

The Right of Way, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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THE RIGHT OF WAY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN

The agitation and curiosity possessing Rosalie all day held her in the evening when the wooden shutters of the tailor's shop were closed and only a flickering light showed through the cracks. She was restless and uneasy during supper, and gave more than one unmeaning response to the remarks of her crippled father, who, drawn up for supper in his wheel-chair, was more than usually inclined to gossip.

Damase Evanturel's mind was stirred concerning the loss of the iron cross; the threat made by Filion Lacasse and his companions troubled him. The one person beside the Cure, Jo Portugais, and Louis Trudel, to whom M'sieu' talked much, was the postmaster, who sometimes met him of an evening as he was taking the air. More than once he had walked behind the wheel-chair and pushed it some distance, making the little crippled man gossip of village matters.

As the two sat at supper the postmaster was inclined to take a serious view of M'sieu's position. He railed at Filion Lacasse; he called the suspicious habitants clodhoppers, who didn't know any better--which was a tribute to his own superior birth; and at last, carried away by a feverish curiosity, he suggested that Rosalie should go and look through the cracks in the shutters of the tailor-shop and find out what was going on within. This was indignantly rejected by Rosalie, but the more she thought, the more uneasy she became. She ceased to reply to her father's remarks, and he at last relapsed into gloom, and said that he was tired and would go to bed. Thereupon she wheeled him inside his bedroom, bade him good-night, and left him to his moodiness, which, however, was soon absorbed in a deep sleep, for the mind of the little grey postmaster could no more hold trouble or thought than a sieve.

Left alone, Rosalie began to be tortured. What were they doing in the house opposite?

Go and look through the windows? But she had never spied on people in her life! Yet would it be spying? Would it not be pardonable? In the interest of the man who had been attacked in the morning by the tailor, who had been threatened by the saddler, and concerning whom she had seen a signal pass between old Louis and Filion Lacasse, would it not be a humane thing to do? It might be foolish and feminine to be anxious, but did she not mean well, and was it not, therefore, honourable?

The mystery inflamed her imagination. Charley's passiveness when he was assaulted by old Louis and afterwards threatened by the saddler seemed to her indifference to any sort of danger--the courage of the hopeless life, maybe. Instantly her heart overflowed with sympathy. Monsieur was not a Catholic perhaps? Well, so much the more he should be befriended, for he was so much the more alone and helpless. If a man was born a Protestant --or English--he could not help it, and should not be punished in this world for it, since he was sure to be punished in the next.

Her mind became more and more excited. The postoffice had been long since closed, and her father was asleep--she could hear him snoring. It was ten o'clock, and there was still a light in the tailor's shop. Usually the light went out before nine o'clock. She went to the post-office door and looked out. The streets were empty; there was not a light burning anywhere, save in the house of the Notary. Down towards the river a sleigh was making its way over the thin snow of spring, and screeching on the stones. Some late revellers, moving homewards from the Trois Couronnes, were roaring at the top of their voices the habitant chanson, 'Le Petit Roger Bontemps':

"For I am Roger Bontemps,
Gai, gai, gai!
With drink I am full and with joy content,
Gai, gaiment!"

The chanson died away as she stood there, and still the light was burning in the shop opposite. A thought suddenly came to her. She would go over and see if the old housekeeper, Margot Patry, had gone to bed. Here was the solution to the problem, the satisfaction of modesty and propriety.

She crossed the street quickly, hurried round the corner of the house, and was passing the side-window of the shop, when a crack in the shutters caught her eye. She heard something fall on the floor within. Could it be that the tailor and M'sieu' were working at so late an hour? She had an irresistible impulse, and glued her eye to the crack.

But presently she started back with a smothered cry. There by the great fireplace stood Louis Trudel picking up a red-hot cross with a pair of pincers. Grasping the iron firmly just below the arms of the cross, the tailor held it up again. He looked at it with a wild triumph, yet with a malignancy little in keeping with the object he held--the holy relic he had stolen from the door of the parish church. The girl gave a low cry of dismay.

She saw old Louis advance stealthily towards the door of the shop leading into the house. In bewilderment, she stood still an instant, then, with a sudden impulse, she ran to the kitchen-door and tried it softly. It was not locked. She opened it, entered quickly, and found old Margot standing in the middle of the room in her night-dress.

"Oh, Rosalie, Rosalie!" cried the old woman, "something's going to

happen. M'sieu' Trudel has been queer all evening. I peeped in the key-hole of the shop just now, and--"

"Yes, yes, I've seen too. Come!" said Rosalie, and going quickly to the door, opened it, and passed through to another room. Here she opened another door, leading into the hall between the shop and the house. Entering the hall, she saw a glimmer of light above. It was the reddish glow of the iron cross held by old Louis. She crept softly up the stone steps. She heard a door open very quietly. She hurried now, and came to the landing. She saw the door of Charley's room open--all the village knew what room he slept in--and the moonlight was streaming in at the window.

She saw the sleeping man on the bed, and the tailor standing over him. Charley was lying with one arm thrown above his head; the other lay over the side of the bed.

As she rushed forward, divining old Louis' purpose, the fiery cross descended, and a voice cried: "Show me a sign from Heaven, tailor-man!"

This voice was drowned by that of another, which, gasping with agony out of a deep sleep, as the body sprang upright, cried: "God-oh God!" Rosalie's hand grasped old Louis' arm too late. The tailor sprang back with a horrible laugh, striking her aside, and rushed out to the landing.

"Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur!" cried Rosalie, and, snatching a scarf from her bosom, thrust it in upon the excoriated breast, as Charley, hardly realising what had happened, choked back moans of pain.

"What did he do?" he gasped.

"The iron cross from the church door!" she answered. "A minute, one minute, Monsieur!"

She rushed out upon the landing in time to see the tailor stumble on the stairs and fall head forwards to the bottom, at the feet of Margot Patry.

Rosalie paid no heed to the fallen man. "Oil! flour! Quick!" she cried. "Quick! Quick!" She stepped over the body of the tailor, snatched at Margot's arm, and dragged her into the kitchen. "Quick-oil and flour!"

The old woman showed her where they were, moaning and whining.

"He tried to kill Monsieur," cried Rosalie, "burned him on the breast with the holy cross!"

With oil and flour she hurried back, over the body of the tailor, up the stairs, and into Charley's room. Charley was now out of bed and half dressed, though choking with pain, and preserving consciousness only by a great effort.

"Good Mademoiselle!" he said.

She took the scarf off gently, soaked it in oil and splashed it with flour, and laid it quickly back on the burnt flesh.

Margot came staggering into the room.

"I cannot rouse him. I cannot rouse him. He is dead! He is dead!" she whimpered.

"He--"

Charley swayed forward towards the woman, recovered himself, and said:

"Now not a word of what he did to me, remember. Not one word, or you will go to jail with him. If you keep quiet, I'll say nothing. He didn't know what he was doing." He turned to Rosalie. "Not a word of this, please," he moaned. "Hide the cross."

He moved towards the door. Rosalie saw his purpose, and ran out ahead of him and down the stairs to where the tailor lay prone on his face, one hand still holding the pincers. The little iron cross lay in a dark corner. Stooping, she lifted up the tailor's head, then felt his heart.

"He is not dead," she cried. "Quick, Margot, some water," she added, to the whimpering woman. Margot tottered away, and came again presently with the water.

"I will go for some one to help," Rosalie said, rising to her feet, as she saw Charley come slowly down the staircase, his face white with misery. She ran and took his arm to help him down.

"No, no, dear Mademoiselle," he said; "I shall be all right presently. You must get help to carry him up stairs. Bring the Notary; he and I can carry him up."

"You, Monsieur! You--it would kill you! You are terribly hurt."

"I must help to carry him, else people will be asking questions," he answered painfully. "He is going to die. It must not be known--you understand!" His eyes searched the floor until they found the cross. Rosalie picked it up with the pincers. "It must not be known what he did to me," Charley said to the muttering and weeping old woman. He caught her shoulder with his hand, for she seemed scarcely to heed.

She nodded. "Yes, yes, M'sieu', I will never speak." Rosalie was standing in the door. "Go quickly, Mademoiselle," he said. She disappeared with the iron cross, and flying across the street, thrust it inside the post-office, then ran to the house of the Notary.

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN OF THE TAILOR

Twenty minutes later the tailor was lying in his bed, breathing, but still unconscious, the Notary, M'sieu', and the doctor of the next parish, who by chance was in Chaudiere, beside him. Charley's face was drawn and haggard with pain, for he had helped to carry old Louis to bed, though every motion of his arms gave him untold agony. In the doorway stood Rosalie and Margot Patry.

"Will he live?" asked the Notary.

The doctor shook his head. "A few hours, perhaps. He fell downstairs?"

Charley nodded. There was silence for some time, as the doctor went on with his ministrations, and the Notary sat drumming his fingers on the little table beside the bed. The two women stole away to the kitchen, where Rosalie again pressed secrecy on Margot. In the interest of the cause she had even threatened Margot with a charge of complicity. She had heard the phrase "accessory before the fact," and she used it now with good effect.

Then she took some fresh flour and oil, and thrust them inside the bedroom door where Charley now sat clinching his hands and fighting down the pain. Careful as ever of his personal appearance, however, he had brushed every speck of flour from his clothes, and buttoned his coat up to the neck.

Nearly an hour passed, and then the Cure appeared. When he entered the sick man's room, Charley followed, and again Rosalie and old Margot came and stood within the doorway.

"Peace be to this house!" said the Cure. He had a few minutes of whispered conversation with the doctor, and then turned to Charley.

"He fell down-stairs, Monsieur? You saw him fall?"

"I was in my room--I heard him fall, Cure."

"Had he been ill during the day?"

"He appeared to be feeble, and he seemed moody."

"More than usual, Monsieur?" The Cure had heard of the incident of the morning when Filion Lacasse accused Charley of stealing the cross.

"Rather more than usual, Monsieur."

The Cure turned towards the door. "You, Mademoiselle Rosalie, how came you to know?"

"I was in the kitchen with Margot, who was not well."

The Cure looked at Margot, who tearfully nodded. "I was ill," she said,

"and Rosalie was here with me. She helped M'sieu' and me. Rosalie is a good girl, and kind to me," she whimpered.

The Cure seemed satisfied, and after looking at the sick man for a moment, he came close to Charley. "I am deeply pained at what happened to-day," he said courteously. "I know you have had nothing to do with the beloved little cross."

The Notary tried to draw near and listen, but the Cure's look held him back. The doctor was busy with his patient.

"You are only just, Monsieur," said Charley in response, wishing that these kind eyes were fixed anywhere than on his face.

All at once the Cure laid a hand upon his arm. "You are ill," he said anxiously. "You look very ill indeed. See, Vaudrey," he added to the

doctor, "you have another patient here!"

The friendly, oleaginous doctor came over and peered into Charley's face. "Ill-sure enough!" he said. "Look at this sweat!" he pointed to the drops of perspiration on Charley's forehead. "Where do you suffer?"

"Severe pains all through my body," Charley answered simply, for it seemed easier to tell the truth, as near as might be.

"I must look to you," said the doctor. "Go and lie down, and I will come to you."

Charley bowed, but did not move. Just then two things drew the attention of all: the tailor showed returning consciousness, and there was noise of many voices outside the house and the tramping of feet below-stairs.

"Go and tell them no one must come up," said the doctor to the Notary, and the Cure made ready to say the last offices for the dying.

Presently the noise below-stairs diminished, and the priest's voice rose in the office, vibrating and touching. The two women sank to their knees, the doctor followed, his eyes still fixed on the dying man. Presently, however, Charley did the same; for something penetrating and reasonable in the devotion touched him.

