

The Right of Way, Volume 4.

Gilbert Parker

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Title: The Right of Way, Volume 4.

Author: Gilbert Parker

Release Date: August, 2004 [EBook #6246]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on October 24, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RIGHT OF WAY, PARKER, V3 *****

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THE RIGHT OF WAY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 4.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE WILD RIDE

There had been a fierce thunder-storm in the valley of the Chaudiere. It had come suddenly from the east, had shrieked over the village, levelling fences, carrying away small bridges, and ending in a pelting hail, which whitened the ground with pebbles of ice. It had swept up to Vadrome Mountain, and had marched furiously through the forest, carrying down hundreds of trees, drowning the roars of wild animals and the crying and fluttering of birds. One hour of ravage and rage, and then, spent and bodiless, the storm crept down the other side of the mountain and into the next parish, whither the affrighted quack-doctor had betaken himself. After, a perfect calm, a shining sun, and a sweet smell over all the land, which had thirstily drunk the battering showers.

In the house on Vadrome Mountain the tailor of Chaudiere had watched the storm with sympathetic interest. It was in accord with his own feelings. He had had a hard fight for months past, and had gone down in the storm of his emotions one night when a song called Champagne Charlie had had a weird and thrilling antiphonal. There had been a subsequent debacle for himself, and then a revelation concerning Jo Portugais. Ensued hours and days, wherein he had fought a desperate fight with the present--with himself and the reaction from his dangerous debauch.

The battle for his life had been fought for him by this gloomy woodsman who henceforth represented his past, was bound to him by a measureless gratitude, almost a sacrament--of the damned. Of himself he had played no conscious part in it till the worst was over. On the one side was the Cure, patient, gentle, friendly, never pushing forward the Faith which the good man dreamed should give him refuge and peace; on the other side was the murderer, who typified unrest, secretiveness, an awful isolation, and a remorse which had never been put into words or acts of restitution. For six days the tailor-shop and the life at Chaudiere had been things

almost apart from his consciousness. Ever-recurring memories of Rosalie Eanturel were driven from his mind with a painful persistence. In the shadows where his nature dwelt now he would not allow her good innocence and truth to enter. His self-reproach was the more poignant because it was silent.

Watching the tempest-swept valley, the tortured forest, where wild life was in panic, there came upon him the old impulse to put his thoughts into words, "and so be rid of them," as he was wont to say in other days. Taking from his pocket some slips of paper, he laid them on the table before him. Three or four times he leaned over the paper to write, but the noise of the storm again and again drew his look to the window. The tempest ceased almost as suddenly as it had come, and, as the first sunlight broke through the flying clouds, he mechanically lifted a sheet of the paper and held it up to the light. It brought to his eyes the large water-mark, Kathleen!

A sombre look passed over his face, he shifted in his chair, then bent over the paper and began to write. Words flowed from his pen. The lines of his face relaxed, his eyes lightened; he was lost in a dream. He thought of the present, and he wrote:

"Wave walls to seaward,
Storm-clouds to leeward,
Beaten and blown by the winds of the West;
Sail we encumbered
Past isles unnumbered,
But never to greet the green island of Rest."

He thought of Father Loisel. He had seen the good man's lips tremble at some materialistic words he had once used in their many talks, and he wrote:

"Lips that now tremble,
Do you dissemble
When you deny that the human is best?--
Love, the evangel,
Finds the Archangel?
Is that a truth when this may be a jest?"

"Star-drifts that glimmer
Dimmer and dimmer,
What do ye know of my weal or my woe?
Was I born under
The sun or the thunder?
What do I come from? and where do I go?"

"Rest, shall it ever
Come? Is endeavour
But a vain twining and twisting of cords?
Is faith but treason;
Reason, unreason,
But a mechanical weaving of words?"

He thought of Louis Trudel, in his grave, and his own questioning: "Show me a sign from Heaven, tailorman!" and he wrote:

"What is the token,
Ever unbroken,

Swept down the spaces of querulous years,
Weeping or singing
That the Beginning
Of all things is with us, and sees us, and hears?"

He made an involuntary motion of his hand to his breast, where old Louis Trudel had set a sign. So long as he lived, it must be there to read: a shining smooth scar of excoriation, a sacred sign of the faith he had never been able to accept; of which he had never, indeed, been able to think, so distant had been his soul, until, against his will, his heart had answered to the revealing call in a woman's eyes. He felt her fingers touch his breast as they did that night the iron seared him; and out of this first intimacy of his soul he wrote:

"What is the token?
Bruised and broken,
Bend I my life to a blossoming rod?
Shall then the worst things
Come to the first things,
Finding the best of all, last of all, God?"

Like the cry of his "Aphrodite," written that last afternoon of the old life, this plaint ended with the same restless, unceasing question. But there was a difference. There was no longer the material, distant note of a pagan mind; there was the intimate, spiritual note of a mind finding a foothold on the submerged causeway of life and time.

As he folded up the paper to put it into his pocket, Jo Portugais entered the room. He threw in a corner the wet bag which had protected his shoulders from the rain, hung his hat on a peg of the chimney-piece, nodded to Charley, and put a kettle on the little fire.

"A big storm, M'sieu'," Jo said presently as he put some tea into a pot.

"I have never seen a great storm in a forest before," answered Charley, and came nearer to the window through which the bright sun streamed.

"It always does me good," said Jo. "Every bird and beast is awake and afraid and trying to hide, and the trees fall, and the roar of it like the roar of the chasse-galerie on the Kimash River."

"The Kimash River--where is it?"

Jo shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows!"

"Is it a legend, then?"

"It is a river."

"And the chasse-galerie?"

"That is true, M'sieu', no matter what any one thinks. I know; I have seen--I have seen with my own eyes." Jo was excited now.

"I am listening." He took a cup of tea from Portugais and drank eagerly.

"The Kimash River, M'sieu', that is the river in the air. On it is the chasse-galerie. You sell your soul to the devil; you ask him to help you; you deny God. You get into a canoe and call on the devil. You are

lifted up, canoe and all, and you rush on down rapids, over falls, on the Kimash River in the air. The devil stands behind you and shouts, and you sing, 'V'la! l'bon vent! V'la l'joli vent!' On and on you go, faster and faster, and you forget the world, and you forget yourself, and the devil is with you in the air--in the chasse-galerie on the Kimash River."

"Jo," said Charley Steele, "do you honestly think there's a river like that?"

'M'sieu', I know it. I saw Ignace Latoile, who robbed a priest and got drunk on the communion wine--I saw him with the devil in the Black Canoe at the Saguenay. I could see Ignace; I could see the devil; I could see the Kimash River. I shall ride myself some day.

