the money that night; but this was after he had had a talk with the Cure, to whom Annette had told all. Medallion said he had been able to sell the things at once; but he did not tell her that they were stored in a loft of the Little Chemist's house, and that the Little Chemist's wife had wept over them and carried the case to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin.

It did not matter that the father and brothers stormed. Annette was firm; the dot was hers, and she would do as she wished. She carried the money to the miller. He took it grimly and gave her a receipt, grossly mis-spelled, and, as she was about to go, brought his fist heavily down on his leg and said: "Mon Dieu, it is brave--it is grand--it is an angel." Then he chuckled: "So, so! It was true. I am old, ugly, and a fool. Eh, well, I have my money!" Then he took to counting it over in his hand, forgetting her, and she left him growling gleefully over it.

She had not a happy life, but her people left her alone, for the Cure had said stern things to them. All during the winter she went out fishing every day at a great hole in the ice--bitter cold work, and fit only for a man; but she caught many fish, and little by little laid aside pennies to buy things to replace what she had sold. It had been a hard trial to her to sell them. But for the kind-hearted Cure she would have repined. The worst thing happened, however, when the ring Benoit had given her dropped from her thin finger into the water where she was fishing. Then a shadow descended on her, and she grew almost unearthly in the anxious patience of her face. The Little Chemist's wife declared that the look was death. Perhaps it would have been if Medallion had not sent a lad down to the bottom of the river and got the ring. He gave it to the Cure, who put it on her finger one day after confession. Then she brightened, and waited on and on patiently.

She waited for seven years. Then the deceitful Benoit came pensively back to her, a cripple from a timber accident. She believed what he told her; and that was where her comedy ended and her tragedy began.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE MILLER

Medallion put it into his head on the day that Benoit and Annette were married. "See," said Medallion, "Annette wouldn't have you--and quite right--and she took what was left of that Benoit, who'll laugh at you over his mush-and-milk."

"Benoit will want flour some day, with no money." The old man chuckled and rubbed his hands. "That's nothing; he has the girl--an angel!" "Good enough, that is what I said of her--an angel!"

"Get married yourself, Farette."

For reply Farette thrust a bag of native tabac into Medallion's hands. Then they went over the names of the girls in the village. Medallion objected to those for whom he wished a better future, but they decided at last on Julie Lachance, who, Medallion thought, would in time profoundly increase Farette's respect for the memory of his first wife; for Julie was not an angel. Then the details were ponderously thought out by the miller, and ponderously acted upon, with the dry approval of Medallion, who dared not tell the Cure of his complicity, though he was without compunction. He had a sense of humour, and knew there could be no tragedy in the thing--for Julie. But the miller was a careful man and original in his methods. He still possessed the wardrobe of the first wife, thoughtfully preserved by his sister, even to the wonderful grey watered-poplin which had been her wedding-dress. These he had taken out, shaken free of cayenne, camphor, and lavender, and sent upon the back of Parpon, the dwarf, to the house where Julie lodged (she was an orphan), following himself with a statement on brown paper, showing the extent of his wealth, and a parcel of very fine flour from the new stones in his mill. All was spread out, and then he made a speech, describing his virtues, and condoning his one offence of age by assuring her that every tooth in his head was sound. This was merely the concession of politeness, for he thought his offer handsome.

Julie slyly eyed the wardrobe and as slyly smiled, and then, imitating Farette's manner--though Farette could not see it, and Parpon spluttered with laughter--said:

"M'sieu', you are a great man. The grey poplin is noble, also the flour, and the writing on the brown paper. M'sieu', you go to Mass, and all your teeth are sound; you have a dog-churn, also three feather-beds, and five rag carpets; you have sat on the grand jury.

"M'sieu', I have a dot; I accept you. M'sieu', I will keep the brown paper, and the grey poplin, and the flour." Then with a grave elaborate bow, "M'sieu'!"

That was the beginning and end of the courtship. For though Farette came every Sunday evening and smoked by the fire, and looked at Julie as she arranged the details of her dowry, he only chuckled, and now and again struck his thigh and said:

"Mon Dieu, the ankle, the eye, the good child, Julie, there!"

Then he would fall to thinking and chuckling again. One day he asked her

to make him some potato-cakes of the flour he had given her. Her answer was a catastrophe. She could not cook; she was even ignorant of buttermilk-pudding. He went away overwhelmed, but came back some days afterwards and made another speech. He had laid his plans before Medallion, who approved of them. He prefaced the speech by placing the blank marriage certificate on the table. Then he said that his first wife was such a cook, that when she died he paid for an extra Mass and twelve very fine candles. He called upon Parpon to endorse his words, and Parpon nodded to all he said, but, catching Julie's eye, went off into gurgles of laughter, which he pretended were tears, by smothering his face in his capote. "Ma'm'selle," said the miller, "I have thought. Some men go to the Avocat or the Cure with great things; but I have been a pilgrimage, I have sat on the grand jury. There, Ma'm'selle!" His chest swelled, he blew out his cheeks, he pulled Parpon's ear as Napoleon pulled Murat's. "Ma'm'selle, allons! Babette, the sister of my first wife--ah! she is a great cook also--well, she was pouring into my plate the soup--there is nothing like pea-soup with a fine lump of pork, and thick molasses for the buckwheat cakes. Ma'm'selle, allons! Just then I thought. It is very good; you shall see; you shall learn how to cook. Babette will teach you. Babette said many things. I got mad and spilt the soup. Ma'm'selle--eh, holy, what a turn has your waist!"

At length he made it clear to her what his plans were, and to each and all she consented; but when he had gone she sat and laughed till she cried, and for the hundredth time took out the brown paper and studied the list of Farette's worldly possessions.

The wedding-day came. Julie performed her last real act of renunciation when, in spite of the protests of her friends, she wore the grey watered-poplin, made modern by her own hands. The wedding-day was the anniversary of Farette's first marriage, and the Cure faltered in the exhortation when he saw that Farette was dressed in complete mourning, even to the crape hat-streamers, as he said, out of respect for the memory of his first wife, and as a kind of tribute to his second. At the wedding-breakfast, where Medallion and Parpon were in high glee, Farette announced that he would take the honeymoon himself, and leave his wife to learn cooking from old Babette.

So he went away alone cheerfully, with hymeneal rice falling in showers on his mourning garments; and his new wife was as cheerful as he, and threw rice also.

She learned how to cook, and in time Farette learned that he had his one true inspiration when he wore mourning at his second marriage.

MATHURIN

The tale was told to me in the little valley beneath Dalgrothe Mountain one September morning. Far and near one could see the swinging of the flail, and the laughter of a ripe summer was upon the land. There was a little Calvary down by the riverside, where the flax-beaters used to say their prayers in the intervals of their work; and it was just at the foot of this that Angele Rouvier, having finished her prayer, put her rosary in her pocket, wiped her eyes with the hem of her petticoat, and said to

me:

"Ah, dat poor Mathurin, I wipe my tears for him!"

"Tell me all about him, won't you, Madame Angele? I want to hear you tell it," I added hastily, for I saw that she would despise me if I showed ignorance of Mathurin's story. Her sympathy with Mathurin's memory was real, but her pleasure at the compliment I paid her was also real.

"Ah! It was ver' longtime ago--yes. My gran'mudder she remember dat Mathurin ver' well. He is not ver' big man. He has a face--oh, not ver' handsome, not so more handsome as yours--non. His clothes, dey hang on him all loose; his hair, it is all some grey, and it blow about him head. He is clean to de face, no beard--no, nosing like dat. But his eye--la, M'sieu', his eye! It is like a coal which you blow in your hand, whew!--all bright. My gran'mudder, she say, 'Voila, you can light your pipe with de eyes of dat Mathurin!' She know. She say dat M'sieu' Mathurin's eyes dey shine in de dark. My gran'fadder he say he not need any lights on his cariole when Mathurin ride with him in de night.

"Ah, sure! it is ver' true what I tell you all de time. If you cut off Mathurin at de chin, all de way up, you will say de top of him it is a priest. All de way down from his neck, oh, he is just no better as yoursel' or my Jean--non. He is a ver' good man. Only one bad ting he do. Dat is why I pray for him; dat is why everybody pray for him--only one bad ting. Sapristi!--if I have only one ting to say God-have-mercy for, I tink dat ver' good; I do my penance happy. Well, dat Mathurin him use to teach de school. De Cure he ver' fond of him. All de leetla children, boys and girls, dey all say: 'C'est bon Mathurin!' He is not ver' cross--non. He have no wife, no child; jes live by himself all alone. But he is ver' good friends with everybody in Pontiac. When he go 'long de street, everybody say, 'Ah, dere go de good Mathurin!' He laugh, he tell story, he smoke leetla tabac, he take leetla white wine behin' de door; dat is nosing--non.

"He have in de parish five, ten, twenty children all call Mathurin; he is godfadder with dem--yes. So he go about with plenty of sugar and sticks of candy in his pocket. He never forget once de age of every leetla child dat call him godfadder. He have a brain dat work like a clock. My gran'fadder he say dat Mathurin have a machine in his head. It make de words, make de thoughts, make de fine speech like de Cure, make de gran' poetry--oh, yes!

"When de King of Englan' go to sit on de throne, Mathurin write ver' nice verse to him. And by-and-by dere come to Mathurin a letter--voila, dat is a letter! It have one, two, three, twenty seals; and de King he say to Mathurin: 'Merci mille fois, m'sieu'; you are ver' polite. I tank you. I will keep your verses to tell me dat my French subjects are all loyal like M. Mathurin.' Dat is ver' nice, but Mathurin is not proud--non. He write six verses for my granmudder--hein? Dat is something. He write two verses for de King of Englan' and he write six verses for my granmudder--you see! He go on so, dis week, dat week, dis year, dat year, all de time.