All at once Louis Trudel opened his eyes. Staring round with acute excitement, his eyes fell on the Cure, then upon Charley.

"Stop--stop, M'sieu' le Cure!" he cried. "There's other work to do." He gasped and was convulsed, but the pallor of his face was alive with fire from the distempered eyes. He snatched from his breast the paper Charley had neglected to burn. He thrust it into the Cure's hand.

"See--see!" he croaked. "He is an infidel--black infidel--from hell!" His voice rose in a kind of shriek, piercing to every corner of the house. He pointed at Charley with shaking finger.

"He wrote it there--on that paper. He doesn't--believe in God."

His strength failed him, his hand clutched tremblingly at the air. He laughed, a dry, crackling laugh, and his mouth opened twice or thrice to speak, but gasping breaths only came forth. With a last effort, however--as the priest, shocked, stretched out his hand and said: "Have done, have done, Trudel!"--he cried, in a voice that quavered shrilly:

"He asked--tailor-man--sign--from--Heaven. Look-look!" He pointed wildly at Charley. "I--gave him--sign of--"

But that was the end. With a shudder the body collapsed in a formless heap, and the tailor-man was gone to tell of the work he had done for his faith on earth.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CURE HAS AN INSPIRATION

White and malicious faces peered through the doorway. There was an ugly murmur coming up the staircase. Many habitants had heard Louis Trudel's last words, and had passed them on with vehement exaggeration.

Chaudiere had been touched in its most superstitious corner. Protestantism was a sin, but atheism was a crime against humanity. The Protestant might be the victim of a mistake, but the atheist was the deliberate son of darkness, the source of fearful dangers. An atheist in their midst was like a scorpion in a flower-bed--no one could tell when and where he would sting. Rough misdemeanours among them had been many, there had once been a murder in the parish, but the undefined horrors of infidelity were more shameful than crimes the eye could see.

To the minds of these excited people the tailor-man's death was due to the infidel before them. They were ready to do all that might become a Catholic intent to avenge the profaned honour of the Church and the faith. Bodily harm was the natural form for their passion to take.

"Bring him out--let us have him!" they cried with fierce gestures, to which Rosalie Evanturel turned a pained, indignant face.

As the Curb stood with the paper in his hand, his face set and bitter, Rosalie made a step forward. She meant to tell the truth about Louis Trudel, and show how good this man was, who stood charged with an imaginary crime. But she met the warning eye of the man himself, calm and resolute, she saw the suffering in the face, endured with what composure! and she felt instantly that she must obey him, and that--who could tell?--his plan might be the best in the end. She looked at the Cure anxiously. What would he say and do? In the Cure's heart and mind a great struggle was going on. All his inherent prejudice, the hereditary predisposition of centuries, the ingrained hatred of atheism, were alive in him, hardening his mind against the man before him. His first impulse was to let Charley take his fate at the hands of the people of Chaudiere, whatever it might be. But as he looked at the man, as he recalled their first meeting, and remembered the simple, quiet life he had lived among them--charitable, and unselfish--the barriers of creed and habit fell down, and tears unbidden rushed into his eyes.

The Cure had, all at once, the one great inspiration of his life--its one beautiful and supreme imagining. For thus he reasoned swiftly:

Here he was, a priest who had shepherded a flock of the faithful passed on to him by another priest before him, who again had received them from a guardian of the fold--a family of faithful Catholics whose thoughts never strayed into forbidden realms. He had done no more than keep them faithful and prevent them from wandering--counselling, admonishing, baptising, and burying, giving in marriage and blessing, sending them on their last great journey with the cachet of Holy Church upon them. But never once, never in all his life, had he brought a lost soul into the fold. If he died to-night, he could not say to St. Peter, when he arrived at Heaven's gate: "See, I have saved a soul!" Before the Throne he could not say to Him who cried: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"--he could not say: "Lord, by Thy grace I found this soul in the wilderness, in the dark and the loneliness, having no God to worship, denial and rebellion in his heart; and behold, I took him to my breast, and taught him in Thy name, and led him home to Thy haven, the Church!"

Thus it was that the Cure dreamed a dream. He would set his life to

saving this lost soul. He would rescue him from the outer darkness.

His face suffused, he handed the paper in his hand back to the man who had written the words upon it. Then he lifted his hand against the people at the door and the loud murmuring behind them.

"Peace--peace!" he said, as though from the altar. "Leave this room of death, I command you. Go at once to your homes. This man"--he pointed to Charley--"is my friend. Who seeks to harm him, would harm me. Go hence and pray. Pray for yourselves, pray for him, and for me; and pray for the troubled soul of Louis Trudel. Go in peace."

Soon afterwards the house was empty, save for the Cure, Charley, old Margot, and the Notary.

That night Charley sat in the tailor's bedroom, rigid and calm, though racked with pain, and watched the candles flickering beside the dead body. He was thinking of the Cure's last words to the people.

"I wonder--I wonder," he said, and through his eyeglass he stared at the crucifix that threw a shadow on the dead man's face. Morning found him there. As dawn crept in he rose to his feet. "Whither now?" he said, like one in a dream.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WOMAN WHO SAW

Up to the moment of her meeting with Charley, Rosalie Evanturel's life had been governed by habit, which was lightly coloured by temperament. Since the eventful hour on Vadrome Mountain it had become a life of temperament, in which habit was involuntary and mechanical. She did her daily duties with a good heart, but also with a sense superior to the practical action. This grew from day to day, until, in the tragical days wherein she had secretly played a great part, she moved as in a dream, but a dream so formal that no one saw any change taking place in her, or associated her with the events happening across the way.

She had been compelled to answer many questions, for it was known she was in the tailor's house when Louis Trudel fell down-stairs, but what more was there to tell than that she had run for the Notary, and sent word to the Cure, and that she was present when the tailor died, charging M'sieu' with being an infidel? At first she was ill disposed to answer any questions, but she soon felt that attitude would only do harm. For the first time in her life she was face to face with moral problems--the beginning of sorrow, of knowledge, and of life.

In all secrets there is a kind of guilt, however beautiful or joyful they may be, or for what good end they may be set to serve. Secrecy means evasion, and evasion means a problem to the moral mind. To the primitive mind, with its direct yes and no, there is danger of it becoming a tragical problem ere it is realised that truth is various and diverse. Perhaps even with that Mary who hid the matter in her heart--the exquisite tragedy and glory of Christendom--there was a delicate feeling of guilt, the guilt of the hidden though lofty and beautiful thing.

If secrecy was guilt, then Charley and Rosalie were bound together by a bond as strong as death: Rosalie held the key to a series of fateful days and doings.

In ordinary course, they might have known each other for five years and not have come to this sensitive and delicate association. With one great plunge she had sprung into the river of understanding. In the moment that she had thrust her scarf into his scorched breast, in that little upper room, the work of years had been done.

As long as he lived, that mark must remain on M'sieu's breast--the red, smooth scar of a cross! She had seen the sort of shining scar a bad burn makes, and at thought of it she flushed, trembled, and turned her head away, as though some one were watching her. Even in the night she flushed and buried her face in the pillow when the thought flashed through her mind; though when she had soaked the scarf in oil and flour and laid it on the angry wound she had not flushed at all, was determined, quiet, and resourceful.

That incident had made her from a girl into a woman, from a child of the convent into a child of the world. She no longer thought and felt as she had done before. What she did think or feel could not easily have been set down, for her mind was one tremulous confusion of unusual thoughts, her heart was beset by new feelings, her imagination, suddenly finding itself, was trying its wings helplessly. The past was full of wonder and event, the present full of surprises.

There was M'sieu' established already in Louis Trudel's place, having been granted a lease of the house and shop by the Curte, on the part of the parish, to which the property had been left; receiving also a gift of the furniture and of old Margot, who remained where she had been so many years. She could easily see Charley at work--pale and suffering still --for the door was generally open in the sweet April weather, with the birds singing, and the trees bursting into blossom. Her wilful imagination traced the cross upon his breast--it almost seemed as if it were outside upon his clothes, exposed to every eye, a shining thing all fire, not a wound inside, for which old Margot prepared oiled linen now.

The parish was as perturbed as her own mind, for the mystery of the stolen cross had never been cleared up, and a few still believed that M'sieu' had taken it. They were of those who kept hinting at dark things which would yet be worked upon the infidel in the tailor's shop. These were they to whom the Curb's beautiful ambition did not appeal. He had said that if the man were an infidel, then they must pray that he be brought into the fold; but a few were still suspicious, and they said in Rosalie's presence: "Where is the little cross? M'sieu' knows."

He did know. That was the worst of it. The cross was in her possession. Was it not necessary, then, to quiet suspicion for his sake? She had locked the relic away in a cupboard in her bedroom, and she carried the key of it always in her pocket. Every day she went and looked at it, as at some ghostly token. To her it was a symbol, not of supernatural things, but of life in its new reality to her. It was M'sieu', it was herself, it was their secret--she chafed inwardly that Margot should share a part of that secret. If it were only between their two selves--between M'sieu' and herself! If Margot--she paused suddenly, for she was going to say, If Margot would only die! She was not wicked enough to wish that; yet in the past few weeks she had found herself capable of thinking things beyond the bounds of any past experience.

She found a solution at last. She would go to-night secretly and nail the cross again on the church door, and so stop the chatter of evil tongues. The moon set very early now, and as every one in Chaudiere was supposed to be in bed by ten o'clock, the chances of not being seen were in her favour. She received the final impetus to her resolution by a quarrelsome and threatening remark of Jo Portugais to some sharp-tongued gossip in the post-office. She was glad that Jo should defend M'sieu', but she was jealous of his friendship for the tailor. Besides, did there not appear to be a secret between Jo and M'sieu'? Was it not possible that Jo knew where M'sieu' came from, and all about him? Of late Jo had come in and gone out of the shop oftener than in the past, had even brought her bunches of mosses for her flower-pots, the first budding lilacs, and some maple-sugar made from the trees on Vadrome Mountain. She remembered that when she was a girl at school, years ago--ten years ago--Jo Portugais, then scarcely out of his teens, a cheerful, pleasant, quick-tempered lad, had brought her bunches of the mountain-ash berry; that once he had mended the broken runner of her sled; and yet another time had sent her a birch-bark valentine at the convent, where it was confiscated by the Mother Superior. Since those days he had become a dark morose figure, living apart from men, never going to confession, seldom going to Mass, unloving and unlovable.

There was only one other person in the parish more unloved. That was the woman called Paulette Dubois, who lived in the little house at the outer gate of the Manor. Paulette Dubois had a bad name in the parish--so bad that all women shunned her, and few men noticed her. Yet no one could say that at the present time she did not live a careful life, justifying, so far as eye could see, the protection of the Seigneur, M. Rossignol, a man of queer habits and queerer dress, a dabbler in physical science, a devout Catholic, and a constant friend of the Cure. He it was who, when an effort was made to drive Paulette out of the parish, had said that she should not go unless she wished; that, having been born in Chaudiere, she had a right to live there and die there; and if she had sinned there, the parish was in some sense to blame. Though he had no lodge-gates, and though the seigneurie was but a great wide low-roofed farmhouse, with an observatory, and a chimney-piece dating from the time of Louis the Fourteenth, the Seigneur gave Paulette Dubois a little hut at his outer gate, which had been there since the great Count Frontenac visited Chaudiere. Probably Rosalie spoke to Paulette Dubois more often than did any one else in the parish, but that was because the woman came for little things at the shop, and asked for letters, and every week sent one--to a man living in Montreal. She sent these letters, but not more than once in six months did she get a reply, and she had not had one in a whole year. Yet every week she asked, and Rosalie found it hard to answer her politely, and sometimes showed it.