"Ride where?"

"What does it matter where?"

"Why should you ride?"

"Because you ride fast with the devil."

"What is the good of riding fast?"

"In the rush a man forget."

"What does he forget, my friend?"

There was a pause, in which a man with a load of crime upon his soul dwelt upon the words my friend, coming from the lips of one who knew the fulness of his iniquity. Then he answered:

"In the noise he forget that a voice is calling in his ear, 'You did It!' He forget what he see in his dreams. He forget the hand that touch him on the arm when he walk in the woods alone, or lie down to sleep at night, no one near. He forget that some one wait--wait--wait, till he has suffer long enough, or till, one day, he think he is happy again, and the Thing he did is far off like a dream--to drag him out to the death he did not die. He forget that he is alone--all alone in the world, for ever and ever and ever."

He suddenly sank upon the floor beside Charley, and a groan burst from his lips. "To have no friend--ah, it is so awful!" he said. "Never to see a face that look into yours, and know how bad are you, and doesn't mind. For five years I have live like that. I cannot let any one be my friend because I was that! They seem to know--everything, everybody--what I am. The little children when I pass them run away to hide. I have wake in the night and cry out in fear, it is so lonely. I have hear voices round me in the woods, and I run and run and run from them, and not leave them behind. Three times I go to the jails in Quebec to see the prisoners behind the bars, and watch the pains on their faces, to understand what I escape. Five times have I go to the courts to listen to murderers tried, and watch them when the Jury say Guilty! and the Judge send them to death--that I might know. Twice have I go to see murderers hung. Once I was helper to the hangman, that I might hear and know what the man said, what he felt. When the arms were bound, I felt the straps on my own; when the cap come down, I gasp for breath; when the bolt is shot, I feel the wrench and the choke, and shudder go through myself--feel the world jerk out in the dark. When the body is bundled in

the pit, I see myself lie still under the quick-lime with the red mark round my throat."

Charley touched him on the shoulder. "Jo--poor Jo, my friend!" he said. Jo raised his eyes, red with an unnatural fire, deep with gratitude.

"As I sit at my dinner, with the sun shining and the woods green and glad, and all the world gay, I have see what happened all over again. I have see his strong hands; his bad face laugh at my words; I have see him raise his riding-whip and cut me across the head. I have see him stagger and fall from the blows I give him with the knife--the knife which never was found--why, I not know, for I throw it on the ground beside him! There, as I sit in the open day, a thousand times I have see him shiver and fall, staring, staring at me as if he see a dreadful thing. Then I stand up again and strike at him--at his ghost!--as I did that day in the woods. Again I see him lie in his blood, straight and white--so large, so handsome, so still! I have shed tears--but what are tears! Blind with tears I have call out for the devils of hell to take me with them. I have call on God to give me death. I have prayed, and I have cursed. Twice I have travelled to the grave where he lies. I have knelt there and have beg him to tell the truth to God, and say that he torture me till I kill him. I have beg him to forgive me and to haunt me no more with his bad face. But never--never--never--have I one quiet hour until you come, M'sieu'; nor any joy in my heart till I tell you the black truth--M'sieu'! M'sieu!"

He buried his face between Charley's feet, and held them with his hands.

Charley laid a hand on the shaggy head as though it were that of a child. "Be still--be still, Jo," he said gently.

Since that night of St. Jean Baptiste's festival, no word of the past, of the time when Charley turned aside the revanche of justice from a man called Joseph Nadeau, had been spoken between them. Out of the delirium of his drunken trance had come Charley's recognition of the man he knew now as Jo Portugais. But the recognition had been sent again into the obscurity whence it came, and had not been mentioned since. To outward seeming they had gone on as before. As Charley saw the knotted brows, the staring eyes, the clinched hands, the figure of the woodsman rigid in its agony of remorse, he said to himself: "What right had I to save this man's life? To have paid for his crime would have been easier for him. I knew he was guilty. Perhaps it was my duty to see that every condition, to the last shade of the law, was satisfied, but was it justice to the poor devil himself? There he sits with a load on him that weighs him down every hour of his life. I called him back; I gave him life; but I gave him memory and remorse, and the ghosts that haunt him: the voice in his ear, the touch on his arm, the some one that is 'waiting--waiting--waiting!' That is what I did, and that is what the brother of the Cure did for me. He drew me back. He knew I was a drunkard, but he drew me back. I might have been a murderer like Portugais. The world says I was a thief, and a thief I am until I prove to the world I am innocent--and wreck three lives! How much of Jo's guilt is guilt? How much remorse should a man suffer to pay the debt of a life? If the law is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, how much hourly remorse and torture, such as Jo's, should balance the eye or the tooth or the life? I wonder, now!"

He leaned over, and, helping Jo to his feet, gently forced him down upon a bench near. "All right, Jo, my friend," he said. "I understand.

We'll drink the gall together."

They sat and looked at each other in silence.

At length Charley leaned over and touched Jo on the shoulder.

"Why did you want to save yourself?" he said.

At that instant there was a knock at the door, and a voice said:
"Monsieur!--Monsieur!"

Jo sprang to his feet with a sharp exclamation, then went heavily to the door and threw it open.

CHAPTER XXX

ROSALIE WARNS CHARLEY

Charley's eyes met Rosalie's with a look the girl had never seen in them before. It gave a glow to his haggard face.

Rosalie turned to Jo and greeted him with a friendlier manner than was her wont towards him. The nearer she was to Charley, the farther away from him, to her mind, was Portugais, and she became magnanimous.

Jo nodded awkwardly and left the room. Looking after the departing figure, Rosalie said: "I know he has been good to you, but--but do you trust him, Monsieur?"

"Does not everybody in Chaudiere trust him?"

"There is one who does not, though perhaps that's of no consequence."

"Why do you not trust him?"

"I don't know. I never knew him do a bad thing; I never heard of a bad thing he has done; and--he has been good to you."

She paused, flushing as she felt the significance of her words, and continued: "Yet there is--I cannot tell what. I feel something. It is not reasonable to go upon one's feelings; but there it is, and so I do not trust him."

"It is the way he lives, here in these lonely woods--the mystery around him."

A change passed over her. With the first glow of meeting the object of her visit had receded, though since her last interview with the Seigneur she had not rested a moment, in her anxiety to warn him of his danger. "Oh, no," she said, lifting her eyes frankly to his: "oh, no, Monsieur! It is not that. There is mystery about you!" She felt her heart beating hard. It almost choked her, but she kept on bravely. "People say strange and bad things about you. No one knows"--she trembled under the painful inquiry of his eyes. Then she gained courage and went on, for she must make it clear she trusted him, that she took him at his word, before she told him of the peril before him--"No one knows where you came

from . . . and it is nobody's business. Some people do not believe in you. But I believe in you--I should believe in you if every one doubted; for there is no feeling in me that says, 'He has done some wicked thing that stands-between us.' It isn't the same as with Portugais, you see--naturally, it could not be the same."