"Well, by-and-by dere is trouble on Pontiac. It is ver' great trouble. You see dere is a fight 'gainst de King of Englan', and dat is too bad. It is not his fault; he is ver' nice man; it is de bad men who make de laws for de King in Quebec. Well, one day all over de country everybody

take him gun, and de leetla bullets, and say, I will fight de soldier of de King of Englan'--like dat. Ver' well, dere was twenty men in Pontiac, ver' nice men--you will find de names cut in a stone on de church; and den, three times as big, you will find Mathurin's name. Ah, dat is de ting! You see, dat rebellion you English call it, we call it de War of de Patriot--de first War of de Patriot, not de second--well, call it what you like, quelle difference? The King of Englan' smash him Patriot War all to pieces. Den dere is ten men of de twenty come back to Pontiac ver' sorry. Dey are not happy, nobody are happy. All de wives, dey cry; all de children, dey are afraid. Some people say, What fools you are; others say, You are no good; but everybody in him heart is ver' sorry all de time.

"Ver' well, by-and-by dere come to Pontiac what you call a colonel with a dozen men--what for, you tink? To try de patriots. He will stan' dem against de wall and shoot dem to death--kill dem dead. When dey come, de Cure he is not in Pontiac--non, not dat day; he is gone to anudder village. De English soldier he has de ten men drew up before de church. All de children and all de wives dey cry and cry, and dey feel so bad. Certainlee, it is a pity. But de English soldier he say he will march dem off to Quebec, and everybody know dat is de end of de patriots.

"All at once de colonel's horse it grow ver' wild, it rise up high, and dance on him hind feet, and--voila! he topple him over backwards, and de horse fall on de colonel and smaish him--smaish him till he go to die. Ver' well; de colonel, what does he do? Dey lay him on de steps of de church. Den he say: 'Bring me a priest, quick, for I go to die.' Nobody answer. De colonel he say: 'I have a hunder sins all on my mind; dey are on my heart like a hill. Bring to me de priest,'--he groan like dat. Nobody speak at first; den somebody say de priest is not here. 'Find me a priest,' say de colonel; 'find me a priest.' For he tink de priest will not come, becos' he go to kill de patriots. 'Bring me a priest,' he say again, 'and all de ten shall go free.' He say it over and over. He is smaish to pieces, but his head is all right. All at once de doors of de church open behin' him--what you tink! Everybody's heart it stan' still, for dere is Mathurin dress as de priest, with a leetla boy to swing de censer. Everybody say to himself, What is dis? Mathurin is dress as de priest--ah! dat is a sin. It is what you call blaspheme.

"The English soldier he look up at Mathurin and say: 'Ah, a priest at last--ah, M'sieu' le Cure, comfort me!' "Mathurin look down on him and say: 'M'sieu', it is for you to confess your sins, and to have de office of de Church. But first, as you have promise just now, you must give up dese poor men, who have fight for what dey tink is right. You will let dem go free dis women?'" 'Yes, yes,' say de English colonel; 'dey shall go free. Only give me de help of de Church at my last.' "Mathurin turn to de other soldiers and say: 'Unloose de men.'

"De colonel nod his head and say: 'Unloose de men.' Den de men are unloose, and dey all go away, for Mathurin tell dem to go quick.

"Everybody is ver' 'fraid becos' of what Mathurin do. Mathurin he say to de soldiers: 'Lift him up and bring him in de church.' Dey bring him up to de steps of de altar. Mathurin look at de man for a while, and it seem as if he cannot speak to him; but de colonel say: 'I have give you my word. Give me comfort of de Church before I die.' He is in ver' great pain, so Mathurin he turn roun' to everybody dat stan' by, and tell dem to say de prayers for de sick. Everybody get him down on his knees and say de prayer. Everybody say: 'Lord have mercy. Spare him, O Lord;

deliver him, O Lord, from Thy wrath!" And Mathurin he pray all de same as a priest, ver' soft and gentle. He pray on and on, and de face of de English soldier it get ver; quiet and still, and de tear drop down his cheek. And just as Mathurin say at de last his sins dey are forgive, he die. Den Mathurin, as he go away to take off his robes, he say to himself: 'Miserere mei Deus! miserere mei Deus!'

"So dat is de ting dat Mathurin do to save de patriots from de bullets. Ver' well, de men dey go free, and when de Governor at Quebec he hear de truth, he say it is all right. Also de English soldier die in peace and happy, becos' he tink his sins are forgive. But den--dere is Mathurin and his sin to pretend he is a priest! The Cure he come back, and dere is a great trouble.

"Mathurin he is ver' quiet and still. Nobody come near him in him house; nobody go near to de school. But he sit alone all day in de school, and he work on de blackboar' and he write on de slate; but dere is no child come, becos' de Cure has forbid any one to speak to Mathurin. Not till de next Sunday, den de Cure send for Mathurin to come to de church. Mathurin come to de steps of de altar; den de Cure say to him:

"Mathurin, you have sin a great sin. If it was two hunderd years ago you would be put to death for dat.'

"Mathurin he say ver' soft: 'Dat is no matter. I am ready to die now. I did it to save de fadders of de children and de husbands of de wives. I do it to make a poor sinner happy as he go from de world. De sin is mine.'

"Den de Cure he say: 'De men are free, dat is good; de wives have dere husbands and de children dere fadders. Also de man who confess his sins --de English soldier--to whom you say de words of a priest of God, he is forgive. De Spirit of God it was upon him when he die, becos' you speak in de name of de Church. But for you, blasphemmer, who take upon you de holy ting, you shall suffer! For penance, all your life you shall teach a chile no more.'

"Voila, M'sieu' le Cure he know dat is de greatest penance for de poor Mathurin! Den he set him other tings to do; and every month for a whole year Mathurin come on his knees all de way to de church, but de Cure say: 'Not yet are you forgive.' At de end of de year Mathurin he look so thin, so white, you can blow through him. Every day he go to him school and write on de blackboar', and mark on de slate, and call de roll of de school. But dere is no answer, for dere is no children. But all de time de wives of de men dat he have save, and de children, dey pray for him. And by-and-by all de village pray for him, so sorry.

"It is so for two years; and den dey say dat Mathurin he go to die. He cannot come on his knees to de church; and de men whose life he save, dey come to de Cure and ask him to take de penance from Mathurin. De Cure say: 'Wait till nex' Sunday.' So nex' Sunday Mathurin is carry to de church--he is too weak to walk on his knees. De Cure he stan' at de altar, and he read a letter from de Pope, which say dat Mathurin his penance is over, and he is forgive; dat de Pope himself pray for Mathurin, to save his soul. So "Mathurin, all at once he stan' up, and his face it smile and smile, and he stretch out his arms as if dey are on a cross, and he say, 'Lord, I am ready to go,' and he fall down. But de Cure catch him as he fall, and Mathurin say: 'De children--let dem come to me dat I teach dem before I die.' And all de children in de church

dey come close to him, and he sit up and smile at dem, and he say:

"It is de class in 'rithmetic. How much is three times four?' And dem all answer: 'T'ree times four is twelve.' And he say: 'May de Twelve Apostles pray for me!' Den he ask: 'Class in geography--how far is it roun' de world?' And dey answer: 'Twenty-four t'ousand miles.' He say: 'Good; it is not so far to God! De school is over all de time,' he say. And dat is only everything of poor Mathurin. He is dead.

"When de Cure lay him down, after he make de Sign upon him, he kiss his face and say: 'Mathurin, now you are a priest unto God.'"

That was Angele Rouvier's story of Mathurin, the Master of the School, for whom the women and the children pray in the parish of Pontiac, though the school has been dismissed these hundred years and more.

THE STORY OF THE LIME-BURNER

For a man in whose life there had been tragedy he was cheerful. He had a habit of humming vague notes in the silence of conversation, as if to put you at your ease. His body and face were lean and arid, his eyes oblique and small, his hair straight and dry and straw-coloured; and it flew out crackling with electricity, to meet his cap as he put it on. He lived alone in a little but near his lime-kiln by the river, with no near neighbours, and few companions save his four dogs; and these he fed sometimes at expense of his own stomach. He had just enough crude poetry in his nature to enjoy his surroundings. For he was well placed. Behind the lime-kiln rose knoll on knoll, and beyond these the verdant hills, all converging to Dalgrothe Mountain. In front of it was the river, with its banks dropping forty feet, and below, the rapids, always troubled and sportive. On the farther side of the river lay peaceful areas of meadow and corn land, and low-roofed, hovering farm-houses, with one larger than the rest, having a wind-mill and a flag-staff. This building was almost large enough for a manor, and indeed it was said that it had been built for one just before the conquest in 1759, but the war had destroyed the ambitious owner, and it had become a farm-house. Paradis always knew the time of the day by the way the light fell on the wind-mill. He had owned this farm once, he and his brother Fabian, and he had loved it as he loved Fabian, and he loved it now as he loved Fabian's memory. In spite of all, they were cheerful memories, both of brother and house.

At twenty-three they had become orphans, with two hundred acres of land, some cash, horses and cattle, and plenty of credit in the parish, or in the county, for that matter. Both were of hearty dispositions, but Fabian had a taste for liquor, and Henri for pretty faces and shapely ankles. Yet no one thought the worse of them for that, especially at first. An old servant kept house for them and cared for them in her honest way, both physically and morally. She lectured them when at first there was little to lecture about. It is no wonder that when there came a vast deal to reprove, the bonne desisted altogether, overwhelmed by the weight of it.