So it was that the two disliked each other without good cause, save that they were separated by a chasm as wide as a sea. The one disliked the other because she must recognise her; the other chafed because she could be recognised by Rosalie officially only.

The late afternoon of the day in which Rosalie decided to nail the cross on the church door again, Paulette arrived to ask for letters at the moment that the office wicket was closed, and Rosalie had answered that it was after office hours, and had almost closed the door in her face. As she turned away Jo Portugais came out of the tailor-shop opposite. He saw Paulette, and stood still an instant. She did the same. A strange look passed across the face of each, then they turned and went in

opposite directions.

Never in her life had time gone so slowly with Rosalie. She watched the clock. A dozen times she went to the front door and looked out. She tried to read--it was no use; she tried to spin-her fingers trembled; she sorted the letters in the office again, and rearranged every letter and parcel and paper in its little pigeonhole--then did it all over again. She took out again the letter Paulette had dropped in the letter-box; it was addressed in the name of the man at Montreal. She looked at it in a kind of awe, as she had ever done the letters of this woman who was without the pale. They had a sense of mystery, an air of forbidden imagination.

She put the letter back, went to the door again, and looked out. It was now time to go. Drawing a hood over her head, she stepped out into the night. There was a little frost, though spring was well forward, and the smell of the rich earth and the budding trees was sweet to the sense. The moon had just set, but the stars were shining, and here and there patches of snow on the hillside and in the fields added to the light. Yet it was not bright enough to see far, and as Rosalie moved down the street she did not notice a figure at a little distance behind, walking on the new-springing grass by the roadside. All was quiet at the tavern; there was no light in the Notary's house--as a rule, he sat up late, reading; and even the fiddle of Maximilian Cour, the baker, was silent. The Cure's windows were dark, and the church with its white tin spire stood up sentinel-like above the village.

Rosalie had the fateful cross in her hand as she softly opened the gate of the churchyard and approached the great oak doors. Taking a screw-driver and some screws from her pocket, she felt with a finger for the old screw-holes in the door. Then she began her work, looking fearfully round once or twice at first. Presently, however, because the screws were larger than the old ones, it became much harder; the task called forth more strength, and drove all thought of being seen out of her mind for a space. At last, however, she gave the final turn to the handle, and every screw was in its place, its top level and smooth with the iron of the cross. She stopped and looked round again with an uneasy feeling. She could see no one, hear no one, but she began to tremble, and, overcome, she fell on her knees before the door, and, with her fingers on the foot of the little cross, prayed passionately; for herself, for

Monsieur.

Suddenly she heard footsteps inside the church. They were coming towards the doorway, nearer and nearer. At first she was so struck with terror that she could not move. Then with a little cry she sprang to her feet, rushed to the gate, threw it open, ran out into the road, and wildly on towards home. She did not stop for at least three hundred yards. Turning and looking back she saw at the church door a pale round light. With another cry she sped on, and did not pause till she reached the house. Then, bursting in and locking the door, she hurried to her room, undressed quickly, got into bed without saying her prayers, and buried her face in the pillow, shivering and overwrought.

The footsteps she had heard were those of the Cure and Jo Portugais. The Cure had sent for Jo to do some last work upon a little altar, to be used the next day for the first time. The carpenter and the carver in wood who were responsible for the work had fallen victims to white whiskey on the very last day of their task, and had been driven from the church by

the Cure, who then sent for Jo. Rosalie had not seen the light at the shrine, as it was on the side of the church farthest from the village.

Their labour finished, the two came towards the front door, the Cure's lantern in his hand. Opening the door, Jo heard the sound of footsteps and saw a figure flying down the road. As the Cure came out abstractedly, he glanced sorrowfully towards the place where the little cross was used to be. He gave a wondering cry, and almost dropped the lantern.

"See, see, Portugais," he said, "our little cross again!" Jo nodded. "So it seems, Monsieur," he said.

At that instant he saw a hood lying on the ground, and as the Cure held up the lantern, peering at the little cross, he hastily picked it up and thrust it inside his coat.

"Strange--very strange!" said the Cure. "It must have been done while we were inside. It was not there when we entered."

"We entered by the vestry door," said Jo.

"Ah, true-true," responded the Cure.

"It comes as it went," said Jo. "You can't account for some things."

The Cure turned and looked at Jo curiously. "Are you then so superstitious, Jo? Nonsense; it is the work of human hands--very human hands," he added sadly.

"There is nothing to show," said the Cure, seeing Jo's glance round.

"As you see, M'sieu' le Cure."

"Well, it is a mystery which time no doubt will clear up. Meanwhile, let us be thankful to God," said the Cure.

They parted, the Cure going through a side-gate into his own garden, Jo passing out of the churchyard-gate through which Rosalie had gone. He looked down the road towards the village.

"Well!" said a voice in his ear. Paulette Dubois stood before him.

"It was you, then," he said, with a glowering look. "What did you want with it?"

"What do you want with the hood in your coat there?" She threw her head back with a spiteful laugh. "Whose do you think it is?" he said quietly.

"You and the schoolmaster made verses about her once."

"It was Rosalie Evanturel?" he asked, with aggravating composure.

"You have the hood-look at it! You saw her running down the road; I saw her come, watched her, and saw her go. She is a thief--pretty Rosalie--thief and postmistress! No doubt she takes letters too."

"The ones you wait for, and that never come--eh?" Her face darkened with

rage and hatred. "I will tell the world she's a thief," she sneered.

"Who will believe you?"

"You will." She was hard and fierce, and looked him in the eyes squarely. "You'll give evidence quick enough, if I ask you."

"I wouldn't do anything you asked me to--nothing, if it was to save my life."

"I'll prove her a thief without you. She can't deny it."

"If you try it, I'll--" He stopped, husky and shaking.

"You'll kill me, eh? You killed him, and you didn't hang. Oh no, you wouldn't kill me, Jo," she added quickly, in a changed voice. "You've had enough of that kind of thing. If I'd been you, I'd rather have hung--ah, sure!" She suddenly came close to him. "Do you hate me so bad, Jo?" she said anxiously. "It's eight years--do you hate me so bad as then?"

"You keep your tongue off Rosalie Evanturel," he said, and turned on his heel.

She caught his arm. "We're both bad, Jo. Can't we be friends?" she said eagerly, her voice shaking.

He did not reply.

"Don't drive a woman too hard," she said between her teeth.

"Threats! Pah!" he rejoined. "What do you think I'm made of?"

"I'll find that out," she said, and, turning on her heel, ran down the road towards the Manor House. "What had Rosalie to do with the cross?" Jo said to himself. "This is her hood." He took it out and looked at it. "It's her hood--but what did she want with the cross?"

He hurried on, and as he neared the post-office he saw the figure of a woman in the road. At first he thought it might be Rosalie, but as he came nearer he saw it was not. The woman was muttering and crying. She wandered to and fro bewilderedly. He came up, caught her by the arm, and looked into her face.

It was old Margot Patry.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WOMAN WHO DID NOT TELL

"Oh, M'sieu', I am afraid."

"Afraid of what, Margot?"

"Of the last moment, M'sieu' le Cure."

"There will be no last moment to your mind--you will not know it when it comes, Margot."

The woman trembled. "I am not sorry to die. But I am afraid; it is so lonely, M'sieu' le Cure."

"God is with us, Margot."

"When we are born we do not know. It is on the shoulders of others. When we die we know, and we have to answer."

"Is the answering so hard, Margot?"

The woman shook her head feebly and sadly, but did not speak.

"You have been a good mother, Margot." She made no sign.

"You have been a good neighbour; you have done unto others as you would be done by."

She scarcely seemed to hear.

"You have been a good servant--doing your duty in season and out of season; honest and just and faithful."

The woman's fingers twitched on the coverlet, and she moved her head restlessly.

The Cure almost smiled, for it seemed as if Margot were finding herself wanting. Yet none in Chaudiere but knew that she had lived a blameless life--faithful, friendly, a loving and devoted mother, whose health had been broken by sleepless attendance at sick-beds by night, while doing her daily work at the house of the late Louis Trudel.

"I will answer for the way you have done your duty, Margot," said the Cure. "You have been a good daughter of the Church."

He paused a minute, and in the pause some one rose from a chair by the window and looked out on the sunset sky. It was Charley. The woman heard, and turned her eyes towards him. "Do you wish him to go?" asked the Cure.

"No, no--oh no, M'sieu'!" she said eagerly. She had asked all day that either Rosalie or M'sieu' should be in the room with her. It would seem as though she were afraid she had not courage enough to keep the secret of the cross without their presence. Charley had yielded to her request, while he shrank from granting it. Yet, as he said to himself, the woman was keeping his secret--his and Rosalie's--and she had some right to make demand.

When the Cure asked the question of old Margot, he turned expectantly, and with a sense of relief. He thought it strange that the Cure should wish him to remain. The Cure, on his part, was well pleased to have him in the influence of a Christian death-bed. A time must come when the last confidences of the dying woman could be given to no ears but his own, but meanwhile it was good that M'sieu' should be there.

"M'sieu' le Cure," said the dying woman, "must I tell all?"

"All what, Margot?"

"All that is sin?"

"There is no must, Margot."

"If you should ask me, M'sieu'--"

She paused, and the man at the window turned and looked curiously at her. He saw the problem in the woman's mind: had she the right to die with the secret of another's crime upon her mind?

"The priest does not ask, Margot: it is you who confess your sins. That is between you and God."

The Cure spoke firmly, for he wanted the man at the window to clearly understand.

"But if there are the sins of others, and you know, and they trouble your soul, M'sieu'?"

"You have nothing to do with the sins of others; it is enough to repent of your own sins. The priest has nothing to do with any sins but those confessed by the sinner to himself. Your own sins are your sole concern to-night, Margot."

The woman's face seemed to clear a little, and her eyes wandered to the man at the window with less anxiety. Charley was wondering whether, after all, she would have the courage to keep her word, whether spiritual terror would surmount the moral attitude of honour. He was also wondering how much right he had to put the strain upon the woman in her desperate hour. "How long did the doctor say I could live?" the woman asked presently.

"Till morning, perhaps, Margot."

"I should like to live till sunrise," she answered, "till after breakfast. Rosalie makes good tea," she added musingly.

The Cure almost smiled. "There is the Living Bread, my daughter."

She nodded. "But I should like to see the sunrise and have Rosalie bring me tea," she persisted.

"Very well, Margot. We will ask God for that."

Her mind flew back again to the old question.

"Is it wrong to keep a secret?" she asked, her face turned away from the man at the window.

"If it is the secret of a sin, and the sin is your own--yes, Margot."

"And if the sin is not your own?"

"If you share the sin, and if the secret means injury to others, and a wrong is being done, and the law can right that wrong, then you must go to the law, not to your priest."

The Cure's look was grave, even anxious, for he saw that the old woman's mind was greatly disturbed. But her face cleared now, and stayed so. "It has all been a mix and a muddle," she answered; "and it hurt my poor head, M'sieu' le Cure, but now I think I understand. I am not afraid; I will confess."

The Cure had made it clear to her that she could carry to her grave the secret of the little cross and the work it had done, and so keep her word and still not injure her chances of salvation. She was content. She no longer needed the helpful presence of M'sieu' or Rosalie. Charley instinctively felt what was in her mind, and came towards the bed.

"I will tell Mademoiselle Rosalie about the tea," he said to her.

She looked up at him, almost smiling. "Thank you, good M'sieu'," she said.

"I will confess now, M'sieu' le Cure" she continued. Charley left the room.

Towards morning Margot waked out of a brief sleep, and found the Cure and his sister and others about her bed.