She seemed not to realise that she was telling more of her own heart than she had ever told. It was a revelation, having its origin in an honesty which impelled a pure outspokenness to himself. Reserve, of course, there had been elsewhere, for did not she hold a secret with him? Had she not hidden things, equivocated else where? Yet it had been at his wish, to protect the name of a dead man, for the repose of whose soul masses were now said, with expensive candles burning. For this she had no repentance; she was without logic where this man's good was at stake.

Charley had before him a problem, which he now knew he never could evade in the future. He could solve it by none of the old intellectual means, but by the use of new faculties, slowly emerging from the unexplored fastnesses of his nature.

"Why should you believe in me?" he asked, forcing himself to smile, yet acutely alive to the fact that a crisis was impending. "You, like all down there in Chaudiere, know nothing of my past, are not sure that I haven't been a hundred times worse than you think poor Jo there. I may have been anything. You may be harbouring a man the law is tracking down."

In all that befell Rosalie Evanturel thereafter, never could come such another great resolute moment. There was nothing to support her in the crisis but her own faith. It needed high courage to tell this man who had first given her dreams, then imagination, hope, and the beauty of doing for another's well-being rather than for her own--to tell this man that he was a suspected criminal. Would he hate her? Would his kindness turn to anger? Would he despise her for even having dared to name the suspicion which was bringing hither an austere Abbe and officers of the law?

"We are harbouring a man the law is tracking down," she said with an infinite appeal in her eyes.

He did not quite understand. He thought that perhaps she meant Jo, and he glanced towards the door; but she kept her eyes on him, and they told him that she meant himself. He chilled, as though ether were being poured through his veins.

Did the world know, then, that Charley Steele was alive? Was the law sending its officers to seize the embezzler, the ruffian who had robbed widow and orphan?

If it were so. . . . To go back to the world whence he came, with the injury he must do to others, and the punishment also that he must suffer, if he did not tell the truth about Billy! And Chaudiere, which, in spite of all, was beginning to have a real belief in him--where was his contempt for the world now! . . . And Rosalie, who trusted him--this new element rapidly grew dominant in his thoughts--to be the common criminal in her eyes!

His paleness gave way to a flush as like her own as could be.

"You mean me?" he asked quietly.

She had thought that his flush meant anger, and she was surprised at the quiet tone. She nodded assent. "For what crime?" he asked.

"For stealing."

His heart seemed to stand still. Then, it had come in spite of all it had come. Here was his resurrection, and the old life to face.

"What did I steal?" he asked with dull apathy. "The gold vessels from the Catholic Cathedral of Quebec, after--after trying to blow up Government House with gunpowder."

His despair passed. His face suddenly lighted. He smiled. It was so absurd. "Really!" he said. "When was the place blown up?"

"Two days before you came here last year--it was not blown up; an attempt was made."

"Ah, I did not know. Why was the attempt made to blow it up?"

"Some Frenchman's hatred of the English, they say."

"But I am not French."

"They do not know. You speak French as perfectly as English--ah, Monsieur, Monsieur, I believe you are whatever you say." Pain and appeal rang from her lips.

"I am only an honest tailor," he answered gently. He ruled his face to calmness, for he read the agony in the girl's face, and troubled as he was, he wished to show her that he had no fear.

"It is for what you were they will arrest you," she said helplessly, and as though he needed to have all made clear to him. "Oh, Monsieur," she continued, in a broken voice, "it would shame me so to have you made a prisoner in Chaudiere--before all these silly people, who turn with the wind. I should not lift my head--but yes, I should lift my head!" she added hurriedly. "I should tell them all they lied--every one--the idiots! The Seigneur--"

"Well, what of the Seigneur-Rosalie?"

Her own name on his lips--the sound of it dimmed her eyes.

"Monsieur Rossignol does not know you. He neither believes nor disbelieves. He said to me that if you wanted consideration, to command him, for in Chaudiere he had heard nothing but good of you. If you stayed, he would see that you had justice--not persecution. I saw him two hours ago."

She said the last words shyly, for she was thinking why the Seigneur had spoken as he did--that he had taken her opinion of Monsieur as his guide, and she had not scrupled to impress him with her views. The Seigneur was in danger of becoming prejudiced by his sentiments.

A wave of feeling passed over Charley, a rushing wave of sympathy for this simple girl, who, out of a blind confidence, risked so much for him.

Risk there certainly was, if she--if she cared for him. It was cruelty not to reassure her.

Touching his breast, he said gravely: "By this sign here, I am not guilty of the crime for which they come to seek me, Rosalie. Nor of any other crime for which the law might punish me--dear, noble friend."

He did so little to get such rich return. Her eyes leaped up to brighter degrees of light, her face shone with a joy it had never reflected before, her blood rushed to her finger-tips. She abruptly sat down in a chair and buried her face in her hands, trembling. Then, lifting her head slowly, after a moment she spoke in a tone that told him her faith, her gratitude--not for reassurance, but for confidence, which is as water in a thirsty land to a woman.

"Oh, Monsieur, I thank you, I thank you from the depth of my heart; and my heart is deep indeed, very, very deep--I cannot find what lies lowest in it! I thank you, because you trust me, because you make it so easy to--to be your friend; to say 'I know' when any one might doubt you. One has no right to speak for another till--till the other has given confidence, has said you may. Ah, Monsieur, I am so happy!"

In very abandonment of heart she clasped her hands and came a step nearer to him, but abruptly stopped still; for, realising her action, timidity and embarrassment rushed upon her.

Charley understood, and again his impulse was to say what was in his heart and dare all; but resolution possessed him, and he said quickly:

"Once, Rosalie, you saved me--from death perhaps. Once your hands helped my pain--here." He touched his breast. "Your words now, and what you do, they still help me--here . . . but in a different way. The trouble is in my heart, Rosalie. You are glad of my confidence? Well, I will give you more. . . . I cannot go back to my old life. To do so would injure others--some who have never injured me and some who have. That is why. That is why I do not wish to be taken to Quebec now on a false charge. That is all I can say. Is it enough?"

She was about to answer, but Jo Portugais entered, exclaiming. "M'sieu'," he cried, "men are coming with the Seigneur and Cure."

Charley nodded at Jo, then turned to Rosalie. "You need not be seen if you go out by the back way, Mademoiselle." He held aside the bear-skin curtain of the door that led into the next room.