Henri got a shock the day before their father died when he saw Fabian lift the brandy used to mix with the milk of the dying man, and pouring

out the third of a tumbler, drink it off, smacking his lips as he did so, as though it were a cordial. That gave him a cue to his future and to Fabian's. After their father died Fabian gave way to the vice. He drank in the taverns, he was at once the despair and the joy of the parish; for, wild as he was, he had a gay temper, a humorous mind, a strong arm, and was the universal lover. The Cure, who did not, of course, know one-fourth of his wildness, had a warm spot for him in his heart. But there was a vicious strain in him somewhere, and it came out one day in a perilous fashion.

There was in the hotel of the Louis Quinze an English servant from the west, called Nell Barraway. She had been in a hotel in Montreal, and it was there Fabian had seen her as she waited at table. She was a splendid-looking creature--all life and energy, tall, fair-haired, and with a charm above her kind. She was also an excellent servant, could do as much as any two women in any house, and was capable of more airy diablerie than any ten of her sex in Pontiac. When Fabian had said to her in Montreal that he would come to see her again, he told her where he lived. She came to see him instead, for she wrote to the landlord of the Louis Quinze, enclosed fine testimonials, and was at once engaged. Fabian was stunned when he entered the Louis Quinze and saw her waiting at table, alert, busy, good to behold. She nodded at him with a quick smile as he stood bewildered just inside the door, then said in English: "This way, m'sieu'."

As he sat down he said in English also, with a laugh and with snapping eyes: "Good Lord, what brings you here, lady-bird?"

As she pushed a chair under him she whispered through his hair: "You!" and then was gone away to fetch pea-soup for six hungry men.

The Louis Quinze did more business now in three months than it had done before in six. But it became known among a few in Pontiac that Nell was notorious. How it had crept up from Montreal no one guessed, and, when it did come, her name was very intimately associated with Fabian's. No one could say that she was not the most perfect of servants, and also no one could say that her life in Pontiac had not been exemplary. Yet wise people had made up their minds that she was determined to marry Fabian, and the wisest declared that she would do so in spite of everything--religion (she was a Protestant), character, race. She was clever, as the young Seigneur found, as the little Avocat was forced to admit, as the Cure allowed with a sigh, and she had no airs of badness at all and very little of usual coquetry. Fabian was enamoured, and it was clear that he intended to bring the woman to the Manor one way or another.

Henri admitted the fascination of the woman, felt it, despaired, went to Montreal, got proof of her career, came back, and made his final and only effort to turn his brother from the girl.

He had waited an hour outside the hotel for his brother, and when Fabian got in, he drove on without a word. After a while, Fabian, who was in high spirits, said:

"Open your mouth, Henri. Come along, sleepyhead."

Straightway he began to sing a rollicking song, and Henri joined in with him heartily, for the spirit of Fabian's humour was contagious:

"There was a little man,

The foolish Guilleri
Carabi.
He went unto the chase,
Of partridges the chase.
Carabi.
Titi Carabi,
Toto Carabo,
You're going to break your neck,
My lovely Guilleri!"

He was about to begin another verse when Henri stopped him, saying:

"You're going to break your neck, Fabian."

"What's up, Henri?" was the reply.

"You're drinking hard, and you don't keep good company."

Fabian laughed. "Can't get the company I want, so what I can get I have, Henri, my lad."

"Don't drink." Henri laid his freehand on Fabian's knee.

"Whiskey-wine is meat and drink to me--I was born on New Year's Day, old coffin-face. Whiskey-wine day, they ought to call it. Holy! the empty jars that day." Henri sighed. "That's the drink, Fabian," he said patiently. "Give up the company. I'll be better company for you than that girl, Fabian."

"Girl? What the devil do you mean!"

"She, Nell Barraway, was the company I meant, Fabian."

"Nell Barraway--you mean her? Bosh! I'm going to marry her, Henri."

"You mustn't, Fabian," said Henri, eagerly clutching Fabian's sleeve.

"But I must, my Henri. She's the best-looking, wittiest girl I ever saw--splendid. Never lonely with her."

"Looks and brains isn't everything, Fabian."

"Isn't it, though? Isn't it? Tiens, you try it!"

"Not without goodness." Henri's voice weakened.

"That's bosh. Of course it is, Henri, my dear. If you love a woman, if she gets hold of you, gets into your blood, loves you so that the touch of her fingers sets your pulses going pom-pom, you don't care a sou whether she is good or not."

"You mean whether she was good or not?"

"No, I don't. I mean is good or not. For if she loves you she'll travel straight for your sake. Pshaw, you don't know anything about it!"

"I know all about it."

"Know all about it! You're in love--you?"

"Yes."

Fabian sat open-mouthed for a minute. "Godam!" he said. It was his one English oath.

"Is she good company?" he asked after a minute.

"She's the same as you keep--voila, the same."

"You mean Nell--Nell?" asked Fabian, in a dry, choking voice.

"Yes, Nell. From the first time I saw her. But I'd cut my hand off first. I'd think of you; of our people that have been here for two hundred years; of the rooms in the old house where mother used to be."

Fabian laughed nervously. "Holy heaven, and you've got her in your blood, too!"

"Yes, but I'd never marry her. Fabian, at Montreal I found out all about her. She was as bad--"

"That's nothing to me, Henri," said Fabian, "but something else is. Here you are now. I'll make a bargain." His face showed pale in the moonlight. "If you'll drink with me, do as I do, go where I go, play the devil when I play it, and never squeal, never hang back, I'll give her up. But I've got to have you--got to have you all the time, everywhere, hunting, drinking, or letting alone. You'll see me out, for you're stronger, had less of it. I'm soon for the little low house in the grass. Stop the horses."

Henri stopped them and they got out. They were just opposite the lime-kiln, and they had to go a few hundred yards before they came to the bridge to cross the river to their home. The light of the fire shone in their faces as Fabian handed the flask to Henri, and said: "Let's drink to it, Henri. You half, and me half." He was deadly pale.

Henri drank to the finger-mark set, and then Fabian lifted the flask to his lips.

"Good-bye, Nell!" he said. "Here's to the good times we've had!" He emptied the flask, and threw it over the bank into the burning lime, and Garotte, the old lime-burner, being half asleep, did not see or hear.

The next day the two went on a long hunting expedition, and the following month Nell Barraway left for Montreal.

Henri kept to his compact, drink for drink, sport for sport. One year the crops were sold before they were reaped, horses and cattle went little by little, then came mortgage, and still Henri never wavered, never weakened, in spite of the Cure and all others. The brothers were always together, and never from first to last did Henri lose his temper, or openly lament that ruin was coming surely on them. What money Fabian wanted he got. The Cure's admonitions availed nothing, for Fabian would go his gait. The end came on the very spot where the compact had been made; for, passing the lime-kiln one dark night, as the two rode home together, Fabian's horse shied, the bank of the river gave way, and with a startled "Ah, Henri!" the profligate and his horse were gone into the river below.

Next month the farm and all were sold, Henri Paradis succeeded the old lime-burner at his post, drank no more ever, and lived his life in sight of the old home.

THE WOODSMAN'S STORY OF THE GREAT WHITE CHIEF

The old woodsman shifted the knife with which he was mending his fishing-rod from one hand to the other, and looked at it musingly, before he replied to Medallion. "Yes, m'sieu', I knew the White Chief, as they called him: this was his"--holding up the knife; "and this"--taking a watch from his pocket. "He gave them to me; I was with him in the Circle on the great journey."

"Tell us about him, then," Medallion urged; "for there are many tales, and who knows which is the right one?"

"The right one is mine. Holy, he was to me like a father then! I know more of the truth than any one." He paused a moment, looking out on the river where the hot sun was playing with all its might, then took off his cap with deliberation, laid it beside him, and speaking as it were into the distance, began:

"He once was a trader of the Hudson's Bay Company. Of his birth some said one thing, some another; I know he was beaucoup gentil, and his heart, it was a lion's! Once, when there was trouble with the Chipp'ways, he went alone to their camp, and say he will fight their strongest man, to stop the trouble. He twist the neck of the great fighting man of the tribe, so that it go with a snap, and that ends it, and he was made a chief, for, you see, in their hearts they all hated their strong man. Well, one winter there come down to Fort o' God two Esquimaux, and they say that three white men are wintering by the Coppermine River; they had travel down from the frozen seas when their ship was lock in the ice, but can get no farther. They were sick with the evil skin, and starving. The White Chief say to me: 'Galloir, will you go to rescue them?' I would have gone with him to the ends of the world--and this was near one end."

The old man laughed to himself, tossed his jet-black hair from his wrinkled face, and after a moment, went on: "There never was such a winter as that. The air was so still by times that you can hear the rustle of the stars and the shifting of the northern lights; but the cold at night caught you by the heart and clamp it--Mon Dieu, how it clamp! We crawl under the snow and lay in our bags of fur and wool, and the dogs hug close to us. We were sorry for the dogs; and one died, and then another, and there is nothing so dreadful as to hear the dogs howl in the long night--it is like ghosts crying in an empty world. The circle of the sun get smaller and smaller, till he only tramp along the high edge of the north-west. We got to the river at last and found the camp. There is one man dead--only one; but there were bones--ah, m'sieu', you not guess what a thing it is to look upon the bones of men, and know that--!"

Medallion put his hand on the old man's arm. "Wait a minute," he said.

Then he poured out coffee for both, and they drank before the rest was told.

"It's a creepy story," said Medallion, "but go on."

"Well, the White Chief look at the dead man as he sit there in the snow, with a book and a piece of paper beside him, and the pencil in the book. The face is bent forward to the knees. The White Chief pick up the book and pencil, and then kneel down and gaze up in the dead man's face, all hard like stone and crusted with frost. I thought he would never stir again, he look so long. I think he was puzzle. Then he turn and say to me: 'So quiet, so awful, Galloir!' and got up. Well, but it was cold then, and my head seemed big and running about like a ball of air. But I light a spirit-lamp, and make some coffee, and he open the dead man's book--it is what they call a diary--and begin to read. All at once I hear a cry, and I see him drop the book on the ground, and go to the dead man, and jerk his fist as if to strike him in the face. But he did not strike."