"Is it near sunrise?" she whispered.

"It is just sunrise. See; God has been good," answered the Cure, drawing open the blind and letting in the first golden rays.

Rosalie entered the room with a cup of tea, and came towards the bed.

Old Margot looked at the girl, at the tea, and then at the Cure.

"Drink the tea for me, Rosalie," she whispered. Rosalie did as she was asked.

She looked round feebly; her eyes were growing filmy. "I never gave--so much--trouble--before," she managed to say. "I never had--so much--attention.... I can keep--a secret too," she said, setting her lips feebly with pride. "But I--never--had--so much--attention--before; have I--Rosalie?"

Rosalie did not need to answer, for the woman was gone. The crowning interest of her life had come all at the last moment, as it were, and she had gone away almost gladly and with a kind of pride.

Rosalie also had a hidden pride: the secret was now her very own--hers and M'sieu's.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SEIGNEUR TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME

It was St. Jean Baptiste's day, and French Canada was en fete. Every seigneur, every cure, every doctor, every notary--the chief figures in a parish--and every habitant was bent for a happy holiday, dressed in his best clothes, moved in his best spirits, in the sweet summer weather.

Bells were ringing, flags were flying, every road and lane was filled with caleches and wagons, and every dog that could draw a cart pulled big and little people, the old and the blind and the mendicant, the happy and the sour, to the village, where there were to be sports and speeches, races upon the river, and a review of the militia, arranged by the member of the Legislature for the Chaudiere-half of the county. French soldiers in English red coats and carrying British flags were straggling along the roads to join the battalion at the volunteers' camp three miles from the town, and singing:

"Brigadier, repondez Pandore--
Brigadier, vous avez raison."

It was not less incongruous and curious when one group presently broke out into 'God save the Queen', and another into the 'Marseillaise', and another still into 'Malbrouck s'en va t'en guerre'. At last songs and soldiers were absorbed in the battalion at the rendezvous, and the long dusty march to the village gave a disciplined note to the gaiety of the militant habitant.

At high noon Chaudiere was filled to overflowing. There were booths and tents everywhere--all sorts of cheap-jacks vaunted their wares, merry-go-rounds and swings and shooting-galleries filled the usual spaces in the perspective. The Cure, M. Rossignol the Seigneur, and the Notary stood on the church steps viewing the scene and awaiting the approach of the soldier-citizens. The Seigneur and the Cure had ceased listening to the babble of M. Dauphin, who seemed not to know that his audience closed its ears and found refuge in a "Well, well!" or "Think of that!" or an abstracted "You surprise me!"

The Notary talked on with eager gesture and wreathing smile, shaking back his oiled ringlets as though they trespassed on his smooth, somewhat jaundiced cheeks, until it began to dawn upon him that there was no coin of real applause to be got at this mint. Fortune favoured him at the critical juncture, for the tailor walked slowly past them, looking neither to right nor to left, his eyes cast upon the ground, apparently oblivious to all round him. Almost opposite the church door, however, Charley was suddenly stopped by Filion Lacasse, who ran out from a group before the tavern, and, standing in front of him with outstretched hand, said loudly:

"M'sieu', it's all right. What you said done it, sure! I'm a thousand dollars richer to-day. You may be an infidel, but you have a head, and you save me money, and you give away your own, and that's good enough for me,"--he wrung Charley's hand,--"and I don't care who knows it--sacre!"

Charley did not answer him, but calmly withdrew his hand, smiled, raised his hat at the lonely cheer the saddler raised, and passed on, scarce conscious of what had happened. Indeed he was indifferent to it, for he had a matter on his mind this day which bitterly absorbed him.

But the Notary was not indifferent. "Look there, what do you think of that?" he asked querulously. "I am glad to see that Lacasse treats Monsieur well," said the Cure.

"What do you think of that, Monsieur?" repeated the Notary excitedly to the Seigneur.

The Seigneur put his large gold-handled glass to his eye and looked interestedly after Charley for a moment, then answered: "Well, Dauphin, what?"

"He's been giving Filion Lacasse advice about the old legacy business, and Filion's taken it; and he's got a thousand dollars; and now there's all that fuss. And four months ago Filion wanted to tar and feather him for being just what he is to-day--an infidel--an infidel!"

He was going to say something else, but he did not like the look the Cure turned on him, and he broke off short.

"Do you regret that he gave Lacasse good advice?" asked the Cure.

"It's taking bread out of other men's mouths."

"It put bread into Filion's mouth. Did you ever give Lacasse advice? The truth now, Dauphin!" said the Seigneur drily.

"Yes, Monsieur, and sound advice too, within the law-precedent and code and every legal fact behind." The Seigneur was a man of laconic speech. "Tut, tut, Dauphin; precedent and code and legal fact are only good when there's brain behind 'em. The tailor yonder has brains."

"Ah, but what does he know about the law?" answered Dauphin, with acrimonious voice but insinuating manner, for he loved to stand well with the Seigneur.

"Enough for the saddler evidently," sharply rejoined the Seigneur.

Dauphin was fighting for his life, as it were. His back was to the wall. If this man was to be allowed to advise the habitants of Chaudiere on their disputes and "going to law," where would his own prestige be? His vanity had been deeply wounded.

"It's guesswork with him. Let him stick to his trade as I stick to mine. That sort of thing only does harm."

"He puts a thousand dollars into the saddler's pocket: that's a positive good. He may or may not take thereby ten dollars out of your pocket: that's a negative injury. In this case there was no injury, for you had already cost Lacasse--how much had you cost him, Dauphin?" continued the Seigneur, with a half-malicious smile. "I've been out of Chaudiere for near a year; I don't know the record--how much, eh, Dauphin?"

The Notary was too offended to answer. He shook his ringlets back angrily, and a scarlet spot showed on each straw-coloured cheek.

"Twenty dollars is what Lacasse paid our dear Dauphin," said the Cure benignly, "and a very proper charge. Lacasse probably gave Monsieur there quite as much, and Monsieur will give it to the first poor man he meets, or send it to the first sick person of whom he hears."

"My own opinion is, he's playing some game here," said the Notary.

"We all play games," said the Seigneur. "His seems to give him hard work and little luxury. Will you bring him to see me at the Manor, my dear Cure?" he added. "He will not go. I have asked him."

"Then I shall visit him at his tailor-shop," said the Seigneur. "I need a new suit."

"But you always had your clothes made in Quebec, Monsieur," said the Notary, still carping.

"We never had such a tailor," answered the Seigneur.

"We'll hear more of him before we're done with him," obstinately urged the Notary.

"It would give Dauphin the greatest pleasure if our tailor proved to be a murderer or a robber. I suppose you believe that he stole our little cross here," the Cure added, turning to the church door, where his eye lingered lovingly on the relic, hanging on a pillar just inside, whither he had had it removed.

"I'm not sure yet he hadn't something to do with it," was the stubborn response.

"If he did, may it bring him peace at last!" said the Cure piously. "I have set my heart on nailing him to our blessed faith as that cross is fixed to the pillar yonder--'I will fasten him like a nail in a sure place,' says the Book. I take it hard that my friend Dauphin will not help me on the way. Suppose the man were evil, then the Church should try to snatch him like a brand from the burning. But suppose that in his past there was no wrong necessary to be hidden in the present--and this I believe with all my heart; suppose that he was wronged, not wronging: then how much more should the Church strive to win him to the light! Why, man, have you no pride in Holy Church? I am ashamed of you, Dauphin, with your great intelligence, your wide reading. With our knowledge of the world we should be broader."

The Seigneur's eyes were turned away, for there was in them at once humour and a suspicious moisture. Of all men in the world he most admired the Cure, for his utter truth and nobility; but he could not help smiling at his enthusiasm--his dear Cure turned evangelist like any "Methody"!--and at the appeal of the Notary on the ground of knowledge of the world. He was wise enough to count himself an old fogy, a provincial, and "a simon-pure habitant," but of the three he only had any knowledge of life. As men of the world the Cure and the Notary were sad failures, though they stood for much in Chaudiere. Yet this detracted nothing from the fine gentlemanliness of the Cure or the melodramatic courtesy of the Notary.

Amused and touched as the Seigneur had been at the Cure's words, he turned now and said: "Always on the weaker side, Cure; always hoping the best from the worst of us."

"I am only following an example at my door--you taught us all charity and justice," answered M. Loisel, looking meaningly at the Seigneur. There was silence a little while, for all three were thinking of the woman of the hut, at the gate of the Seigneur's manor.

On this topic M. Dauphin was not voluble. His original kindness to the woman had given him many troubled hours at home, for Madame Dauphin had construed his human sympathy into the dark and carnal desires of the heart, and his truthful eloquence had made his case the worse. A miserable sentimentalist, the Notary was likely to be misunderstood for

ever, and one or two indiscretions of his extreme youth had been a weapon against him through the long years of a blameless married life.

He heaved a sigh of sympathy with the Cure now. "She has not come back yet?" he said to the Seigneur. "No sign of her. She locked up and stepped out, so my housekeeper says, about the time--"

"The day of old Margot's funeral," interposed the Notary. "She'd had a letter that day, a letter she'd been waiting for, and abroad she went-- alas! the flyaway--from bad to worse, I fear--ah me!"

The Seigneur turned sharply on him. "Who told you she had a letter that day, for which she had been waiting?" he said.

"Monsieur Evanturel."

The Seigneur's face became sterner still. "What business had he to know that she received a letter that day?"

"He is postmaster," innocently replied the Notary. "He is the devil!" said the Seigneur tartly. "I beg your pardon, Cure; but it is Evanturel's business not to know what letters go to and fro in that office. He should be blind and dumb, so far as we all are concerned."

"Remember that Evanturel is a cripple," the Cure answered gently. "I am glad, very glad it was not Rosalie."

"Rosalie has more than usual sense for her sex," gruffly but kindly answered the Seigneur, a look of friendliness in his eyes. "I shall talk to her about her father; I can't trust myself to speak to the man."

"Rosalie is down there with Madame Dauphin," said the Notary, pointing. "Shall I ask her to come?"

The Seigneur nodded. He was magistrate and magnate, and he was the guarantor of the post-office, and of Rosalie and her father. His eyes fixed in reverie on Rosalie; he and the Cure passively waited her approach.

She came over, pale and a little anxious, but with a courageous look. She had a vague sense of trouble, and she feared it might be the little cross, that haunting thing of all these months.

When she came near, the Cure greeted her courteously, and then, taking the Notary by the arm, led him away.

The Seigneur and Rosalie being left alone, the girl said: "You wish to speak with me, Monsieur?"

The Seigneur scrutinised her sharply. Though her colour came and went, her look was frank and fearless. She had had many dark hours since that fateful month of April. At night, trying to sleep, she had heard the ghostly footsteps in the church, which had sent her flying homeward. Then, there was the hood. She had waited on and on, fearing word would come that it had been found in the churchyard, and that she had been seen putting the cross back upon the church door. As day after day passed she had come at length to realise that, whatever had happened to the hood, she was not suspected. Yet the whole train of circumstances had a supernatural air, for the Cure and Jo Portugais had not made public their

experience on the eventful night; she had been educated in a land of legend and superstition, and a deep impression had been made upon her mind, giving to her other new emotions a touch of pathos, of imagination, and adding character to her face. The old Seigneur stroked his chin as he looked at her. He realised that a change had come upon her, that she had developed in some surprising way.

"What has happened--who has happened, Mademoiselle Rosalie?" he asked. He had suddenly made up his mind about that look in her face--he thought it the woman in her which answers to the call of man, not perhaps any particular man, but man the attractive influence, the complement.