There was a frightened look in her face. "Do not fear for me," he continued. "It will come right--somehow. You have done more for me than any one has ever done or ever will do. I will remember till the last moment of my life. Good-bye."

He laid a hand on her shoulder and gently pushed her from the room.

"God protect you! The Blessed Virgin speak for you! I will pray for you," she whispered.

CHARLEY STANDS AT BAY

Charley turned quickly to the woodsman. "Listen," he said, and he told Jo how things stood.

"You will not hide, M'sieu'? There is time," Jo asked.

"I will not hide, Jo."

"What will you do?"

"I'll decide when they come."

There was silence for a moment, then the sound of voices on the hill-side.

Charley's soul rose up in revolt against the danger that faced him--not against personal peril, but the danger of being dragged back again into the life he had come from, with all that it involved--the futility of this charge against him! To be the victim of an error--to go to the bar of justice with the hand of injustice on his arm!

All at once the love of this new life welled up in him, as a spring of water overflows its bounds. A voice kept ringing in his ears, "I will pray for you." Subconsciously his mind kept saying, "Rosalie--Rosalie--Rosalie!" There was nothing now that he would not do to avert his being taken away upon this ridiculous charge. Mistaken identity? To prove that, he must at once prove himself--who he was, whence he came. Tell the Cure, and make it a point of honour for his secret to be kept? But once told, the new life would no longer stand by itself as the new life, cut off from all contact with the past. Its success, its possibility, must lie in its absolute separateness, with obscurity behind--as though he had come out of nothing into this very room, on that winter morning when memory returned.

It was clear that he must, somehow, evade the issue. He glanced at Jo, whose eyes, strained and painful, were fixed upon the door. Here was a man who suffered for his sake. . . . He took a step forward, as though with sudden resolve, but there came a knocking, and, pausing, he motioned Jo to open the door. Then, turning to a shelf, he took something from it hastily, and kept it in his hand.

Jo roused himself with an effort, and opened to the knocking.

Three people entered: the Seigneur, the Cure, and the Abbe Rossignol, an ascetic, severe man, with a face of intolerance and inflexibility. Two constables in plain clothes followed; one stolid, one alert, one English and one French, both with grim satisfaction in their faces--the successful exercise of his trade is pleasant to every craftsman. When they entered, Charley was standing with his back to the fireplace, his eye-glass adjusted, one hand stroking his beard, the other held behind his back.

The Cure came forward and shook hands in an eager friendly way.

"My dear Monsieur," said he, "I hope that you are better."

"I am quite well, thank you, Monsieur le Cure," answered Charley.

"I shall get back to work on Monday, I hope."

"Yes, yes, that is good," responded the Cure, and seemed confused. He turned uneasily to the Seigneur. "You have come to see my friend Portugais," Charley remarked slowly, almost apologetically. "I will take my leave." He made a step forward. The two constables did the same, and would have laid their hands upon his shoulder but that the Seigneur said tartly:

"Stand off, Jack-in-boxes!"

The two stood aside, and looked covertly at the Seigneur, whose temper seemed unusually irascible. Charley's face showed no surprise, but he looked inquiringly at the Cure.

"If they wish to be measured for uniforms--or manners--I will see them at my shop," he said.

The Seigneur chuckled. Charley stepped again towards the door. The two constables stood before it. Again he turned inquiringly, this time towards the Cure. The Cure did not speak.

"It is you we wish to see, tailor," said the Abbe Rossignol.

Soft-tongued irony leaped to Charley's lips: "Have I, then, the honour of including Monsieur among my customers? I cannot recall Monsieur's figure. I think I should not have forgotten it."

It was now the old Charley Steele, with the new body, the new spirit, but with the old skilful mind, aggravatingly polite, non-intime--the intolerant face of this father of souls irritated him.

"I never forget a figure which has idiosyncrasy," he added, with a bland eye wandering over the priest's gaunt form. It was his old way to strike first and heal after--"a kick and a lick," as old Paddy Wier, whom he once saved from prison, said of him. It was like bygone years of another life to appear in defence when the law was tightening round a victim. The secret spring had been touched, the ancient machinery of his mind was working almost automatically.

The illusion was considerable, for the Seigneur had taken the only arm-chair in the room, a little apart, as it were, filling the place of judge. The priest-brother, cold and inveterate, was like the attorney for the crown. The Cure was the clerk of the court, who could only echo the decisions of the Judge. The constables were the machinery of the Law, and Jo Portugais was the unwilling witness, whose evidence would be the crux of the case. The prisoner--he himself was prisoner and prisoner's counsel.

A good struggle was forward.

He had enraged the Abbe as much as he had delighted the Abbe's brother; for nothing gave the Seigneur such pleasure as the discomfiture of the Abbe Rossignol, chaplain and ordinary to the Archbishop of Quebec. The genial, sympathetic nature of the Seigneur could not even be patient with the excessive piety of the churchman, who, in rigid righteousness, had thrashed him cruelly as a boy. At Charley's words upon the Abbe's figure, gaunt and precise as a swaddled ramrod, he pulled his nose with a grunt of satisfaction.

The Cure, the peace-maker, intervened. The tailor's meaning was sufficiently clear: if they had come to see him personally, then it was natural for him to wish to know the names and stations of his guests, and their business. The Seigneur was aware that the tailor did know, and he enjoyed the 'sang-froid' with which he was meeting the situation.

"Monsieur," said the Cure, in a mollifying voice, "I have ventured to bring the Seigneur of Chaudiere"--the Seigneur stood up and bowed gravely--"and his brother, the Abbe Rossignol, who would speak with you on private business"--he ignored the presence of the constables.

Charley bowed to the Seigneur and the Abbe, then turned inquiringly towards the two constables. "Friends of my brother the Abbe," said the Seigneur maliciously.

"Their names, Monsieur?" asked Charley.

"They have numbers," answered the Seigneur whimsically--to the Cure's pain, for levity seemed improper at such a time.

"Numbers of names are legally suspicious, numbers for names are suspiciously legal," rejoined Charley. "You have pierced the disguise of discourtesy," said the Seigneur, and, on the instant, he made up his mind that whatever the tailor might have been, he was deserving of respect.

"You have private business with me, Monsieur?" asked Charley of the Abbe.

The Abbe shook his head. "The business is not private, in one sense. These men have come to charge you with having broken into the cathedral at Quebec and stolen the gold vessels of the altar; also with having tried to blow up the Governor's residence."

One of the constables handed Charley the warrant. He looked at it with a curious smile. It was so natural, yet so unnatural, to be thus in touch with the habits of far-off times.

"On what information is this warrant issued?" he asked.

"That is for the law to show in due course," said the priest.