Galloir stopped, and lighted his pipe, and was so long silent that Medallion had to jog him into speaking. He puffed the smoke so that his face was in the cloud, and he said through it: "No, he did not strike. He get to his feet and spoke: 'God forgive her!' like that, and come and take up the book again, and read. He eat and drunk, and read the book again, and I know by his face that something more than cold was clamp his heart.

"'Shall we bury him in the snow?' I say. 'No,' he spoke, 'let him sit there till the Judgmen'. This is a wonderful book, Galloir,' he went on. 'He was a brave man, but the rest--the rest!'--then under his breath almost: 'She was so young--but a child.' I not understand that. We start away soon, leaving the thing there. For four days, and then I see that the White Chief will never get back to Fort Pentecost; but he read the dead man's book much. . . ."

"I cannot forget that one day. He lies down looking at the world--nothing but the waves of snow, shining blue and white, on and on. The sun lift an eye of blood in the north, winking like a devil as I try to drive Death away by calling in his ear. He wake all at once; but his eyes seem asleep. He tell me to take the book to a great man in Montreal--he give me the name. Then he take out his watch--it is stop--and this knife, and put them into my hands, and then he pat my shoulder. He motion to have the bag drawn over his head. I do it. . . . Of course that was the end!"

"But what about the book?" Medallion asked.

"That book? It is strange. I took it to the man in Montreal--tonnerre, what a fine house and good wine had he!--and told him all. He whip out a scarf, and blow his nose loud, and say very angry: 'So, she's lost both now! What a scoundrel he was! . . .' Which one did he mean? I not understan' ever since."

He was no uncle of mine, but it pleased me that he let me call him Uncle Jim.

It seems only yesterday that, for the first time, on a farm "over the border," from the French province, I saw him standing by a log outside the wood-house door, splitting maple knots. He was all bent by years and hard work, with muscles of iron, hands gnarled and lumpy, but clinching like a vise; grey head thrust forward on shoulders which had carried forkfuls of hay and grain, and leaned to the cradle and the scythe, and been heaped with cordwood till they were like hide and metal; white straggling beard and red watery eyes, which, to me, were always hung with an intangible veil of mystery--though that, maybe, was my boyish fancy. Added to all this he was so very deaf that you had to speak clear and loud into his ear; and many people he could not hear at all, if their words were not sharp-cut, no matter how loud. A silent, withdrawn man he was, living close to Mother Earth, twin-brother of Labour, to whom Morning and Daytime were sounding-boards for his axe, scythe, saw, flail, and milking-pail, and Night a round hollow of darkness into which he crept, shutting the doors called Silence behind him, till the impish page of Toil came tapping again, and he stepped awkwardly into the working world once more. Winter and summer saw him putting the kettle on the fire a few minutes after four o'clock, in winter issuing with lantern from the kitchen door to the stable and barn to feed the stock; in summer sniffing the grey dawn and looking out on his fields of rye and barley, before he went to gather the cows for milking and take the horses to water.

For forty years he and his worn-faced wife bowed themselves beneath the yoke, first to pay for the hundred-acre farm, and then to bring up and educate their seven children. Something noble in them gave them ambitions for their boys and girls which they had never had for themselves; but when had gone the forty years, in which the little farm had twice been mortgaged to put the eldest son through college as a doctor, they faced the bitter fact that the farm had passed from them to Rodney, the second son, who had come at last to keep a hotel in a town fifty miles away. Generous-hearted people would think that these grown-up sons and daughters should have returned the old people's long toil and care by buying up the farm and handing it back to them, their rightful refuge in the decline of life. But it was not so. They were tenants where they had been owners, dependants where they had been givers, slaves where once they were, masters. The old mother toiled without a servant, the old man without a helper, save in harvest time.

But the great blow came when Rodney married the designing milliner who flaunted her wares opposite his bar-room; and, somehow, from the date of that marriage, Rodney's good fortune and the hotel declined. When he and his wife first visited the little farm after their marriage the old mother shrank away from the young woman's painted face, and ever afterwards an added sadness showed in her bearing and in her patient smile. But she took Rodney's wife through the house, showing her all there was to show, though that was not much. There was the little parlour with its hair-cloth chairs, rag carpet, centre table, and iron stove with black pipes, all gaily varnished. There was the parlour bedroom off it, with the one feather-bed of the house bountifully piled up with coarse home-made blankets, topped by a silk patchwork quilt, the artistic labour of the old wife's evening hours while Uncle Jim peeled apples and strung them to dry from the rafters. There was a room, dining-room in summer, and kitchen dining-room in winter, as clean as

aged hands could scrub and dust it, hung about with stray pictures from illustrated papers, and a good old clock in the corner "ticking" life, and youth, and hope away. There was the buttery off that, with its meagre china and crockery, its window looking out on the field of rye, the little orchard of winter apples, and the hedge of cranberry bushes. Upstairs were rooms with no ceilings, where, lying on a corn-husk bed, you reached up and touched the sloping roof, with windows at the end only, facing the buckwheat field, and looking down two miles towards the main road--for the farm was on a concession or side-road, dusty in summer, and in winter sometimes impassable for weeks together. It was not much of a home, as any one with the mind's eye can see, but four stalwart men and three fine women had been born, raised, and quartered there, until, with good clothes, and speaking decent English and tolerable French, and with money in their pockets, hardly got by the old people, one by one they issued forth into the world.

The old mother showed Rodney's wife what there was for eyes to see, not forgetting the three hives of bees on the south side, beneath the parlour window. She showed it with a kind of pride, for it all seemed good to her, and every dish, and every chair, and every corner in the little house had to her a glory of its own, because of those who had come and gone--the firstlings of her flock, the roses of her little garden of love, blooming now in a rougher air than ranged over the little house on the hill. She had looked out upon the pine woods to the east and the meadow-land to the north, the sweet valley between the rye-field and the orchard, and the good honest air that had blown there for forty years, bracing her heart and body for the battle of love and life, and she had said through all, Behold it is very good.

But the pert milliner saw nothing of all this; she did not stand abashed in the sacred precincts of a home where seven times the Angel of Death had hovered over a birth-bed. She looked into the face which Time's finger had anointed, and motherhood had etched with trouble, and said:

"'Tisn't much, is it? Only a clap-board house, and no ceilings upstairs, and rag carpets-pshaw!"

And when she came to wash her hands for dinner, she threw aside the unscented, common bar-soap, and, shrugging her narrow shoulders at the coarse towel, wiped her fingers on her cambric handkerchief. Any other kind of a woman, when she saw the old mother going about with her twisted wrist--a doctor's bad work with a fracture--would have tucked up her dress, and tied on an apron to help. But no, she sat and preened herself with the tissue-paper sort of pride of a vain milliner, or nervously shifted about, lifting up this and that, curiously supercilious, her tongue rattling on to her husband and to his mother in a shallow, foolish way. She couldn't say, however, that any thing was out of order or ill-kept about the place. The old woman's rheumatic fingers made corners clean, and wood as white as snow, the stove was polished, the tins were bright, and her own dress, no matter what her work, neat as a girl's, although the old graceful poise of the body had twisted out of drawing.

But the real crisis came when Rodney, having stood at the wood-house door and blown the dinner-horn as he used to do when a boy, the sound floating and crying away across the rye-field, the old man came--for, strange to say, that was the one sound he could hear easily, though, as he said to himself, it seemed as small as a pin, coming from ever so far away. He came heavily up from the barn-yard, mopping his red face and forehead, and now and again raising his hand to shade his eyes, concerned to see

the unknown visitors, whose horse and buggy were in the stable-yard. He and Rodney greeted outside warmly enough, but there was some trepidation too in Uncle Jim's face--he felt trouble brewing; and there is no trouble like that which comes between parent and child. Silent as he was, however, he had a large and cheerful heart, and nodding his head he laughed the deep, quaint laugh which Rodney himself of all his sons had--and he was fonder of Rodney than any. He washed his hands in the little basin outside the wood-house door, combed out his white beard, rubbed his red, watery eyes, tied a clean handkerchief round his neck, put on a rusty but clean old coat, and a minute afterwards was shaking hands for the first time with Rodney's wife. He had lived much apart from his kind, but he had a mind that fastened upon a thought and worked it down until it was an axiom. He felt how shallow was this thin, flaunting woman of flounces and cheap rouge; he saw her sniff at the brown sugar--she had always had white at the hotel; and he noted that she let Rodney's mother clear away and wash the dinner things herself. He felt the little crack of doom before it came.

It came about three o'clock. He did not return to the rye-field after dinner, but stayed and waited to hear what Rodney had to say. Rodney did not tell his little story well, for he foresaw trouble in the old home; but he had to face this and all coming dilemmas as best he might. With a kind of shamefacedness, yet with an attempt to carry the thing off lightly, he told Uncle Jim, while, inside, his wife told the old mother, that the business of the hotel had gone to pot (he did not say who was the cause of that), and they were selling out to his partner and coming to live on the farm.

"I'm tired anyway of the hotel job," said Rodney. "Farming's a better life. Don't you think so, dad?"

"It's better for me, Rod," answered Uncle Jim, "it's better for me."

Rodney was a little uneasy. "But won't it be better for me?" he asked.

"Mebbe," was the slow answer, "mebbe, mebbe so."

"And then there's mother, she's getting too old for the work, ain't she?"

"She's done it straight along," answered the old man, "straight along till now."

"But Millie can help her, and we'll have a hired girl, eh?"

"I dunno, I dunno," was the brooding answer; "the place ain't going to stand it."