Her eyes dropped, then raised frankly to his. "I don't know,"--adding, with a quick humour, for he had been very friendly with her, and joked with her in his dry way all her life; "do you, Monsieur?"

He pulled his nose with a quick gesture habitual to him, and answered slowly and meaningly: "The government's a good husband and pays regular wages, Mademoiselle. I'd stick to government."

"I am not asking for a divorce, Monsieur."

He pulled his nose again delightedly--so many people were pathetically in earnest in Chaudiere--even the Cure's humour was too mediaeval and obvious. He had never before thought Rosalie so separate from them all. All at once he had a new interest in her. His cheek flushed a little, his eye kindled, humour relaxed his lips.

"No other husband would intrude so little," he rejoined.

"True, there's little love lost between us, Monsieur." She felt exhilaration in talking with him, a kind of joy in measuring word against word; yet a year ago she would have done no more than smile respectfully and give a demure reply if the Seigneur had spoken to her like this.

The Seigneur noted the mixed emotions in her face and the delicate alertness of expression. As a man of the world, he was inclined to believe that only one kind of experience can bring such looks to a woman's face. He saw in her the awakening of the deeper interests of life, the tremulous apprehension of nascent emotions and passions which, at some time or other, give beauty and importance to the nature of every human being. It did not occur to him that the tailor--the mysterious figure in the parish--might be responsible. He was observant, but not imaginative; he was moved by what he saw, in a quiet, unexplainable manner.

"The government is the best sort of husband. From the other sort you would get more kisses and less ha'pence," he continued.

"That might be a satisfactory balance-sheet, Monsieur."

"Take care, Mademoiselle Rosalie," he rejoined, half seriously, "that you don't miss the ha'pence before you get the kisses."

She turned pale in very fear. What was he going to say? Was the post-office to be taken from them? She came straight to the point.

"What have I done wrong, Monsieur? I've never kept the mail-stage waiting; I've never left the mailbag unlocked; I've never been late in

opening the wicket; I've never been careless, and no one's ever complained of a lost letter."

The Seigneur saw her agitation, and was sorry for her. He came to the point as she had done:

"We will have you made postmistress--you alone, Rosalie Evanturel. I've made up my mind to that. But you'll promise not to get married--eh? Anyhow, there's no one in the parish for you to marry. You're too well-born and you've been too well educated for a habitant's wife--and the Cure or I can't marry you."

He was not taken back to see her flush deeply, and it pleased him to see this much life rising to his own touch, this much revelation to give his mind a new interest. He had come to that age when the mind is surprised to find that the things that once charmed charm less, and the things once hated are less acutely repulsive. He saw her embarrassment. He did not know that this was the first time that she had ever thought of marriage since it ceased to be a dream of girlhood, and, by reason of thinking much on a man, had become a possibility, which, however, she had never confessed to herself. Here she was faced by it now in the broad open day: a plain, hard statement, unrelieved by aught save the humour of the shrewd eyes bent upon her.

She did not answer him at once. "Do you promise not to marry so useless a thing as man, and to remain true to the government?" he continued.

"If I wished to marry a man, I should not let the government stand in my way," she said, in brave confusion.

"But do you wish to marry any man?" he asked abruptly, even petulantly.

"I have not asked myself that question, Monsieur, and--should you ask it, unless--" she said, and paused with as pretty and whimsical a glance of merriment as could well be.

He burst out laughing at the swift turn she had given her reply, and at the double suggestion. Then he suddenly changed. A curious expression filled his eyes. A smile, almost beautiful, came to his lips.

"Pon my honour," he said, in a low tone, "you have me caught! And I beg to say--I beg to say," he added, with a flush mounting in his own face, a sudden inspiration in his look, "that if you do not think me too old and crabbed and ugly, and can endure me, I shall be profoundly happy if you will marry me, Rosalie."

He stood upright, holding himself very hard, for this idea had shot into his mind all in an instant, though, unknown to himself, it had been growing for years, cherished by many a kind act to her father and by a simple gratitude on her part. He had spoken without feeling the absurdity of the proposal. He had never married, and he was unprepared to make any statement on such a theme; but now, having made it somehow, he would stand by it, in spite of any and all criticism. He had known Rosalie since her birth, her education was as good as a convent could secure, she was the granddaughter of a notable seigneur, and here she was, as fine a type of health, beauty and character as man could wish--and he was only fifty! Life was getting lonelier for him every day, and, after all, why should he leave distant relations and the Church his worldly goods? All this flashed through his mind as he waited for her

answer. Now it seemed to him that he had meant to say this thing for many years. He had seen an awakening in her--he had suddenly been awakened himself.

"Monsieur, Monsieur," she said in a bewildered way, "do not amuse yourself at my expense."

"Would it be that, then?" he said, with a smile, behind which there was determination and self-will. "I want you to marry me; I do with all my heart. You shall have those ha'pence, and the kisses too, if so be you will take them--or not, as you will, Rosalie."

"Monsieur," she gasped, for something caught her in the throat, and the tears started to her eyes, "ask me to forget that you have ever said those words. Oh, Monsieur, it is not possible, it never could be possible! I am only the postmaster's daughter."

"You are my wife, if you will but say the word," he answered, "and I as proud a husband as the land holds!"

"You were always kind to me, Monsieur," she rejoined, her lips trembling; "won't you be so still?"

"I am too old?" he asked.

"Oh no, it is not that," she replied.

"You have as good manners as my mother had. You need not fear comparison with any lady in the land. Have I not known you all your life? I know the way you have come, and your birth is as good as mine."

"Ah, it is not that, Monsieur!"

"I give you my word that I do not come to you because no one else would have me," he said with a curious simplicity. "I never asked a woman to marry me--never! You are the first. There was talk once--but it was all false. I never meant to ask any one to marry me. But I have the wish now which I never had in my youth. I thought best of myself always; now, I think--I think better of you than--"

"Oh, Monsieur, I beg of you, no more! I cannot; oh, I cannot--"

"You--but no; I will not ask you, Mademoiselle. If you have some one else in your heart, or want some one else there, that is your affair, not mine--undoubtedly. I would have tried to make you happy; you would have had peace and comfort all your life; you could have trusted me--but there it is. . . ." He felt all at once that he was unfair to her, that he had thrust upon her too hard a problem in too troubled an hour.

"I could trust you with my life, Monsieur Rossignol," she replied. "And I love you in a way that a man may be loved to no one's harm or sorrow: it is true that!" She raised her eyes to his simply, trustingly.

He looked at her steadily for a moment. "If you change your mind--"

She shook her head sadly.

"Good, then," he went on, for he thought it wise not to press her now, though he had no intention of taking her no as final. "I'll keep an eye

on you. You'll need me some day soon; I can do things that the Cure can't, perhaps." His manner changed still more. "Now to business," he continued. "Your father has been talking about letters received and sent from the post-office. That is punishable. I am responsible for you both, and if it is reported, if the woman were to report it--you know the letter I mean--there would be trouble. You do not talk. Now I am going to ask the government to make you sole postmistress, with full responsibility. Then you must govern your father--he hasn't as much sense as you."

"Monsieur, we owe you so much! I am deeply grateful, and, whatever you do for us, you may rely on me to do my duty."

They could scarcely hear each other speak now, for the soldiers were coming nearer, and the fife-and-drum bands were screeching, 'Louis the King was a Soldier'.

"Then you will keep the government as your husband?" he asked, with forced humour, as he saw the Cure and the Notary approaching.

"It is less trouble, Seigneur," she answered, with a smile of relief.

M. Rossignol turned to the Cure and the Notary. "I have just offered Mademoiselle a husband she might rule in place of a government that rules her, and she has refused," he said in the Cure's ear, with a dry laugh.

"She's a sensible girl, is Rosalie," said the Cure, not apprehending.

The soldiers were now opposite the church, and riding at their head was the battalion Colonel, also member of the Legislature.

They all moved down, and Rosalie disappeared in the crowd. As the Seigneur and the Cure greeted the Colonel, the latter said:

"At luncheon I'll tell you one of the bravest things ever seen. Happened half-hour ago at the Red Ravine. Man who did it wore an eye-glass--said he was a tailor."

CHAPTER XXV

THE COLONEL TELLS HIS STORY

The Colonel had lunched very well indeed. He had done justice to every dish set before him; he had made a little speech, congratulating himself on having such a well-trained body of men to command, and felicitating Chaudiere from many points of view. He was in great good-humour with himself, and when the Notary asked him--it was at the Manor, with the soldiers resting on the grass without--about the tale of bravery he had promised them, he brought his fist down on the table with great intensity but little noise, and said:

"Chaudiere may well be proud of it. I shall refer to it in the Legislature on the question of roads and bridges--there ought to be a stone fence on that dangerous road by the Red Ravine--Have I your attention?"

He stood up, for he was an excitable and voluble Colonel, and he loved oration as a cat does milk. With a knife he drew a picture of the locale on the table cloth. "Here I was riding on my sorrel, all my noble fellows behind, the fife and drums going as at Louisburg--that day! Martial ardour united to manliness and local pride--follow me? Here we were, Red Ravine left, stump fences and waving fields of grain right. From military point of view, bad position--ravine, stump fence, brave soldiers in the middle, food for powder--catch it?--see?"

He emptied his glass, drew a long breath, and again began, the carving-knife cutting a rhetorical path before him. "I was engaged upon the military problem--demonstration in force, no scouts ahead, no rearguard, ravine on the right, stump fence on the left, red coats, fife-and-drum band, concealed enemy--follow me? Observant mind always sees problems everywhere--unresting military genius accustoms intelligence to all possible contingencies--'stand what I mean?"

The Seigneur took a pinch of snuff, and the Cure, whose mind was benevolent, listened with the gravest interest.

"At the juncture when, in my mind's eye, I saw my gallant fellows enfiladed with a terrible fire, caught in a trap, and I, despairing, spurring on to die at their head--have I your attention?--just at that moment there appeared between the ravine and the road ahead a man. He wore an eye-glass; he seemed an unconcerned spectator of our movements--so does the untrained, unthinking eye look out upon destiny! Not far away was a wagon, in it a man. Wagon bisecting our course from a cross-road--"

He drew a line on the table-cloth with the carving-knife, and the Notary said: "Yes, yes, the concession road."

"So, Messieurs. There were we, a battalion and a fife-and-drum band; there was the man with the eyeglass, the indifferent spectator, yet the engine of fate; there was the wagon, a mottled horse, and a man driving--catch it? The mottled horse took fright at our band, which at that instant strikes up 'The Chevalier Drew his Sabre'. He shies from the road with a leap, the man falls backwards into the wagon, and the reins drop. The horse dashes from the road into the open, and rushes on to the ravine. What good now to stop the fifes and drums--follow me? What can we, an armed force, bandoleered, knapsacked, sworded, rifled, impetuous, brave, what can we do before this tragedy? The man in the wagon senseless, the flying horse, the ravine, death! How futile the power of man--'stand what I mean?"

"Why didn't your battalion shoot the horse?" said the Seigneur drily, taking a pinch of snuff. "Monsieur," said the Colonel, "see the irony, the implacable irony of fate--we had only blank cartridge! But see you, here was this one despised man with an eye-glass, a tailor--takes nine tailors to make a man!--between the ravine and the galloping tragedy. His spirit arrayed itself like an army with banners, prepared to wrestle with death as Jacob wrestled with his shadow all the night 'sieur le Cure!"

The Cure bowed; the Notary shook back his oiled locks in excitement.

"Awoke a whole man--nine-ninths, as in Adam--in the obscure soul of the tailor, and, rushing forward, he seized the mottled horse by the bridle as he galloped upon the chasm: The horse dragged him on--dragged him on

--on--on. We, an army, so to speak, stood and watched the Tailor and the Tragedy! All seemed lost, but, by the decree of fate--"

"The will of God," said the Cure softly.