"Pardon me; it is for the law to show now. I have a right to know."

The constables shifted from one foot to the other, looked at each other meaningly, and instinctively felt their weapons.

"I believe," said the Seigneur evenly, "that--" The Abbe interrupted. "He can have information at his trial."

"Excuse me, but the warrant has my endorsement," said the Seigneur, "and, as the justice most concerned, I shall give proper information to the gentleman under suspicion." He waved a hand at the Abbe, as at a fractious child, and turned courteously to Charley.

"Monsieur," he said, "on the tenth of August last the cathedral at Quebec was broken into, and the gold altar-vessels were stolen. You are suspected. The same day an attempt was made to blow up the Governor's residence. You are suspected."

"On what ground, Monsieur?"

"You appeared in this vicinity three days afterwards with an injury to the head. Now, the incendiary received a severe blow on the head from a servant of the Governor. You see the connection, Monsieur?"

"Where is the servant of the Governor, Monsieur?"

"Dead, unfortunately. He told the story so often, to so much hospitality, that he lost his footing on Mountain Street steps--you remember Mountain Street steps possibly, Monsieur?--and cracked his head on the last stone."

There was silence for a moment. If the thing had not been so serious, Charley must have laughed outright. If he but disclosed his identity, how easy to dispose of this silly charge! He did not reply at once, but looked calmly at the Abbe. In the pause, the Seigneur added "I forgot to add that the man had a brown beard. You have a brown beard, Monsieur."

"I had not when I arrived here."

Jo Portugais spoke. "That is true, M'sieu'; and what is more, I know a newly shaved face when I see it, and M'sieu's was tanned with the sun. It is foolish, that!"

"This is not the place for evidence," said the Abbe sharply.

"Excuse me, Abbe," said his brother; "if Monsieur wishes to have a preliminary trial here, he may. He is in my seigneurie; he is a tenant of the Church here--"

"It is a grave offence that an infidel, dropping down here from, who knows where--that an acknowledged infidel should be a tenant of the Church!"

"The devil is a tenant of the Almighty, if creation is the Almighty's," said Charley.

"Satan is a prisoner," snapped the Abbe.

"With large domains for exercise," retorted Charley, "and in successful opposition to the Church. If it is true that the man you charge is an infidel, how does that warrant suspicion?"

"Other thefts," answered the Abbe. "A sacred iron cross was stolen from the door of the church of Chaudiere. I have no doubt that the thief of the gold vessels of the cathedral was the thief of the iron cross."

"It is not true," sullenly broke in Jo Portugais.

"What proof have you?" said the Seigneur. Charley waved a deprecating hand towards Jo.

"I shall not call Portugais as evidence," he said.

"You are conducting your own case?" asked the Seigneur, with a grim smile.

"It is dangerous, I believe."

"I will take my chances," answered Charley. "Will you tell me what object the criminal could have in stealing the gold vessels from the cathedral?" he added, turning to the Abbe.

"They were gold!"

"And for taking the cross from the door of the church in Chaudiere?"

"It was sacred, and he was an infidel, and hated it."

"I do not see the logic of the argument. He stole the vessels because they were valuable, and the iron cross because he was an infidel! Now how do you know that the suspected criminal was an infidel, Monsieur?"

"It is well known."

"Has he ever said so?"

"He does not deny it."

"If you were charged with being an opium-eater, does it follow that you are one because you do not deny it? There was a Man who was said to blaspheme, to have all 'the crafts and assaults of the devil'--was it His duty to deny it? Suppose you were accused of being a highwayman, would you be less a highwayman if you denied it? Or would you be less guilty if you denied it?"

"That is beside the case," said the priest with acerbity.

"Faith, I think it is the case itself," said the Seigneur with a satisfied pull of his nose.

"But do you seriously suggest that only infidels rob churches?" Charley persisted.

"I am not here to be cross-examined," answered the Abbe harshly. "You are charged with robbing the cathedral and trying to blow up the Governor's residence. Arrest him!" he added, turning to the constables.

"Stand where you are, men," sharply threatened the Seigneur. "There are no lettres de cachet nowadays, Francois," he added tartly to his brother.

"If it is the exclusive temptation of an infidel to rob a church, has infidelity also an inherent penchant for arson? Is it a patent? Why did the infidel blow up the Governor's residence?" continued Charley.

"He did not blow it up, he only tried," interposed the Cure softly.

"I was not aware," said Charley. "Well, did the man who stole the patens from the altar--"

"They were chalices," again interrupted the Cure, with a faint smile.

"Ah, I was not aware!" again rejoined Charley. "I repeat, what reason had the person who stole the chalices to try to blow up the Governor's residence? Is it a sign of infidelity, or--"

"You can answer for that yourself," angrily interposed the Abbe. The strain was telling on his nerves.

"It is fair to give reasons for the suspicion," urged the Seigneur acidly.

"As I said before, Francois, this is not the fifteenth century."

"He hated the English government," said the Abbe. "I do not understand," responded Charley. "Am I then to suppose that the alleged criminal was a Frenchman as well as an infidel?"

There was silence, and Charley continued. "It is an unusual thing for a French Abbe to be so concerned for the safety of an English Protestant's life and housing . . . the Governor is a Protestant--eh? That is, indeed, a zeal almost Christian--or millennial."

The Abby turned to the Seigneur. "Are you going to interfere longer with the process of the law?"

"I think Monsieur has not quite finished his argument," said the Seigneur, with a twist of the mouth.

"If the man was a Frenchman, why do you suspect the tailor of Chaudiere?" asked Charley softly. "Of course I understand the reason behind all: you have heard that the tailor is an infidel; you have protested to the good Cure here, and the Cure is a man who has a sense of justice, and will not drive a poor man from his parish by Christian persecution--without cause. Since certain dates coincide and impulses urge, you suspect the tailor. Again, according to your mind, a man who steals holy vessels must needs be an infidel; therefore a tailor in Chaudiere, suspected of being an infidel, stole the holy chalices. It might seem a fair case for a grand jury of clericals. But it breaks down in certain places. Your criminal is a Frenchman; the tailor of Chaudiere is an Englishman."

The Abbe's face was contracted with stubborn annoyance, though he held his tongue from violence. "Do you deny that you are French?" he asked tartly.

"I could almost endure the suspicion because of the compliment to my command of your charming language."

"Prove that you are an Englishman. No one knows where you came from; no one knows what you are. You are a fair subject for suspicion, apart from the evidence shown," said the Abbe, trying now to be as polite as the tailor.

"This is a free country. So long as the law is obeyed, one can go where one wills without question, I take it."

"There is a law of vagrancy."