"We'll get more out of it," answered Rodney. "I'll stock it up, I'll put more under barley. All the thing wants is working, dad. Put more in, get more out. Now ain't that right?"

The other was looking off towards the rye-field, where, for forty years, up and down the hillside, he had travelled with the cradle and the scythe, putting all there was in him into it, and he answered, blinking along the avenue of the past:

"Mebbe, mebbe!"

Rodney fretted under the old man's vague replies, and said: "But darn it

all, can't you tell us what you think?"

His father did not take his eyes off the rye-field. "I'm thinking," he answered, in the same old-fashioned way, "that I've been working here since you were born, Rod. I've blundered along, somehow, just boggling my way through. I ain't got anything more to say. The farm ain't mine any more, but I'll keep my scythe sharp and my axe ground just as I always did, and I'm for workin' as I've always worked as long as I'm let to stay."

"Good Lord, dad, don't talk that way! Things ain't going to be any different for you and mother than they are now. Only, of course--" He paused.

The old man pieced out the sentence: "Only, of course, there can't be two women rulin' one house, Rod, and you know it as well as I do."

Exactly how Rodney's wife told the old mother of the great change Rodney never knew; but when he went back to the house the grey look in his mother's face told him more than her words ever told. Before they left that night the pink milliner had already planned the changes which were to celebrate her coming and her ruling.

So Rodney and his wife came, all the old man prophesied in a few brief sentences to his wife proving true. There was no great struggle on the mother's part; she stepped aside from governing, and became as like a servant as could be. An insolent servant-girl came, and she and Rodney's wife started a little drama of incompetency, which should end as the hotel-keeping ended. Wastefulness, cheap luxury, tawdry living, took the place of the old, frugal, simple life. But the mother went about with that unchanging sweetness of face, and a body withering about a fretted soul. She had no bitterness, only a miserable distress. But every slight that was put upon her, every change, every new-fangled idea, from the white sugar to the scented soap and the yellow buggy, rankled in the old man's heart. He had resentment both for the old wife and himself, and he hated the pink milliner for the humiliation that she heaped upon them both. Rodney did not see one-fifth of it, and what he did see lost its force, because, strangely enough, he loved the gaudy wife who wore gloves on her bloodless hands as she did the house-work and spent numberless afternoons in trimming her own bonnets. Her peevishness grew apace as the newness of the experience wore off. Uncle Jim seldom spoke to her, as he seldom spoke to anybody, but she had an inkling of the rancour in his heart, and many a time she put blame upon his shoulders to her husband, when some unavoidable friction came.

A year, two years, passed, which were as ten upon the shoulders of the old people, and then, in the dead of winter, an important thing happened. About the month of March Rodney's first child was expected. At the end of January Rodney had to go away, expecting to return in less than a month. But, in the middle of February, the woman's sacred trouble came before its time. And on that day there fell such a storm as had not been seen for many a year. The concession road was blocked before day had well set in; no horse could go ten yards in it. The nearest doctor was miles away at Pontiac, and for any man to face the journey was to connive with death. The old mother came to Uncle Jim, and, as she looked out of a little unfrosted spot on the window at the blinding storm, told him that the pink milliner would die. There seemed to be no other end to it, for the chances were a hundred to one against the strongest man making a journey for the doctor, and another hundred to one against the doctor's

coming.

No one knows whether Uncle Jim could hear the cries from the torture-chamber, but, after standing for a time mumbling to himself, he wrapped himself in a heavy coat, tied a muffler about his face, and went out. If they missed him they must have thought him gone to the barn, or in the drive-shed sharpening his axe. But the day went on and the old mother forgot all the wrongs that she had suffered, and yearned over the trivial woman who was hurrying out into the Great Space. Her hours seemed numbered at noon, her moments measured as it came towards sundown, but with the passing of the sun the storm stopped, and a beautiful white peace fell on the world of snow, and suddenly out of that peace came six men; and the first that opened the door was the doctor. After him came Uncle Jim, supported between two others.

Uncle Jim had made the terrible journey, falling at last in the streets of the county town with frozen hands and feet, not a dozen rods from the doctor's door. They brought him to, he told his story, and, with the abating of the storm, the doctor and the villagers drove down to the concession road, and then made their way slowly up across the fields, carrying the old man with them, for he would not be left behind.

An hour after the doctor entered the parlour bedroom the old mother came out to where the old man sat, bundled up beside the fire with bandaged hands and feet.

"She's safe, Jim, and the child too," she said softly. The old man twisted in his chair, and blinked into the fire. "Dang my soul!" he said.

The old woman stooped and kissed his grey tangled hair. She did not speak, and she did not ask him what he meant; but there and then they took up their lives again and lived them out.

THE HOUSE WITH THE TALL PORCH

No one ever visited the House except the Little Chemist, the Avocat, and Medallion; and Medallion, though merely an auctioneer, was the only person on terms of intimacy with its owner, the old Seigneur, who for many years had never stirred beyond the limits of his little garden. At rare intervals he might be seen sitting in the large stone porch which gave overweighted dignity to the house, itself not very large.

An air of mystery surrounded the place: in summer the grass was rank, the trees seemed huddled together in gloom about the houses, the vines appeared to ooze on the walls, and at one end, where the window-shutters were always closed and barred, a great willow drooped and shivered; in winter the stone walls showed naked and grim among the gaunt trees and furtive shrubs.

None who ever saw the Seigneur could forget him--a tall figure with stooping shoulders; a pale, deeply lined, clean-shaven face, and a forehead painfully white, with blue veins showing; the eyes handsome, penetrative, brooding, and made indescribably sorrowful by the dark skin

around them. There were those in Pontiac, such as the Cure, who remembered when the Seigneur was constantly to be seen in the village; and then another person was with him always, a tall, handsome youth, his son. They were fond and proud of each other, and were religious and good citizens in a highbred, punctilious way.

At that time the Seigneur was all health and stalwart strength. But one day a rumour went abroad that he had quarrelled with his son because of the wife of Farette the miller. No one outside knew if the thing was true, but Julie, the miller's wife, seemed rather to plume herself that she had made a stir in her little world. Yet the curious habitants came to know that the young man had gone, and after a few years his having once lived there had become a mere memory. But whenever the Little Chemist set foot inside the tall porch he remembered; the Avocat was kept in mind by papers which he was called upon to read and alter from time to time; the Cure never forgot, because when the young man went he lost not one of his flock but two; and Medallion, knowing something of the story, had wormed a deal of truth out of the miller's wife. Medallion knew that the closed, barred rooms were the young man's; and he knew also that the old man was waiting, waiting, in a hope which he never even named to himself.

One day the silent old housekeeper came rapping at Medallion's door, and simply said to him: "Come--the Seigneur!"

Medallion went, and for hours sat beside the Seigneur's chair, while the Little Chemist watched and sighed softly in a corner, now and again rising to feel the sick man's pulse or to prepare a cordial. The housekeeper hovered behind the high-backed chair, and when the Seigneur dropped his handkerchief--now, as always, of the exquisite fashion of a past century--she put it gently in his hand.

Once when the Little Chemist touched his wrist, his dark eyes rested on him with inquiry, and he said: "Soon?"

It was useless trying to shirk the persistency of that look. "Eight hours, perhaps, sir," the Little Chemist answered, with painful shyness.

The Seigneur seemed to draw himself up a little, and his hand grasped his handkerchief tightly for an instant; then he said: "Soon. Thank you."

After a little, his eyes turned to Medallion and he seemed about to speak, but still kept silent. His chin dropped on his breast, and for a time he was motionless and shrunken; but still there was a strange little curl of pride--or disdain--on his lips. At last he drew up his head, his shoulders came erect, heavily, to the carved back of the chair, where, strange to say, the Stations of the Cross were figured, and he said, in a cold, ironical voice: "The Angel of Patience has lied!"

The evening wore on, and there was no sound, save the ticking of the clock, the beat of rain upon the windows, and the deep breathing of the Seigneur. Presently he started, his eyes opened wide, and his whole body seemed to listen.

"I heard a voice," he said.

"No one spoke, my master," said the housekeeper.

"It was a voice without," he said.

"Monsieur," said the Little Chemist, "it was the wind in the eaves."

His face was almost painfully eager and sensitively alert.

"Hush!" he said; "I hear a voice in the tall porch."

"Sir," said Medallion, laying a hand respectfully on his arm, "it is nothing."

With a light on his face and a proud, trembling energy, he got to his feet. "It is the voice of my son," he said. "Go--go, and bring him in."

No one moved. But he was not to be disobeyed.

His ears had been growing keener as he neared the subtle atmosphere of that Brink where man strips himself to the soul for a lonely voyaging, and he waved the woman to the door.

"Wait," he said, as her hand fluttered at the handle. "Take him to another room. Prepare a supper such as we used to have. When it is ready I will come. But, listen, and obey. Tell him not that I have but four hours of life. Go, good woman, and bring him in."

It was as he said. They found the son weak and fainting, fallen within the porch--a worn, bearded man, returned from failure and suffering and the husks of evil. They clothed him and cared for him, and strengthened him with wine, while the woman wept over him and at last set him at the loaded, well-lighted table. Then the Seigneur came in, leaning his arm very lightly on that of Medallion with a kind of kingly air; and, greeting his son before them all, as if they had parted yesterday, sat down. For an hour they sat there, and the Seigneur talked gaily with a colour to his face, and his great eyes glowing. At last he rose, lifted his glass, and said: "The Angel of Patience is wise. I drink to my son!"

He was about to say something more, but a sudden whiteness passed over his face. He drank off the wine, and as he put the glass down, shivered, and fell back in his chair.

"Two hours short, Chemist!" he said, and smiled, and was Still.