"By the great decree, the man was able to stop the horse, not a half-dozen feet from the ravine. The horse and the insensible driver were spared death--death. So, Messieurs, does bravery come from unexpected places--see?"

The Seigneur, the Cure, and even the Notary clapped their hands, and murmured praises of the tailor-man. But the Colonel did not yet take his seat.

"But now, mark the sequel," he said. "As I galloped over, I saw the tailor look into the wagon, and turn away quickly. He waited by the horse till I came near, and then walked off without a word. I rode up, and tapped him with my sword upon the shoulder. 'A noble deed, my good man,' said I. 'I approve of your conduct, and I will remember it in the Legislature when I address the committee of the whole house on roads and bridges.' What do you think was his reply to my affable words? When I tapped him approvingly on the shoulder a second time, he screwed his eye-glass in his eye, and, with no emotion, though my own eyes were full of tears, he said, in a tone of affront, 'Look after the man there, constable,' and pointed to the wagon. Constable--mon Dieu! Gross manners even for a tailor!"

"I had not thought his manners bad," said the Cure, as the Colonel sat down, gulped a glass of brandy-andwater, and mopped his forehead.

"A most remarkable tailor," said the Seigneur, peering into his snuff-box.

"And the driver of the mottled horse?" asked the Notary.

"Knocked senseless. One of my captains soon restored him. He followed us into the village. He is a quack-doctor. I suppose he is now selling tinctures, pulling teeth, and driving away rheumatics. He gave me his card. I told him he should leave one on the tailor."

With a flourish he threw a professional card upon the table, before the Cure.

The Cure picked it up and read:

JOHN BROWN, B.A., M.D.,

Healer of Ailments that Defy the Ordinary Skill of Ordinary Medical Men. Rheumatism, Sciatica, Headache, Toothache, Asthma, Ague, Pleurisy, Gout, and all Chronic Diseases Yield Instantly to the Power of his Medicines.

Dr. Brown will publicly treat the most stubborn cases, laying himself open to the derision of mankind if he does not instantly give relief and benefit. His whole career has been a blessing to his fellows, and his journey now through this country, fresh from his studies in the Orient, is to introduce his remedies to a suffering world, for the conquest of malady, not for personal profit.

JOHN BROWN, B.A., M.D.,

Specialist in Chronic Diseases and General Practitioner.

CHAPTER XXVI

A SONG, A BOTTLE, AND A GHOST

All day John Brown, ex-clergyman and quack-doctor, harangued the people of Chaudiere from his gaily-painted wagon. He had the perfect gift of the charlatan, and he had discovered his metier. Inclined to the picturesque by nature, melodramatic and empirical, his earlier career had been the due fruit of habit and education. As a dabbler in mines he had been out of his element. He lacked the necessary reticence, and arsenic had not availed him, though it had tempted Billy Wantage to forgery; and because Billy hid himself behind the dismal opportunity of silence, had ruined the name of a dead man called Charley Steele. Since Charley's death John Brown had never seen Billy: he had left the town one woful day an hour after Billy had told him of the discovery Charley had made. From a far corner of the country he had read the story of Charley's death; of the futile trial of the river-drivers afterwards, ending in acquittal, and the subsequent discovery of the theft of the widows' and orphans' trust-moneys.

On this St. Jean Baptiste's day he was thinking of anything and everything else but Charley Steele. Nothing could have been a better advertisement for him than the perilous incident at the Red Ravine. Falling backwards when the horse suddenly bolted, his head had struck the medicine-chest, and he had lain insensible till brought back to consciousness by the good offices of the voluble Colonel. He had not, therefore, seen Charley. It was like him that his sense of gratitude to the unknown tailor should be presently lost in exploiting the interest he created in the parish. His piebald horse, his white "plug" hat, his gaily painted wagon, his flamboyant manner, and, above all, the marvellous tale of his escape from death, were more exciting to the people of Chaudiere than the militia, the dancing-bears, the shooting-galleries, or the boat-races. He could sing extremely well--had he not trained his own choir when he was a parson? had not Billy approved his comic songs?--and these comic songs, now sandwiched between his cures and his sales, created much laughter. He cured headaches, toothaches, rheumatism, and all sorts of local ailments "with despatch." He miraculously juggled away pains by what he called his Pain Paint, and he stopped a cough by a laugh and a dose of his Golden Pectoral. In the exuberance of trade, which steadily increased till sundown, he gave no thought to the tailor, to whom, however, he had sent by a messenger a two-dollar bill and two bottles of Pain Paint, with the lordly announcement that he would call in the evening and "present his compliments and his thanks." The messenger left the Pain Paint on the door-step of the tailor-shop, and the two dollars he promptly spent at the Trois Couronnes.

Rosalie Evanturel rescued the bottles from the doorstep and awaited Charley's return to his shop, that she might take them over to him, and so have an excuse to speak with him; for to-day her heart and mind were full of him. He had done a brave thing for the medicine-man, and had

then fled from public gaze as a brave man should. There was no one to compare with him. Not even the Cure was his superior in ability, and certainly he was a greater man--though seemingly only a tailor--than M. Rossignol. M. Rossignol--she flushed. Who could have believed that the Seigneur would say those words to her this morning--to her, Rosalie Evanturel, who hadn't five hundred dollars to her name? That she should be asked to be Madame Rossignol! Confusion mingled with her simple pride, and she ran out into the street, to where her father sat listening to the medicine-man singing, in doubtful French:

"I am a waterman bold,
Oh, I'm a waterman bold:
But for my lass I have great fear,
Yes, in the isles I have great fear,
For she is young, and I am old,
And she is bien gentille!"

It was night now. The militia had departed, their Colonel roaring commands at them out of a little red drill-book; the older people had gone to their homes, but festive youth hovered round the booths and sideshows, the majority enjoying themselves at some expense in the medicine-man's encampment.

As Rosalie ran towards the crowd she turned a wistful glance to the tailor-shop. Not a sign of life there! She imagined M'sieu' to be at Vadrome Mountain, until, glancing round the crowd at the quack-doctor's wagon, she saw Jo Portugais gloomily watching the travelling tinker of human bodies. Evidently M'sieu' was not at Vadrome Mountain.

He was not far from her. At the side of the road, under a huge maple-tree with wide-spreading branches, Charley stood and watched John Brown performing behind the flaring oil-lights stuck on poles round his wagon, his hat now on, now off; now singing a comic song in English--'I found Y' in de Honeysuckle Paitch;' now a French chanson--'En Revenant de St. Alban;' now treating a stiff neck or a bent back, or giving momentary help to the palsy of an old man, or again making a speech.

Charley was in touch again with the old life, but in a kind of fantasy only--a staring, high-coloured dream. This man--John Brown--had gone down before his old ironical questioning, had been, indirectly, the means of disgracing his name. A step forward to that wagon, a word uttered, a look, and he would have to face again the life he had put by for ever, would have to meet a hard problem and settle it--to what misery and tragedy, who might say? Under this tree he was M. Mallard, the infidel tailor, whose life was slowly entering into the life of this place called Chaudiere, slowly being acted upon by habit, which, automatically repeated, at length becomes character. Out in that red light, before that garish wagon, he would be Charley Steele, barrister, 'flaneur', and fop, who, according to the world, had misused a wife, misled her brother, robbed widows and orphans, squandered a fortune, become drunkard and wastrel, and at last had lost his life in a disorderly tavern at the Cote Dorion. This man before him had contributed to his disgrace; but once he had contributed to John Brown's disgrace; and to-day he had saved John Brown's life. They were even.

All the night before, all this morning, he had fought a fierce battle with his past--with a raging thirst. The old appetite had swept over him fiercely. All day he had moved in a fevered conflict, which had lifted him away from the small movements of everyday life into a region where

only were himself and one strong foe, who tirelessly strove with him. In his old life he had never had a struggle of any sort. His emotions had been cloaked, his soul masked, there had been a film before his eyes, he had worn an armour of selfishness on a life which had no deep problems, because it had no deep feelings--a life never rising to the intellectual prowess for which it was fitted, save when under the stimulus of liquor.

From the moment he had waked from a long seven months' sleep in the hut on Vadrome Mountain, new deep feelings had come to him as he faced problems of life. Fighting had begun from that hour--a fighting which was putting his nature through bitter mortal exercises, yet, too, giving him a sense of being he had never known. He had now the sweetness of earning daily bread by the work of his hands; of giving to the poor, the needy, and the afflicted; of knowing for the first time in his life that he was not alone in the world. Out of the grey dawn of life a woman's voice had called to him; the look of her face had said to him: "Viens ici! Viens ici!"--"Come to me! Come to me!"

But with that call there was the answer of his soul, the desolating cry of the dispossessed Lear--"Never--never--never--never--never!"

He had not questioned himself concerning Rosalie--had dared not to do so. But now, as he stood under the great tree, within hand-touch of the old life, in imminent danger of being thrust back into it, the question of Rosalie came upon him with all the force of months of feeling behind it. Thus did he argue with himself:

"Do I love her? And if I love her, what is to be done? Marry her, with a wife living? Marry her while charged with a wretched crime? Would that be love? But suppose I never were discovered, and we might live here for ever, I as 'Monsieur Mallard,' in peace and quiet all the days of our life? Would that be love? . . . Could there be love with a vital secret, like, a cloud between, out of which, at any hour, might spring discovery? Could I build our life upon a silence which must be a lie? Would I not have to face the question, Does any one know cause or just impediment why this woman should not be married to this man? Tell Rosalie all, and let the law separate myself and Kathleen? That would mean Billy's ruin and imprisonment, and Kathleen's shame, and it might not bring Rosalie. She is a Catholic, and her Church would not listen to it. Would I have the right to bring trouble into her life? To wrong one woman should seem enough for one lifetime!"

At that instant Rosalie, who had been on the outskirts of the crowd, moved into his line of vision. The glare from the lights fell on her face as she stood by her father's chair, looking curiously at the quack-doctor who, having sold many bottles of his medicines, now picked up a guitar and began singing an old dialect chanson of Saintonge:

"Voici, the day has come
When Rosette leaves her home!
With fear she walks in the sun,
For Raoul is ninety year,
And she not twenty-one.
La petit' Rosette,
She is not twenty-one.

"He takes her by the hand,
And to the church they go;

By parents 'twas well meant,
But is Rosette content?
'Tis gold and ninety year
She walks in the sun with fear,
La petit' Rosette,
Not twenty-one as yet!"

Charley's eyes, which had watched her these months past, noted the deepening colour of the face, the glow in the eyes, the glances of keen but agitated interest towards the singer. He could not translate her looks; and she, on her part, had she been compelled to do so, could only have set down a confusion of sensations.

In Rosette she saw herself, Rosalie Evanturel; in the man "de quatre-vingt-dix ans," who was to marry this Rosette of Saintonge, she saw M. Rossignol. Disconcerting pictures of a possible life with the Seigneur flitted before her mind. She beheld herself, young, fresh-cheeked, with life beating high and all the impulses of youth panting to use, sitting at the head of the seigneurie table. She saw herself in the great pew at Mass, stiff with dignity, old in the way of manorial pride--all laughter dead in her, all spring-time joy overshadowed by the grave decorum of the Manor, all the imagination of her dreaming spirit chilled by the presence of age, however kindly and quaint and cheerful.

She shuddered, and dropped her eyes upon the ground, as, to the laughter and giggling of old and young gathered round the wagon, the medicine-man sang:

"He takes her by the hand,
And to her chamber fair--"

Then, suddenly turning, she vanished into the night, followed by the feeble inquiry of her father's eyes, the anxious look in Charley's.