"I am a householder, a tenant of the Church, not a vagrant."

"Monsieur, you can have your choice of proving these things here or in Quebec," said the Abbe, with angry impatience again.

"I may not be compelled to prove anything. It is the privilege of the law to prove the crime against me."

"You are a very remarkable tailor," said the Abbe sarcastically.

"I have not had the honour of making you even a cassock, I think. Monsieur le Cure, I believe, approves of those I make for him. He has a good figure, however."

"You refuse to identify yourself?" asked the Abbe, with asperity.

"I am not aware that you possess any right to ask me to do so."

The Abbe's thin lips clipped-to like shears. He turned again towards the officers.

"It would relieve the situation," interposed the Seigneur, "if Monsieur could find it possible to grant the Abbe's demand."

Charley bowed to the Seigneur. "I do not know why I should be taken for a Frenchman or an infidel. I speak French well, I presume, but I spoke it from the cradle. I speak English with equally good accent," he added, with the glimmer of a smile; for there was a kind of exhilaration in the little contest, even with so much at stake. This miserable, silly charge had that behind it which might open up a grave, make its dead to walk, fright folk from their senses, and destroy their peace for ever. Yet he was cool and thinking clearly. He measured up the Abbe in his mind, analysed him, found the vulnerable spot in his nature, the avenue to the one place lighted by a lamp of humanity. He leaned a hand upon the ledge of the chimney where he stood, and said, in a low voice:

"Monsieur l'Abbe, it is sometimes the misfortune of just men to be terribly unjust. 'For conscience sake' is another name for prejudice--for those antipathies which, natural to us, are, at the same time, trap-doors, for our just intentions. You, Monsieur, have a radical antipathy to those men who are unable to see or to feel what you were privileged to see and feel from the time of your birth. You know that you are right. Do you think that those who do not see as you do are wicked because they were not given what you were given? If you are right, may they, poor folk! not be the victims of their blindness of heart--of the darkness born with them, or of the evils that overtake them? For conscience sake, you would crush out evil. To you an infidel--so called--is an evil-doer, a peril to the peace of God. You drive him out from among the faithful. You heard that a tailor of Chaudiere was an infidel. You did not prove him one, but you, for conscience sake, are trying to remove him, by fixing on him a crime of which he may, with slight show of reason, be suspected. But I ask you, would you have taken the same deep interest in setting the law upon this suspected man did you not believe him to be an infidel?"

He paused. The Abbe made no reply. The Cure was bending forward eagerly; the Seigneur sat with his hands over the top of his cane, his chin on his hands, never taking his eyes from him, save to glance once or twice at his brother. Jo Portugais was crouched on the bench, watching.

"I do not know what makes an infidel," Charley went on. "Is it an honest mind, a decent life, an austerity of living as great as that of any priest, a neighbourliness that gives and takes in fairness--"

"No, no, no," interposed the Cure eagerly. "So you have lived here, Monsieur; I can vouch for that. Charity and a good heart have gone with

you always."

"Do you mean that a man is an infidel because he cannot say, as Louis Trudel said to me, 'Do you believe in God?' and replies, as I replied, 'God knows!' Is that infidelity? If God is God, He alone knows when the mind or the tongue can answer in the terms of that faith which you profess. He knows the secret desires of our hearts, and what we believe, and what we do not believe; He knows better than we ourselves know--if there is a God. Does a man conjure God, if he does not believe in God? 'God knows!' is not a statement of infidelity. With me it was a phrase--no more. You ask me to bare my inmost soul. I have not learned how to confess. You ask me to lay bare my past, to prove my identity. For conscience sake you ask that, and I for conscience sake say I will not, Monsieur. You, when you enter your priestly life, put all your past behind you. It is dead for ever: all its deeds and thoughts and desires, all its errors--sins. I have entered on a life here which is to me as much a new life as your priesthood is to you. Shall I not have the right to say, that may not be disinterred? Have I not the right to say, Hands off? For the past I am responsible, and for the past I will speak from the past; but for the deeds of the present I will speak only from the present. I am not a Frenchman; I did not steal the little cross from the church door here, nor the golden chalices in Quebec; nor did I seek to injure the Governor's residence. I have not been in Quebec for three years."

He ceased speaking, and fixed his eyes on the Abbe, who now met his look fairly.

"In the way of justice, there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, nor secret that shall not be made known," answered the Abbe. "Prove that you were not in Quebec on the day the robbery was committed." There was silence. The Abbe's pertinacity was too difficult. The Seigneur saw the grim look in Charley's face, and touched the Abbe on the arm. "Let us walk a little outside. Come, Cure" he added. "It is right that Monsieur should have a few minutes alone. It is a serious charge against him, and reflection will be good for us all."

He motioned the constables from the room. The Abby passed through the door into the open air, and the Cure and the Seigneur went arm in arm together, talking earnestly. The Cure turned in the doorway.

"Courage, Monsieur!" he said to Charley, and bowed himself out. Jo Portugais followed.

One officer took his place at the front door and the other at the back door, outside.

The Abby, by himself, took to walking backward and forward under the trees, buried in gloomy reflection. Jo Portugais caught his sleeve.

"Come with me for a moment, M'sieu'," he said. "It is important."

The Abby followed him.

CHAPTER XXXII

JO PORTUGAIS TELLS A STORY

Jo Portugais had fastened down a secret with clasps heavier than iron, and had long stood guard over it. But life is a wheel, and natures move in circles, passing the same points again and again, the points being distant or near to the sense as the courses of life have influenced the nature. Confession was an old principle, a light in the way, a rest-house for Jo and all his race, by inheritance, by disposition, and by practice. Again and again Jo had come round to the rest-house since one direful day, but had not, found his way therein. There were passwords to give at the door, there was the tale of the journey to tell to the door-keeper. And this tale he had not been ready to tell. But the man who knew of the terrible thing he had done, who had saved him from the consequences of that terrible thing, was in sore trouble, and this broke down the gloomy guard he had kept over his dread secret. He fought the matter out with himself, and, the battle ended, he touched the door-keeper on the arm, beckoned him to a lonely place in the trees, and knelt down before him.

"What is it you seek?" asked the door-keeper, whose face was set and forbidding.

"To find peace," answered the man; yet he was thinking more of another's peril than of his own soul. "What have I to do with the peace of your soul? Yonder is your shepherd and keeper," said the doorkeeper, pointing to where two men walked arm in arm under the trees.

"Shall the sinner not choose the keeper of his sins?" said the man huskily.

"Who has been the keeper all these years? Who has given you peace?"

"I have had no keeper; I have had no peace these many years."

"How many years?" The Abbe's voice was low and even, and showed no feeling, but his eyes were keenly inquiring and intent.