PARPON THE DWARF

Parpon perched in a room at the top of the mill. He could see every house in the village, and he knew people a long distance off. He was a droll dwarf, and, in his way, had good times in the world. He turned the misery of the world into a game, and grinned at it from his high little eyrie with the dormer window. He had lived with Farette the miller for some years, serving him with a kind of humble insolence.

It was not a joyful day for Farette when he married Julie. She led him a pretty travel. He had started as her master; he ended by being her slave and victim.

She was a wilful wife. She had made the Seigneur de la Riviere, of the House with the Tall Porch, to quarrel with his son Armand, so that Armand disappeared from Pontiac for years.

When that happened she had already stopped confessing to the good Cure; so it may be guessed there were things she did not care to tell, and for which she had no repentance. But Parpon knew, and Medallion the auctioneer guessed; and the Little Chemist's wife hoped that it was not so. When Julie looked at Parpon, as he perched on a chest of drawers, with his head cocked and his eyes blinking, she knew that he read the truth. But she did not know all that was in his head; so she said sharp things to him, as she did to everybody, for she had a very poor opinion of the world, and thought all as flippant as herself. She took nothing seriously; she was too vain. Except that she was sorry Armand was gone, she rather plumed herself on having separated the Seigneur and his son--it was something to have been the pivot in a tragedy. There came others to the village, as, for instance, a series of clerks to the Avocat; but she would not decline from Armand upon them. She merely made them miserable.

But she did not grow prettier as time went on. Even Annette, the sad wife of the drunken Benoit, kept her fine looks; but then, Annette's life was a thing for a book, and she had a beautiful child. You cannot keep this from the face of a woman. Nor can you keep the other: when the heart rusts the rust shows.

After a good many years, Armand de la Riviere came back in time to see his father die. Then Julie picked out her smartest ribbons, capered at the mirror, and dusted her face with oatmeal, because she thought that he would ask her to meet him at the Bois Noir, as he had done long ago. The days passed, and he did not come. When she saw Armand at the funeral--a tall man with a dark beard and a grave face, not like the Armand she had known, he seemed a great distance from her, though she could almost have touched him once as he turned from the grave. She would have liked to throw herself into his arms, and cry before them all: "Mon Armand!" and go away with him to the House with the Tall Porch. She did not care about Farette, the mumbling old man who hungered for money, having ceased to hunger for anything else--even for Julie, who laughed and shut her door in his face, and cowed him.

After the funeral Julie had a strange feeling. She had not much brains, but she had some shrewdness, and she felt her romance askew. She stood before the mirror, rubbing her face with oatmeal and frowning hard. Presently a voice behind her said: "Madame Julie, shall I bring another bag of meal?"

She turned quickly, and saw Parpon on a table in the corner, his legs drawn up to his chin, his black eyes twinkling.

"Idiot!" she cried, and threw the meal at him. He had a very long, quick arm. He caught the basin as it came, but the meal covered him. He blew it from his beard, laughing softly, and twirled the basin on a finger-point.

"Like that, there will need two bags!" he said.

"Imbecile!" she cried, standing angry in the centre of the room.

"Ho, ho, what a big word! See what it is to have the tongue of fashion!"

She looked helplessly round the room. "I will kill you!"

"Let us die together," answered Parpon; "we are both sad."

She snatched the poker from the fire, and ran at him. He caught her wrists with his great hands, big enough for tall Medallion, and held her.

"I said 'together,'" he chuckled; "not one before the other. We might jump into the flume at the mill, or go over the dam at the Bois Noir; or, there is Farette's musket which he is cleaning--gracious, but it will kick when it fires, it is so old!"

She sank to the floor. "Why does he clean the musket?" she asked; fear, and something wicked too, in her eye. Her fingers ran forgetfully through the hair on her forehead, pushing it back, and the marks of small-pox showed. The contrast with her smooth cheeks gave her a weird look. Parpon got quickly on the table again and sat like a Turk, with a furtive eye on her. "Who can tell!" he said at last. "That musket has not been fired for years. It would not kill a bird; the shot would scatter: but it might kill a man--a man is bigger."

"Kill a man!" She showed her white teeth with a savage little smile.

"Of course it is all guess. I asked Farette what he would shoot, and he said, 'Nothing good to eat.' I said I would eat what he killed. Then he got pretty mad, and said I couldn't eat my own head. Holy! that was funny for Farette. Then I told him there was no good going to the Bois Noir, for there would be nothing to shoot. Well, did I speak true, Madame Julie?"

She was conscious of something new in Parpon. She could not define it. Presently she got to her feet and said: "I don't believe you--you're a monkey."

"A monkey can climb a tree quick; a man has to take the shot as it comes." He stretched up his powerful arms, with a swift motion as of climbing, laughed, and added: "Madame Julie, Farette has poor eyes; he could not see a hole in a ladder. But he has a kink in his head about the Bois Noir. People have talked--"

"Pshaw!" Julie said, crumpling her apron and throwing it out; "he is a child and a coward. He should not play with a gun; it might go off and hit him."

Parpon hopped down and trotted to the door. Then he turned and said, with a sly gurgle: "Farette keeps at that gun. What is the good! There will be nobody at the Bois Noir any more. I will go and tell him."

She rushed at him with fury, but seeing Annette Benoit in the road, she stood still and beat her foot angrily on the doorstep. She was ripe for a quarrel, and she would say something hateful to Annette; for she never forgot that Farette had asked Annette to be his wife before herself was considered. She smoothed out her wrinkled apron and waited.

"Good day, Annette," she said loftily.

"Good day, Julie," was the quiet reply.

"Will you come in?"

"I am going to the mill for flax-seed. Benoit has rheumatism."

"Poor Benoit!" said Julie, with a meaning toss of her head.

"Poor Benoit," responded Annette gently. Her voice was always sweet. One would never have known that Benoit was a drunken idler.

"Come in. I will give you the meal from my own. Then it will cost you nothing," said Julie, with an air.

"Thank you, Julie, but I would rather pay."

"I do not sell my meal," answered Julie. "What's a few pounds of meal to the wife of Farette? I will get it for you. Come in, Annette."

She turned towards the door, then stopped all at once. There was the oatmeal which she had thrown at Parpon, the basin, and the poker. She wished she had not asked Annette in. But in some things she had a quick wit, and she hurried to say: "It was that yellow cat of Parpon's. It spilt the meal, and I went at it with the poker."

Perhaps Annette believed her. She did not think about it one way or the other; her mind was with the sick Benoit. She nodded and said nothing, hoping that the flax-seed would be got at once. But when she saw that Julie expected an answer, she said: "Cecilia, my little girl, has a black cat-so handsome. It came from the house of the poor Seigneur de la Riviere a year ago. We took it back, but it would not stay."

Annette spoke simply and frankly, but her words cut like a knife.

Julie responded, with a click of malice: "Look out that the black cat doesn't kill the dear Cecilia." Annette started, but she did not believe that cats sucked the life from children's lungs, and she replied calmly: "I am not afraid; the good God keeps my child." She then got up and came to Julie, and said: "It is a pity, Julie, that you have not a child. A child makes all right."

Julie was wild to say a fierce thing, for it seemed that Annette was setting off Benoit against Farette; but the next moment she grew hot, her eyes smarted, and there was a hint of trouble at her throat. She had lived very fast in the last few hours, and it was telling on her. She could not rule herself--she could not play a part so well as she wished. She had not before felt the thing that gave a new pulse to her body and a joyful pain at her breasts. Her eyes got thickly blurred so that she could not see Annette, and, without a word, she hurried to get the meal. She was silent when she came back. She put the meal into Annette's hands. She felt that she would like to talk of Armand. She knew now there was no evil thought in Annette. She did not like her more for that, but she felt she must talk, and Annette was safe. So she took her arm. "Sit down, Annette," she said. "You come so seldom."

"But there is Benoit, and the child--"

"The child has the black cat from the House!" There was again a sly ring to Julie's voice, and she almost pressed Annette into a chair.

"Well, it must only be a minute."

"Were you at the funeral to-day?" Julie began.

"No; I was nursing Benoit. But the poor Seigneur! They say he died without confession. No one was there except M'sieu' Medallion, the Little Chemist, Old Sylvie, and M'sieu' Armand. But, of course, you have heard everything."

"Is that all you know?" queried Julie.

"Not much more. I go out little, and no one comes to me except the Little Chemist's wife--she is a good woman."

"What did she say?"

"Only something of the night the Seigneur died. He was sitting in his chair, not afraid, but very sad, we can guess. By-and-by he raised his head quickly. 'I hear a voice in the Tall Porch,' he said. They thought he was dreaming. But he said other things, and cried again that he heard his son's voice in the Porch. They went and found M'sieu' Armand. Then a great supper was got ready, and he sat very grand at the head of the table, but died quickly, when making a grand speech. It was strange he was so happy, for he did not confess--he hadn't absolution."

This was more than Julie had heard. She showed excitement.

"The Seigneur and M'sieu' Armand were good friends when he died?" she asked.

"Quite."

All at once Annette remembered the old talk about Armand and Julie. She was confused. She wished she could get up and run away; but haste would look strange.

"You were at the funeral?" she added, after a minute.

"Everybody was there."

"I suppose M'sieu' Armand looks very fine and strange after his long travel," said Annette shyly, rising to go.

"He was always the grandest gentleman in the province," answered Julie, in her old vain manner. "You should have seen the women look at him to-day! But they are nothing to him--he is not easy to please."

"Good day," said Annette, shocked and sad, moving from the door. Suddenly she turned, and laid a hand on Julie's arm. "Come and see my sweet Cecilia," she said. "She is gay; she will amuse you."

She was thinking again what a pity it was that Julie had no child.

"To see Cecilia and the black cat? Very well--some day."