Charley could not read her tale. He had, however, a hot impulse to follow and ask her if she would vanish from the scene if the medicine-man should sing of Rosette and a man of thirty, not ninety, years. The fight he had had all day with his craving for drink had made him feverish, and all his emotions--unregulated, under the command of his will only--were in high temperature. A reckless feeling seized him. He would go to Rosalie, look into her eyes, and tell her that he loved her, no matter what the penalty of fate. He had never loved a human being, and the sudden impulse to cry out in the new language was driving him to follow the girl whose spirit for ever called to him.

He made a step forward to follow her, but stopped short, recalled to caution and his danger by the voice of the medicine-man:

"I had a friend once--good fellow, bad fellow, cleverest chap I ever knew. Tremendous fop--ladies loved him--cheeks like roses--tongue like sulphuric acid. Beautiful to look at. Clothes like a fashion-plate--got any fashion-plates in Chaudiere? 'who's your tailor?'" he added, in the slang of the hour, with a loud laugh, then stopped suddenly and took off his hat. "I forgot," he added, with upturned eyes and a dramatic seriousness, "your tailor saved my life to-day-henceforth I am the friend of all tailors. Well, to continue. My friend that was--I call him my friend, though he ruined me and ruined others,--didn't mean to, but he did just the same,--he came to a bad end. But he was a great man while he lived. And what I'm coming to is this, the song he used to sing when,

in youthful exuberance, we went on the war-path like our young friend over there"--he pointed to a young habitant farmer, who was trying hard to preserve equilibrium--"Brown's Golden Pectoral will cure that cough, my friend!" he added, as the young man, gloomily ashamed of the laughter of the crowd, hiccupped and turned away to the tree under which Charley Steele stood. "Well," he went on, "I was going to say that my friend's name was Charley, and the song he used to sing when the roosters waked the morn was called 'Champagne Charlie.' He was called 'Champagne Charlie'--till he came to a bad end."

He twanged his guitar, cleared his throat, winked at Maximilian Cour the baker, and began:

"The way I gained my title's by a hobby which I've got
Of never letting others pay, however long the shot;
Whoever drinks at my expense is treated all the same;
Whoever calls himself my friend, I make him drink champagne.
Some epicures like Burgundy, Hock, Claret, and Moselle,
But Moet's vintage only satisfies this champagne swell.
What matter if I go to bed and head is muddled thick,
A bottle in the morning sets me right then very quick.
Champagne Charlie is my name;
Champagne Charlie is my name.
Who's the man with the heart so young,
Who's the man with the ginger tongue?
Champagne Charlie is his name!"

Under the tree, Charley Steele listened to this jaunty epitaph on his old self. At the first words of the coarse song there rushed on him the dreaded thirst. He felt his veins beating with desire, with anger, disgust, and shame; for there was John Brown, to the applause of the crowd, imitating his old manner, his voice, his very look. He started forward, but the drunken young habitant lurched sideways under the tree and collapsed upon the ground, a bottle of whiskey falling out of his pocket and rolling almost to his own feet.

"Champagne Charlie is my name,"

sang the medicine-man. All Charley's old life surged up in him as dyked water suddenly bursts bounds and spreads destruction. He had an uncontrollable impulse. As a starving animal snatches at the first food offered it, he stooped, with a rattle in his throat, seized the bottle, uncorked it, put it to his lips, and drank--drank--drank.

Then he turned and plunged away into the trees. The sound of the song followed him. It came to him, the last refrain, sung loudly to the laughter of the crowd, in imitation of his own voice as it used to be --it had been a different voice during this past year. He turned with headlong intention, and, as the last notes of the song and the applause that followed it, died away, threw back his head and sang out of the darkness:

"Champagne Charlie is my name--"

With a shrill laugh, like the half-mad cry of an outcast soul, he flung away farther into the trees.

There was a sudden silence. The crowd turned with half-apprehensive laughter to the trees. Upon John Brown the effect was startling. His

face blanched, his eyes grew large with terror, his mouth opened in helpless agitation. Charley Steele was lying under the waters of the great river, his bones rotting there for a year, yet here was his voice coming out of the night, in response to his own grotesque imitation of the dead man. Seeing his agitation, women turned pale, men felt their flesh creep, imagination gave a thrilling coldness to the air. For a moment the silence was unbroken. Then John Brown stretched out his hand and said, in a hoarse whisper:

"It was his voice--Charley's voice, and he's been dead a year!"

Within half-an-hour, in utter collapse and fright, he was being driven to the next parish by two young habitants whom he paid to accompany him.

CHAPTER XXVII

OUT ON THE OLD TRAIL

There was one person in the crowd surrounding the medicine-man's wagon who had none of that superstitious thrill which had scattered the habitants into little awe-stricken groups, and then by twos and threes to their homes; none of that fear which had reduced the quack-doctor to such nervous collapse that he would not spend the night in the village. Jo Portugais had recognised the voice--that of Charley Steele the lawyer who had saved him from hanging years ago. It was little like the voice of M'sieu! There was that in it which frightened him. He waited until he had seen the quackdoctor start for the next parish, then he went slowly down the street. There were people still about, so he walked on towards the river. When he returned, the street was empty. Keeping in the shadow of the trees, he went to Charley's house. There was a light in a window. He went to the back door and tried it. It was not locked, and, without knocking, he stepped inside the kitchen. Here was no light, and he passed into the hallway and on to a little room opening from the tailorshop. He knocked; then, not waiting for response, opened the door and entered.

Charley was standing before a mirror, holding a pair of scissors. He turned abruptly, and said forbiddingly: "I am at my toilet!"

Then, turning again to the mirror, with a shrug of the shoulders, he raised the shears to his beard. Before he could use them, Jo's hand was on his arm.

"Stop that, M'sieu!" he said huskily.

Charley had drunk nearly a whole bottle of cheap whiskey within an hour. He was intoxicated, but, as had ever been the case with him, his brain was working clearly, his hand was steady; he was in that wide dream of clear-seeing and clear-knowing which, in old days, had given him glimpses of the real life from which, in the egotism of the non-intime, he had been shut out. Looking at Jo now, he was possessed by a composed intoxication like that in which he had moved during that last night at the Cote Dorion.

But now, with the baleful crust of egotism gone, with every nerve of life exposed, with conscience struggling to its feet from the torpor of

thirty-odd vacant years, he was as two men in one, with different lives and different souls, yet as inseparable in their misery as those poor victims of Gallic tyranny, chained back to back and thrown into the Seine.

Jo's words, insistent and eager, suddenly roused in him some old memory, which stayed his hand.

"Why should I stop?" he asked quietly, and smiling that smile which had infuriated the river-drivers at the Cote Dorion.

"Are you going back, M'sieu?"

"Back where?" Charley's eyes were fixed on Jo with a penetrating intensity, heightened to a strange abstraction, as though he saw not Jo alone, but something great distances beyond.

Jo did not answer this question directly. "Some one came to-day--he is gone; some one may come to-morrow--and stay," he said meaningly.

Charley went over to the fire and sat down on a bench, opening and shutting the scissors mechanically. Jo was in the light, and Charley's eyes again studied him hard.

His memory was industriously feeling its way into the baffling distance.

"What if some one did come-and stay?" he urged quietly.

"You might be recognised without the beard."

"What difference would it make?" Charley's memory was creeping close to the hidden door. It was feeling-feeling for the latch.

"You know best, M'sieu'."

"But what do you know?" Charley's face now had a strained look, and he touched his lips with his tongue. "What John Brown knows, M'sieu'."

There flashed across Charley's mind the fatal newspaper he had read on the day he awakened to memory again in the but on Vadrome Mountain. He remembered that he had put it in the fire. But Jo might have read it before it was spread upon the bench--put it there of purpose for him to read. Yet what reason could Jo have for being silent, for hiding his secret?

There was silence for a space, in which Charley's eyes were like unmoving sparks of steel. He did not see Jo's face--it was in a mist--he was searching, searching, searching. All at once he felt the latch of the hidden door under his finger; he saw a court-room, a judge and jury, and hundreds of excited faces, himself standing in the midst. He saw twelve men file slowly into the room and take their seats--all save one, who stood still in his place and said: "Not guilty, your Honour!" He saw the prisoner leave the box and step down a free man. He saw himself coming out into the staring summer day. He watched the prisoner come to him and touch his arm, and say: "Thank you, M'sieu'. You have saved my life." He saw himself turn to this man:

He roused from his trance, he staggered to his feet, the shears rattled to the floor. Lurching forward, he caught Jo Portugais by the throat,

and said, as he had said outside the court-room years ago:

"Get out of my sight. You're as guilty as hell!"

His grip tightened--tightened on Jo's throat. Jo did not move, though his face grew black. Then, suddenly, the hands relaxed, a bluish paleness swept over the face, and Charley fell sidewise to the floor before Jo could catch him.

All night, alone, the murderer struggled with death over the body of the lawyer who had saved his life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SEIGNEUR GIVES A WARNING

Rosalie had watched a shut door for five days--a door from which, for months past, had come all the light and glow of her life. It framed a figure which had come to represent to her all that meant hope and soul and conscience-and love. The morning after St. Jean Baptiste's day she had awaited the opening door, but it had remained closed. Ensued watchful hours, and then from Jo Portugais she had learned that M'sieu' had been ill and near to death. She had been told the weird story of the medicine-man and the ghostly voice, and, without reason, she took the incident as a warning, and associated it with the man across the way. She was come of a superstitious race, and she herself had heard and seen things of which she never had been able to speak--the footsteps in the church the night she had screwed the little cross to the door again; the tiny round white light by the door of the church; the hood which had vanished into the unknown. One mystery fed another. It seemed to her as if some dreadful event were forward; and all day she kept her eyes fixed on the tailor's door.

Dead--if M'sieu' should die! If M'sieu' should die--it needed all her will to prevent herself from going over and taking things in her own hands, being his nurse, his handmaid, his slave. Duty--to the government, to her father? Her heart cried out that her duty lay where all her life was eddying to one centre. What would the world say? She was not concerned for that, save for him. What, then, would M'sieu' say? That gave her pause. The Seigneur's words the day before had driven her back upon a tide of emotions which carried her far out upon that sea where reason and life's conventions are derelicts, where Love sails with reckless courage down the shoreless main.

"If I could only be near him!" she kept saying to herself. "It is my right. I would give my life, my soul for his. I was with him before when his life was in danger. It was my hand that saved him. It was my love that tended him. It was my soul that kept his secret. It was my faith that spoke for him. It was my heart that ached for him. It is my heart that aches for him now as none other in all the world can. No one on earth could care as I care. Who could there be?" Something whispered in her ear, "Kathleen!" The name haunted her, as the little cross had done. Misery and anger possessed her, and she fought on with herself through dark hours.

Thus five days had gone, until at last a wagon was brought to the door of

the tailor-shop, and M'sieu' came out, leaning on the arm of Jo Portugais. There were several people in the street at the time, and they kept whispering that M'sieu' had been at death's door. He was pale and haggard, with dark hollows under the eyes. Just as he got into the wagon the Cure came up. They shook hands. The Cure looked him earnestly in the face, his lips moved, but no one could have told what he said. As the wagon started, Charley looked across to the post-office. Rosalie was standing a little back from the door, but she stepped forward now. Their eyes met. Her heart beat faster, for there was a look in his eyes she had never seen before--a look of human helplessness, of deep anxiety. It was meant for her--for herself alone. She could not trust herself to go and speak to him. She felt that she must burst into tears. So, with a look of pity and pain, she watched the wagon go down the street.