"Seven years."

"Is the sin that held you back from the comfort of the Church a great one?"

"The greatest, save one."

"What would be the greatest?"

"To curse God."

"The next?"

"To murder."

The other's whole manner changed on the instant. He was no longer the stern Churchman, the inveterate friend of Justice, the prejudiced priest, rigid in a pious convention, who could neither bend nor break. The sin of an infidel breaker of the law, that was one thing; the crime of a son of the Church, which a human soul came to relate in its agony, that was another. He had a crass sense of justice, but there was in him a deeper thing still: the revelation of the human soul, the responsibility of

speaking to the heart which has dropped the folds of secrecy, exposing the skeleton of truth, grim and staring, to the eye of a secret earthly mentor.

"If it has been hidden all these years, why do you tell it now, my son?"

"It is the only way."

"Why was it hidden?"

"I have come to confess," answered the man bitterly. The priest looked at him anxiously. "You have spoken rightly, my son. I am not here to ask, but to receive."

"Forgive me, but it is my crime I would speak of now. I choose this moment that another should not suffer for what he did not do."

The priest thought of the man they had left in the little house, and the crime with which he was charged, and wondered what the sinner before him was going to say.

"Tell your story, my son, and God give your tongue the very spirit of truth, that nothing be forgotten and nothing excused."

There was a fleeting pause, in which the colour left the priest's face, and, as he opened the door of his mind--of the Church, secret and inviolate--he had a pain at his heart; for beneath his arrogant churchmanship there was a fanatical spirituality of a mediaeval kind. His sense of responsibility was painful and intense. The same pain possessed him always, were the sin that of a child or a Borgia.

As he listened to the broken tale, the forest around was vocal, the chipmunks scampered from tree to tree, the woodpecker's tap-tap, tap-tap, went on over their heads, the leaves rustled and gave forth their divine sweetness, as though man and nature were at peace, and there were no storms in sky above or soul beneath, or in the waters of life that are deeper than "the waters under the earth."

It was only a short time, but to the door-keeper and the wayfarer it seemed hours, for the human soul travels far and hard and long in moments of pain and revelation. The priest in his anxiety suffered as much as the man who did the wicked thing. When the man had finished, the priest said:

"Is this all?"

"It is the great sin of my life." He shuddered, and continued: "I have no love of life; I have no fear of death; but there is the man who saved me years ago, who got me freedom. He has had great sorrow and trouble, and I would live for his sake--because he has no friend."

"Who is the man?"

The other pointed to where the little house was hidden among the trees. The priest almost gasped his amazement, but waited.

Thereupon the woodsman told the whole truth concerning the tailor of Chaudiere.

"To save him, I have confessed my own sin. To you I might tell all in confession, and the truth about him would be buried for ever. I might not confess at all unless I confessed my own sin. You will save him, father?" he asked anxiously.

"I will save him," was the reply of the priest.

"I want to give myself to justice; but he has been ill, and he may be ill again, and he needs me." He told of the tailor's besetting weakness, of his struggles against it, of his fall a few days before, and the cause of it . . . told all to the man of silence.

"You wish to give yourself to justice?"

"I shall have no peace unless."

There was something martyr-like in the man's attitude. It appealed to some stern, martyr-like quality in the priest. If the man would win eternal peace so, then so be it. His grim piety approved. He spoke now with the authority of divine justice.

"For one year longer go on as you are, then give yourself to justice--one year from to-day, my son. Is it enough?"

"It is enough."

"Absolvo te!" said the priest.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE EDGE OF LIFE

Meantime Charley was alone with his problem. The net of circumstances seemed to have coiled inextricably round him. Once, at a trial in court in other days, he had said in his ironical way: "One hasn't to fear the penalties of one's sins, but the damnable accident of discovery."

To try to escape now, or, with the assistance of Jo Portugais, when en route to Quebec in charge of the constables, and find refuge and seclusion elsewhere? There was nothing he might ask of Portugais which he would not do. To escape--and so acknowledge a guilt not his own! Well, what did it matter! Who mattered? He knew only too well. The Cure mattered--that good man who had never intruded his piety on him; who had been from the first a discreet friend, a gentleman,--a Christian gentleman, if there was such a sort of gentleman apart from all others. Who mattered? The Seigneur, whom he had never seen before, yet who had showed that day a brusque sympathy, a gruff belief in him? Who mattered?

Above all, Rosalie mattered. To escape, to go from Rosalie's presence by a dark way, as it were, like a thief in the night--was that possible? His escape would work upon her mind. She would first wonder, then doubt, and then believe at last that he was a common criminal. She was the one who mattered in that thought of escape to some other parish, to some other province, to some other country--to some other world!

To some other world? He looked at a little bottle he held in the palm of

his hand.

A hand held aside the curtain of the door entering on the next room, and a girl's troubled face looked in, but he did not see.

Escape to some other world? And why not, after all? On the day his memory came back he had resisted the idea in this very room. As the fatalist he had resisted it then. Now how poor seemed the reasons for not having ended it all that day! If his appointed time had been come, the river would have ended him then--that had been his argument. Was that argument not belief in Somebody or Something which governed his going or staying? Was it not preordination? Was not fatalism, then, the cheapest sort of belief in an unchangeable Somebody or Something, representing purpose and law and will? Attribute to anything power, and there was God, whatever His qualities, personality, or being.

The little phial of laudanum was in his hand to loosen life into knowledge. Was it not his duty to eliminate himself, rather than be an unsolvable quantity in the problem of many lives? It was neither vulgar nor cowardly to pass quietly from forces making for ruin, and so avert ruin and secure happiness. To go while yet there was time, and smooth for ever the way for others by an eternal silence--that seemed well. Punishment thereafter, the Cure would say. But was it not worth while being punished, even should the Cure's fond belief in the noble fable be true, if one saved others here? Who--God or man--had the right to take from him the right to destroy himself, not for fear, not through despair, but for others' sake? Had he not the right to make restitution to Kathleen for having given her nothing but himself, whom she had learned to despise? If he were God, he would say, Do justice and fear not. And this was justice. Suppose he were in a battle, with all these things behind him, and put himself, with daring and great results, in some forlorn hope--to die; and he died, ostensibly a hero for his country, but, in his heart of hearts, to throw his life away to save some one he loved, not his country, which profited by his sacrifice--suppose that were the case, what would the world say?

"He saved others, himself he could not save"--flashed through his mind, possessed him. He could save others; but it was clear he could not save himself. It was so simple, so kind, and so decent. And he would be buried here in quiet, unconsecrated ground, a mystery, a tailor who, finding he could not mend the garment of life, cast it away, and took on himself the mantle of eternal obscurity. No reproaches would follow him; and he would not reproach himself, for Kathleen and Billy and another would be safe and free to live their lives.