You could not have told what she meant. But, as Annette turned away again, she glanced at the mill; and there, high up in the dormer window, sat Parpon, his yellow cat on his shoulder, grinning down at her. She wheeled and went into the house.

II

Parpon sat in the dormer window for a long time, the cat purring against his head, and not seeming the least afraid of falling, though its master was well out on the window-ledge. He kept mumbling to himself:

"Ho, ho, Farette is below there with the gun, rubbing and rubbing at the rust! Holy mother, how it will kick! But he will only meddle. If she set her eye at him and come up bold and said: 'Farette, go and have your whiskey-wine, and then to bed,' he would sneak away. But he has heard something. Some fool, perhaps that Benoit--no, he is sick--perhaps the herb-woman has been talking, and he thinks he will make a fuss. But it will be nothing. And M'sieu' Armand, will he look at her?" He chuckled at the cat, which set its head back and hissed in reply. Then he sang something to himself.

Parpon was a poor little dwarf with a big head, but he had one thing which made up for all, though no one knew it--or, at least, he thought so. The Cure himself did not know. He had a beautiful voice. Even in speaking it was pleasant to hear, though he roughened it in a way. It pleased him that he had something of which the finest man or woman would be glad. He had said to himself many times that even Armand de la Riviere would envy him.

Sometimes Parpon went off away into the Bois Noir, and, perched there in a tree, sang away--a man, shaped something like an animal, with a voice like a muffled silver bell.

Some of his songs he had made himself: wild things, broken thoughts, not altogether human; the language of a world between man and the spirits. But it was all pleasant to hear, even when, at times, there ran a weird, dark thread through the woof. No one in the valley had ever heard the thing he sang softly as he sat looking down at Julie:

"The little white smoke blows there, blows here,
The little blue wolf comes down--
C'est la!
And the hill-dwarf laughs in the young wife's ear,
When the devil comes back to town--
C'est la!"

It was crooned quietly, but it was distinct and melodious, and the cat purred an accompaniment, its head thrust into his thick black hair. From where Parpon sat he could see the House with the Tall Porch, and, as he sang, his eyes ran from the miller's doorway to it.

Off in the grounds of the dead Seigneur's manor he could see a man push the pebbles with his foot, or twist the branch of a shrub thoughtfully as he walked. At last another man entered the garden. The two greeted warmly, and passed up and down together.

III

"My good friend," said the Cure, "it is too late to mourn for those lost

years. Nothing can give them back. As Parpon the dwarf said--you remember him, a wise little man, that Parpon--as he said one day, 'For everything you lose you get something, if only how to laugh at yourself.'"

Armand nodded thoughtfully and answered: "You are right--you and Parpon. But I cannot forgive myself; he was so fine a man: tall, with a grand look, and a tongue like a book. Yes, yes, I can laugh at myself--for a fool."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and tapped the ground nervously with his foot, shrugging his shoulders a little. The priest took off his hat and made the sacred gesture, his lips moving. Armand caught off his hat also, and said: "You pray--for him?"

"For the peace of a good man's soul."

"He did not confess; he had no rites of the Church; he had refused you many years."

"My son, he had a confessor."

Armand raised his eyebrows. "They told me of no one."

"It was the Angel of Patience."

They walked on again for a time without a word. At last the Cure said: "You will remain here?"

"I cannot tell. This 'here' is a small world, and the little life may fret me. Nor do I know what I have of this,"--he waved his hands towards the house,--"or of my father's property. I may need to be a wanderer again."

"God forbid! Have you not seen the will?"

"I have got no farther than his grave," was the sombre reply.

The priest sighed. They paced the walk again in silence. At last the Cure said: "You will make the place cheerful, as it once was."

"You are persistent," replied the young man, smiling. "Whoever lives here should make it less gloomy."

"We shall soon know who is to live here. See, there is Monsieur Garon, and Monsieur Medallion also."

"The Avocat to tell secrets, the auctioneer to sell them--eh?" Armand went forward to the gate. Like most people, he found Medallion interesting, and the Avocat and he were old friends.

"You did not send for me, monsieur," said the Avocat timidly, "but I thought it well to come, that you might know how things are; and Monsieur Medallion came because he is a witness to the will, and, in a case--"here the little man coughed nervously--"joint executor with Monsieur le Cure."

They entered the house. In a business-like way Armand motioned them to chairs, opened the curtains, and rang the bell. The old housekeeper appeared, a sorrowful joy in her face, and Armand said: "Give us a bottle

of the white-top, Sylvie, if there is any left."

"There is plenty, monsieur," she said; "none has been drunk these twelve years."

The Avocat coughed, and said hesitatingly to Armand: "I asked Parpon the dwarf to come, monsieur. There is a reason."

Armand raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Very good," he said. "When will he be here?"

"He is waiting at the Louis Quinze hotel."

"I will send for him," said Armand, and gave the message to Sylvie, who was entering the room.

After they had drunk the wine placed before them, there was silence for a moment, for all were wondering why Parpon should be remembered in the Seigneur's Will.

"Well," said Medallion at last, "a strange little dog is Parpon. I could surprise you about him--and there isn't any reason why I should keep the thing to myself. One day I was up among the rocks, looking for a strayed horse. I got tired, and lay down in the shade of the Rock of Red Pigeons--you know it. I fell asleep. Something waked me. I got up and heard the finest singing you can guess: not like any I ever heard; a wild, beautiful, shivery sort of thing. I listened for a long time. At last it stopped. Then something slid down the rock. I peeped out, and saw Parpon toddling away."

The Cure stared incredulously, the Avocat took off his glasses and tapped his lips musingly, Armand whistled softly.

"So," said Armand at last, "we have the jewel in the toad's head. The clever imp hid it all these years--even from you, Monsieur le Cure."

"Even from me," said the Cure, smiling. Then, gravely: "It is strange, the angel in the stunted body." "Are you sure it's an angel?" said Armand.

"Who ever knew Parpon do any harm?" queried the Cure.

"He has always been kind to the poor," put in the Avocat.

"With the miller's flour," laughed Medallion: "a pardonable sin." He sent a quizzical look at the Cure. "Do you remember the words of Parpon's song?" asked Armand.

"Only a few lines; and those not easy to understand, unless one had an inkling."

"Had you the inkling?"

"Perhaps, monsieur," replied Medallion seriously. They eyed each other.

"We will have Parpon in after the will is read," said Armand suddenly, looking at the Avocat. The Avocat drew the deed from his pocket. He looked up hesitatingly, and then said to Armand: "You insist on it being read now?"

Armand nodded coolly, after a quick glance at Medallion. Then the Avocat began, and read to that point where the Seigneur bequeathed all his property to his son, should he return--on a condition. When the Avocat came to the condition Armand stopped him.

"I do not know in the least what it may be," he said, "but there is only one by which I could feel bound. I will tell you. My father and I quarrelled"--here he paused for a moment, clinching his hands before him on the table--"about a woman; and years of misery came. I was to blame in not obeying him. I ought not to have given any cause for gossip. Whatever the condition as to that matter may be, I will fulfil it. My father is more to me than any woman in the world; his love of me was greater than that of any woman. I know the world--and women."

There was a silence. He waved his hand to the Avocat to go on, and as he did so the Cure caught his arm with a quick, affectionate gesture. Then Monsieur Garon read the conditions: "That Farette the miller should have a deed of the land on which his mill was built, with the dam of the mill --provided that Armand should never so much as by a word again address Julie, the miller's wife. If he agreed to the condition, with solemn oath before the Cure, his blessing would rest upon his dear son, whom he still hoped to see before he died."

When the reading ceased there was silence for a moment, then Armand stood up, and took the will from the Avocat; but instantly, without looking at it, handed it back. "The reading is not finished," he said. "And if I do not accept the condition, what then?"

Again Monsieur Garon read, his voice trembling a little. The words of the will ran: "But if this condition be not satisfied, I bequeath to my son Armand the house known as the House with the Tall Porch, and the land, according to the deed thereof; and the residue of my property--with the exception of two thousand dollars, which I leave to the Cure of the parish, the good Monsieur Fabre--I bequeath to Parpon the dwarf."

Then followed a clause providing that, in any case, Parpon should have in fee simple the land known as the Bois Noir, and the hut thereon.

Armand sprang to his feet in surprise, blurting out something, then sat down, quietly took the will, and read it through carefully. When he had finished he looked inquiringly, first at Monsieur Garon, then at the Cure. "Why Parpon?" he said searchingly.

The Cure, amazed, spread out his hands in a helpless way. At that moment Sylvie announced Parpon. Armand asked that he should be sent in. "We'll talk of the will afterwards," he added.

Parpon trotted in, the door closed, and he stood blinking at them. Armand put a stool on the table. "Sit here, Parpon," he said. Medallion caught the dwarf under the arms and lifted him on the table.

Parpon looked at Armand furtively. "The wild hawk comes back to its nest," he said. "Well, well, what is it you want with the poor Parpon?"

He sat down and dropped his chin in his hands, looking round keenly. Armand nodded to Medallion, and Medallion to the priest, but the priest nodded back again. Then Medallion said: "You and I know the Rock of Red Pigeons, Parpon. It is a good place to perch. One's voice is all to

one's self there, as you know. Well, sing us the song of the little brown diver."

Parpon's hands twitched in his beard. He looked fixedly at Medallion. Presently he turned towards the Cure, and shrank so that he looked smaller still.

"It's all right, little son," said the Cure kindly. Turning sharply on Medallion, Parpon said: "When was it you heard?"

Medallion told him. He nodded, then sat very still. They said nothing, but watched him. They saw his eyes grow distant and absorbed, and his face took on a shining look, so that its ugliness was almost beautiful. All at once he slid from the stool and crouched on his knees. Then he sent out a low long note, like the toll of the bell-bird. From that time no one stirred as he sang, but sat and watched him. They did not even hear Sylvie steal in gently and stand in the curtains at the door.