Rat-tat-tat-tat!--the Seigneur's gold-headed cane rattled on the front door of the tailor-shop. It was plain to be seen his business was urgent.

Madame Dauphin came hurrying from the postoffice, followed by Maximilian Cour and Fillion Lacasse. "Ah, M'sieu', the tailor will not answer. There's no use knocking--not a bit, M'sieu' Rossignol," said Madame.

The Seigneur turned querulously upon the Notary's wife, yet with a glint of hard humour in his eye. He had no love for Madame Dauphin. He thought she took unfair advantages of M. Dauphin, whom also he did not love, but whose temperament did him credit.

"How should Madame know whether or no the gentleman will answer? Does Madame share the gentleman's confidence, perhaps?" he remarked.

Madame did not reply at once. She turned on the saddler and the baker. "I hope you'll learn a lesson," she cried triumphantly. "I've always said the tailor was quite the gentleman; and now you see how your betters call him. No, M'sieu', the gentleman will not answer," she added to the Seigneur.

"He is in bed yet, Madame?"

"His bed is empty there, M'sieu'," she said, impressively, and pointing.

"I suppose I should trust you in this matter; I suppose you should know. But, Dauphin--what does Dauphin say?"

The saddler laughed outright. Maximilian Cour suddenly blushed in sympathy with Madame Dauphin, who now saw the drift of the Seigneur's remarks, and was sensibly agitated, as the Seigneur had meant her to be. Had she not turned Dauphin's human sympathies into a crime? Had not the Notary supported the Seigneur in his friendly offices to Paulette Dubois; and had not Madame troubled her husband's life because of it? Madame bridled up now--with discretion, for it was not her cue to offend the Seigneur.

"All the village knows his bed's empty there, M'sieu'," she said, with tightening lips.

"I am subtracted from the total, then?" he asked drily.

"You have been away for the last five days--"

"Come, now, how did you know that?"

"Everybody knows it. You went away with the Colonel and the soldiers on St. Jean Baptiste's day. Since then M'sieu' the tailor has been ill. I should think Mrs. Flynn would have told you that, M'sieu'."

"H'm! Would you? Well, Mrs. Flynn has been away too--and you didn't know that! What is the matter with Monsieur Mallard?"

"Some kind of fever. On St. Jean Baptiste's day he was taken ill, and that animal Portugais took care of him all night--I wonder how M'sieu' can have the creature about! That St. Jean Baptiste's night was an awful night. Have you heard of what happened, M'sieu'? Ghost or no ghost--"

"Come, come, I want to know about the tailor, not of ghosts," impatiently interrupted the Seigneur. "Tiens! M'sieu', the tailor was ill for three days here, and he would let no one except the Cure and Jo Portugais near him. I went myself to clean up and make some broth, but that toad of a Portugais shut the door in my face. The Cure told us to go home and leave M'sieu' with Portugais. He must be very sick to have that black sheep about him--and no doctor either."

The saddler spoke up now. "I took him a bottle of good brandy and some buttermilk-pop and seed cake--I would give him a saddle if he had a horse--he got my thousand dollars for me! Well, he took them, but what do you think? He sent them right off to the shantyman, Gugon, who has a broken leg. Infidel or no, I'm on his side for sure. And God blesses a cheerful giver, I'm told."

It was the baker's chance, and he took it. "I played 'The Heart Bowed Down'-it is English-under his window, two nights ago, and he sent word for me to come and play it again in the kitchen. Ah, that is a good song, 'The Heart Bowed Down.'"

"You'd be a better baker if you fiddled less," said Madame Dauphin, annoyed at being dropped out of the conversation.

"The soul must be fed, Madame," rejoined the baker, with asperity.

"Where is the tailor now?" said the Seigneur shortly. "At Portugais's on Vadrome Mountain. They say he looked like a ghost when he went. Rosalie Evanturel saw him, but she has no tongue in her head this morning," added Madame.

The Seigneur moved away. "Good-bye to you--I am obliged to you, Madame. Good-bye, Lacasse. Come and fiddle to me some night, Cour."

He bowed to the obsequious three, and then bent his steps towards the post-office. They seemed about to follow him, but he stopped them with a look. The men raised their bonnets-rouges, the woman bowed low, and the Seigneur entered the post-office door.

From the shadows of the office Rosalie had watched the little group before the door of the tailor-shop. She saw the Seigneur coming across the street. Suddenly she flushed deeply, for there came to her mind the song the quack-doctor sang:

"Voila, the day has come
When Rosette leaves her home!

With fear she walks in the sun,
For Raoul is ninety year,
And she not twenty-one."

As M. Rossignol's figure darkened the doorway, she pretended to be busy behind the wicket, and not to see him. He was not sure, but he thought it quite possible that she had seen him coming, and he put her embarrassment down to shyness. Naturally the poor child was not given the chance every day to receive an offer of marriage from a seigneur. He had made up his mind that she would be sure to accept him if he asked her a second time.

"Ah, Ma'm'selle Rosalie," he said gaily, "what have you to say that you should not come before a magistrate at once?"

"Nothing, if Monsieur Rossignol is to be the magistrate," she replied, with forced lightness.

"Good!" He looked at her quizzically through his gold-handled glass. "I can't frighten you, I see. Well, you must wait a little; you shall be sworn in postmistress in three days." His voice lowered, became more serious. "Tell me," he said, "do you know what is the matter with the gentleman across the way?" Turning, he looked across to the tailor-shop, as though he expected "the gentleman" to appear, and he did not see her turn pale. When his look fell on her again, she was self-controlled.

"I do not know, Monsieur."

"You have been opposite him here these months past--did you ever see anything not--not as it should be?"

"With him, Monsieur? Never."

"It is as though the infidel behaved like a good Catholic and a Christian?"

"There are good Catholics in Chaudiere who do not behave like Christians."

"What would you say, for instance, about his past?"

"What should I say about his past, Monsieur? What should I know?"

"You should know more than any one else in Chaudiere. The secrets of his breast might well be bared to you."

She started and crimsoned. Before her eyes there came a mist obscuring the Seigneur, and for an instant shutting out the world. The secrets of his breast--what did he mean? Did he know that on Monsieur's breast was the red scar which . . .

M. Rossignol's voice seemed coming from an infinite distance, and as it came, the mist slowly passed from her eyes.

"You will know, Mademoiselle Rosalie," he was saying, "that while I suggested that the secrets of his breast might well be bared to you, I meant that as an honest lady and faithful postmistress they were not. It was my awkward joke--a stupid gambolling by an old man who ought to know

better."

She did not answer, and he continued:

"You know that you are trusted. Pray accept my apologies."

She was herself again. "Monsieur," she said quietly; "I know nothing of his past. I want to know nothing. It does not seem to me that it is my business. The world is free for a man to come and go in, if he keeps the law and does no ill--is it not? But, in any case, I know nothing. Since you have said so much, I shall say this, and betray no 'secrets of his breast'--that he has received no letter through this office since the day he first came from Vadrome Mountain."

The Seigneur smiled. "A wonderful tailor! How does he carry on business without writing letters?"

"There was a large stock of everything left by Louis Trudel, and not long ago a commercial traveller was here with everything."

"You think he has nothing to hide, then?"

"Have not we all something to hide--with or without shame?" she asked simply.

"You have more sense than any woman in Chaudiere, Mademoiselle."

She shook her head, yet she raised her eyes gratefully to him.

"I put faith in what you say," he continued. "Now listen. My brother, the Abbe, chaplain to the Archbishop, is coming here. He has heard of 'the infidel' of our parish. He is narrow and intolerant--the Abbe. He is going to stir up trouble against the tailor. We are a peaceful people here, and like to be left alone. We are going on very well as we are. So I wanted to talk to Monsieur to-day. I must make up my own mind how to act. The tailor-shop is the property of the Church. An infidel occupies it, so it is said; the Abbe does not like that. I believe there are other curious suspicions about Monsieur: that he is a robber, or incendiary, or something of the sort. The Abbe may take a stand, and the Cure's position will be difficult. What is more, my brother has friends here, fanatics like himself. He has been writing to them. They are men capable of doing unpleasant things--the Abbe certainly is. It is fair to warn the tailor. Shall I leave it to you? Do not frighten him. But there is no doubt he should be warned--fair play, fair play! I hear nothing but good of him from those whose opinions I value. But, you see, every man's history in this parish and in every parish of the province is known. This man, for us, has no history. The Cure even admits there are some grounds for calling him an infidel, but, as you know, he would keep the man here, not drive him out from among us. I have not told the Cure about the Abbe yet. I wished first to talk with you. The Abbe may come at any moment. I have been away, and only find his letters to-day."

"You wish me to tell Monsieur?" interrupted Rosalie, unable to hold silence any longer. More than once during the Seigneur's disclosure she had felt that she must cry out and fiercely repel the base insinuations against the man she loved.

"You would do it with discretion. You are friendly with him, are you not?--you talk with him now and then?"

She inclined her head. "Very well, Monsieur. I will go to Vadrome Mountain to-morrow," she said quietly. Anger, apprehension, indignation, possessed her, but she held herself firmly. The Seigneur was doing a friendly thing; and, in any case, she could have no quarrel with him. There was danger to the man she loved, however, and every faculty was alive.

"That's right. He shall have his chance to evade the Abbe if he wishes," answered M. Rossignol.

There was silence for a moment, in which she was scarcely conscious of his presence; then he leaned over the counter towards her, and spoke in a low voice.

"What I said the other day I meant. I do not change my mind--I am too old for that. Yet I'm young enough to know that you may change yours."

"I cannot change, Monsieur," she said tremblingly.

"But you will change. I knew your mother well, I know how anxious she was for your future. I told her once that I should keep an eye on you always. Her father was my father's good friend. I knew you when you were in the cradle--a little brown-haired babe. I watched you till you went to the convent. I saw you come back to take up the duties which your mother laid down, alas!--"

"Monsieur--!" she said choking, and with a troubled little gesture.

"You must let me speak, Rosalie. We got your father this post-office. It is a poor living, but it keeps a roof over your head. You have never failed us you have always fulfilled our hopes. But the best years of your life are going, and your education and your nature have not their chance. Oh, I've not watched you all these years for nothing. I never meant to ask you to marry me. It came to me, though, all at once, and I know that it has been in my mind all these years--far back in my mind. I don't ask you for my own sake alone. Your father may grow very ill--who can tell what may happen!"

"I should be postmistress still," she said sadly.

"As a young girl you could not have the responsibility here alone. And you should not waste your life it is a fine, full spirit; let the lean, the poor-spirited, go singly. You should be mated. You can't marry any of the young farmers of Chaudiere. 'Tis impossible. I can give you enough for any woman's needs--the world may be yours to see and use to your heart's content. I can give, too"--he drew himself up proudly--"the unused emotions of a lifetime." This struck him as a very fine and important thing to say.

"Ah, Monsieur, that is not enough," she responded. "What more can you want?"

She looked up with a tearful smile. "I will tell you one day, Monsieur."

"What day?"

"I have not picked it out in the calendar."

"Fix the day, and I will wait till then. I will not open my mouth again till then."

"Michaelmas day, then, Monsieur," she answered mechanically and at haphazard, but with an urged gaiety, for a great depression was on her.

"Good. Till Michaelmas day, then!" He pulled his long nose, laughing silently. . . . "I leave the tailor in your hands. Give every man his chance, I say. The Abbe is a hard man, but our hearts are soft--eh, eh, very soft!" He raised his hat and turned to the door.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Always hoping the best from the worst of us
Have not we all something to hide--with or without shame?
In all secrets there is a kind of guilt
Pathetically in earnest
Things that once charmed charm less

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