The song was weird, with a strange thrilling charm; it had the slow dignity of a chant, the roll of an epic, the delight of wild beauty. It told of the little good Folk of the Scarlet Hills, in vague allusive phrases: their noiseless wanderings; their sojourning with the eagle, the wolf, and the deer; their triumph over the winds, the whirlpools, and the spirits of evil fame. It filled the room with the cry of the west wind; it called out of the frozen seas ghosts of forgotten worlds; it coaxed the soft breezes out of the South; it made them all to be at the whistle of the Scarlet Hunter who ruled the North.

Then, passing through veil after veil of mystery, it told of a grand Seigneur whose boat was overturned in a whirlpool, and was saved by a little brown diver. And the end of it all, and the heart of it all, was in the last few lines, clear of allegory:

"And the wheel goes round in the village mill, And the little brown diver he tells the grain. . . And the grand Seigneur he has gone to meet The little good Folk of the Scarlet Hills!"

At first, all were so impressed by the strange power of Parpon's voice, that they were hardly conscious of the story he was telling. But when he sang of the Seigneur they began to read his parable. Their hearts throbbed painfully.

As the last notes died away Armand got up, and standing by the table, said: "Parpon, you saved my father's life once?"

Parpon did not answer.

"Will you not tell him, my son?" said the Cure, rising. Still Parpon was silent.

"The son of your grand Seigneur asks you a question, Parpon," said Medallion soothingly.

"Oh, my grand Seigneur!" said Parpon, throwing up his hands. "Once he said to me, 'Come, my brown diver, and live with me.' But I said, 'No, I am not fit. I will never go to you at the House with the Tall Porch.' And I made him promise that he would never tell of it. And so I have lived sometimes with old Farette." Then he laughed strangely again, and sent a furtive look at Armand.

"Parpon," said Armand gently, "our grand Seigneur has left you the Bois Noir for your own. So the hills and the Rock of Red Pigeons are for you --and the little good people, if you like."

Parpon, with fiery eyes, gathered himself up with a quick movement, then broke out: "Oh, my grand Seigneur--my grand Seigneur!" and fell forward, his head in his arms, laughing and sobbing together.

Armand touched his shoulder. "Parpon!" But Parpon shrank away.

Armand turned to the rest. "I do not understand it, gentlemen. Parpon does not like the young Seigneur as he liked the old."

Medallion, sitting in the shadow, smiled. He understood. Armand continued: "As for this 'testament, gentlemen, I will fulfil its conditions; though I swear, were I otherwise minded regarding the woman" --here Parpon raised his head swiftly--"I would not hang my hat for an hour in the Tall Porch."

They rose and shook hands, then the wine was poured out, and they drank it off in silence. Parpon, however, sat with his head in his hands.

"Come, little comrade, drink," said Medallion, offering him a glass.

Parpon made no reply, but caught up the will, kissed it, put it into Armand's hand, and then, jumping down from the table, ran to the door and disappeared through it.

IV

The next afternoon the Avocat visited old Farette. Farette was polishing a gun, mumbling the while. Sitting on some bags of meal was Parpon, with a fierce twinkle in his eye. Monsieur Garon told Farette briefly what the Seigneur had left him. With a quick, greedy chuckle Farette threw the gun away.

"Man alive!" said he; "tell me all about it. Ah, the good news!"

"There is nothing to tell: he left it; that is all."

"Oh, the good Seigneur," cried Farette, "the grand Seigneur!"

Some one laughed scornfully in the doorway. It was Julie.

"Look there," she cried; "he gets the land, and throws away the gun! Brag and coward, miller! It is for me to say 'the grand Seigneur!'"

She tossed her head: she thought the old Seigneur had relented towards her. She turned away to the house with a flaunting air, and got her hat. At first she thought she would go to the House with the Tall Porch, but she changed her mind, and went to the Bois Noir instead. Parpon followed her a distance off. Behind, in the mill, Farette was chuckling and rubbing his hands.

Meanwhile, Armand was making his way towards the Bois Noir. All at once,

in the shade of a great pine, he stopped. He looked about him astonished.

"This is the old place. What a fool I was, then!" he said.

At that moment Julie came quickly, and lifted her hands towards him. "Armand--beloved Armand!" she said.

Armand looked at her sternly, from her feet to her pitted forehead, then wheeled, and left her without a word.

She sank in a heap on the ground. There was a sudden burst of tears, and then she clinched her hands with fury.

Some one laughed in the trees above her--a shrill, wild laugh. She looked up frightened. Parpon presently dropped down beside her.

"It was as I said," whispered the dwarf, and he touched her shoulder. This was the full cup of shame. She was silent.

"There are others," he whispered again. She could not see his strange smile; but she noticed that his voice was not as usual. "Listen," he urged, and he sang softly over her shoulder for quite a minute. She was amazed.

"Sing again," she said.

"I have wanted to sing to you like that for many years," he replied; and he sang a little more. "He cannot sing like that," he wheedled, and he stretched his arm around her shoulder.

She hung her head, then flung it back again as she thought of Armand.

"I hate him!" she cried; "I hate him!"

"You will not throw meal on me any more, or call me idiot?" he pleaded.

"No, Parpon," she said.

He kissed her on the cheek. She did not resent it. But now he drew away, smiled wickedly at her, and said: "See, we are even now, poor Julie!" Then he laughed, holding his little sides with huge hands. "Imbecile!" he added, and, turning, trotted away towards the Rock of Red Pigeons.

She threw herself, face forward, in the dusty needles of the pines.

When she rose from her humiliation, her face was as one who has seen the rags of harlequinade stripped from that mummer Life, leaving only naked being. She had touched the limits of the endurable; her sordid little hopes had split into fragments. But when a human soul faces upon its past, and sees a gargoyle at every milestone where an angel should be, and in one flash of illumination--the touch of genius to the smallest mind--understands the pitiless comedy, there comes the still stoic outlook.

Julie was transformed. All the possible years of her life were gathered into the force of one dreadful moment--dreadful and wonderful. Her mean vanity was lost behind the pale sincerity of her face--she was sincere at

last. The trivial commonness was gone from her coquetting shoulders and drooping eyelids; and from her body had passed its flexuous softness. She was a woman; suffering, human, paying the price.

She walked slowly the way that Parpon had gone. Looking neither to right nor left, she climbed the long hillside, and at last reached the summit, where, bundled in a steep corner, was the Rock of Red Pigeons. As she emerged from the pines, she stood for a moment, and leaned with outstretched hand against a tree, looking into the sunlight. Slowly her eyes shifted from the Rock to the great ravine, to whose farther side the sun was giving bastions of gold. She was quiet. Presently she stepped into the light and came softly to the Rock. She walked slowly round it as though looking for some one. At the lowest side of the Rock, rude narrow hollows were cut for the feet. With a singular ease she climbed to the top of it. It had a kind of hollow, in which was a rude seat, carved out of the stone. Seeing this, a set look came to her face: she was thinking of Parpon, the master of this place. Her business was with him.

She got down slowly, and came over to the edge of the precipice. Steadying herself against a sapling, she looked over. Down below was a whirlpool, rising and falling—a hungry funnel of death. She drew back. Presently she peered again, and once more withdrew. She gazed round, and then made another tour of the hill, searching. She returned to the precipice. As she did so she heard a voice. She looked and saw Parpon seated upon a ledge of rock not far below. A mocking laugh floated up to her. But there was trouble in the laugh too—a bitter sickness. She did not notice that. She looked about her. Not far away was a stone, too heavy to carry but perhaps not too heavy to roll!

Foot by foot she rolled it over. She looked. He was still there. She stepped back. As she did so a few pebbles crumbled away from her feet and fell where Parpon perched. She did not see or hear them fall. He looked up, and saw the stone creeping upon the edge. Like a flash he was on his feet, and, springing into the air to the right, caught a tree steadfast in the rock. The stone fell upon the ledge, and bounded off again. The look of the woman did not follow the stone. She ran to the spot above the whirlpool, and sprang out and down.

From Parpon there came a wail such as the hills of the north never heard before. Dropping upon a ledge beneath, and from that to a jutting tree, which gave way, he shot down into the whirlpool. He caught Julie's body as it was churned from life to death: and then he fought. There was a demon in the whirlpool, but God and demon were working in the man. Nothing on earth could have unloosed that long, brown arm from Julie's drenched body. The sun lifted an eyelid over the yellow bastions of rock, and saw the fight. Once, twice, the shaggy head was caught beneath the surface—but at last the man conquered.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Parpon, with the lifeless Julie clamped in one arm, climbed the rough wall, on, on, up to the Rock of Red Pigeons. He bore her to the top of it. Then he laid her down, and pillowed her head on his wet coat.

The huge hands came slowly down Julie's soaked hair, along her blanched cheek and shoulders, caught her arms and held them. He peered into her face. The eyes had the film which veils Here from Hereafter. On the lips was a mocking smile. He stooped as if to kiss her. The smile stopped him. He drew back for a time, then he leaned forward, shut his

eyes, and her cold lips were his.

Twilight-dusk-night came upon Parpon and his dead--the woman whom an impish fate had put into his heart with mockery and futile pain.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Can't get the company I want, so what I can get I have
Capered at the mirror, and dusted her face with oatmeal
For everything you lose you get something
No trouble like that which comes between parent and child
Old clock in the corner "ticking" life, and youth, and hope away
She had not much brains, but she had some shrewdness
Take the honeymoon himself, and leave his wife to learn cooking
The laughter of a ripe summer was upon the land
Thought all as flippant as herself
Turned the misery of the world into a game, and grinned at it
When the heart rusts the rust shows

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