Far, far better for Rosalie! She too would be saved--free from the peril of his presence. For where could happiness come to her from him? He might not love her; he might not marry her; and it were well to go now, while yet love was not a habit, but an awakening, a realisation of life. His death would settle this sad question for ever. To her he would be a softening memory as time went on.

The girl who had watched by the curtain stepped softly inside the room she divined his purpose. He was so intent he did not hear.

"I will do it," he said to himself. "It is better to go than to stay. I have never done a good thing for love of any human being. I will do one now."

He turned towards the window through which the sunlight streamed. Stepping forward into the sun, he uncorked the bottle.

There was a quick step behind him, and the girl's voice said clearly:

"If you go, I go also."

He turned swiftly, cold with amazement, the blood emptied from his heart.

Rosalie stood a little distance from him, her face pale, her hands held hard to her side.

"I understand all. I could not go outside, I stayed there"--she pointed to the other room--"and I know why you would die. You would die to save others."

"Rosalie!" he protested in a hoarse voice, and could say nothing more.

"You think that I will stay, if you go! No, no, no--I will not. You taught me how to live, and I will follow you now."

He saw the strange determination of her look. It startled him; he knew not what to say. "Your father, Rosalie--"

"My father will be cared for. But who will care for you in the place where you are going? You will have no friends there. You shall not go alone. You will need me--in the dark."

"It is good that I go," he said. "It would be wicked, it would be dreadful, for you to go."

"I go if you go," she urged. "I will lose my soul to be with you; you will want me--there!"

There was no mistaking her intention. Footsteps sounded outside. The others were coming back. To die here before her face? To bring her to death with him? He was sick with despair.

"Go into the next room quickly," he said. "No matter what comes, I will not--on my honour!"

She threw him a look of gratitude, and, as the bearskin curtain dropped behind her, he put the phial of laudanum in his pocket.

The door opened, and the Abbe Rossignol entered, followed by the Seigneur, the Cure, and Jo Portugais. Charley faced them calmly, and waited.

The Abbe's face was still cold and severe, but his voice was human as he said quickly: "Monsieur, I have decided to take you at your word. I am assured you are not the man who committed the crime. You probably have reasons for not establishing your identity."

Had Charley been a prisoner in the dock, he could not have had a moment of deeper amazement--even if after the jury had said Guilty, a piece of evidence had been handed in, proving innocence, averting the death sentence. A wave of excitement passed over him, leaving him cold and still. In the other room a girl put her hand to her mouth to stifle a cry of joy.

Charley bowed. "You made a mistake, Monsieur--pray do not apologise," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN AMBUSH

Weeks went by. Summer was done, autumn was upon the land. Harvest-home had gone, and the "fall" ploughing was forward. The smell of the burning stubble, of decaying plant and fibre, was mingling with the odours of the orchards and the balsams of the forest. The leafy hill-sides, far and near, were resplendent in scarlet and saffron and tawny red. Over the decline of the year flickered the ruined fires of energy.

It had been a prosperous summer in the valley. Harvests had been reaped such as the country had not known for years--and for years there had been great harvests. There had not been a death in the parish all summer, and births had occurred out of all usual proportion.

When Filion Lacasse commented thereon, and mentioned the fact that even the Notary's wife had had the gift of twins as the crowning fulness of the year, Maximilian Cour, who was essentially superstitious, tapped on the table three times, to prevent a turn in the luck.

The baker was too late, however, for the very next day the Notary was brought home with a nasty gunshot wound in his leg. He had been lured into duck-hunting on a lake twenty miles away, in the hills, and had been accidentally shot on an Indian reservation, called Four Mountains, where the Church sometimes held a mission and presented a primitive sort of passion-play. From there he had been brought home by his comrades, and the doctor from the next parish summoned. The Cure assisted the doctor at first, but the task was difficult to him. At the instant when the case was most critical the tailor of Chaudiere set his foot inside the Notary's door. A moment later he relieved the Cure and helped to probe for shot, and care for an ugly wound.

Charley had no knowledge of surgery, but his fingers were skilful, his eye was true, and he had intuition. The long operation over, the rural physician and surgeon washed his hands and then studied Charley with curious admiration.

"Thank you, Monsieur," he said, as he dried his hands on a towel. "I couldn't have done it without you. It's a pretty good job; and you share the credit."

Charley bowed. "It's a good thing not to halloo till you're out of the woods," he said. "Our friend there has a bad time before him--hein?"

"I take you. It is so." The man of knives and tinctures pulled his side-whiskers with smug satisfaction as he looked into a small mirror on the wall. "Do you chance to know if madame has any cordials or spirits?" he added, straightening his waistcoat and adjusting his cravat.

"It is likely," answered Charley, and moved away to the window looking upon the street.

The doctor turned in surprise. He was used to being waited on, and he had expected the tailor to follow the tradition.

"We might--eh?" he said suggestively. "It is usually the custom to provide refreshment, but the poor woman, madame, has been greatly occupied with her husband, and--"

"And the twins," Charley put in drily--" and a house full of work, and only one old crone in the kitchen to help. Still, I have no doubt she has thought of the cordials too. Women are the slaves of custom--ah, here they are, as I said, and--"

He stopped short, for in the doorway, with a tray, stood Rosalie Evanturel. The surgeon was so intent upon at once fortifying himself that he did not see the look which passed between Rosalie and the tailor.

Rosalie had been absent for two months. Her father had been taken seriously ill the day after the critical episode in the but at Vadrome Mountain, and she had gone with him to the hospital at Quebec, for an operation. The Abbe Rossignol had undertaken to see them safely to the hospital, and Jo Portugais, at his own request, was permitted to go in attendance upon M. Evanturel.

There had been a hasty leave-taking between Charley and Rosalie, but it was in the presence of others, and they had never spoken a word privately together since the day she had said to him that where he went she would go, in life or out of it.

"You have been gone two months," Charley said now, after their touch of hands and voiceless greeting. "Two months yesterday," she answered.

"At sundown," he replied, in an even voice.

"The Angelus was ringing," she answered calmly, though her heart was leaping and her hands were trembling. The doctor, instantly busy with the cordial, had not noticed what they said.

"Won't you join me?" he asked, offering a glass to Charley.

"Spirits do not suit me," answered Charley. "Matter of constitution," rejoined the doctor, and buttoned up his coat, preparing to depart. He came close to Charley. "Now, I don't want to put upon you, Monsieur," he said, "but this sick man is valuable in the parish--you take me? Well, it's a difficult, delicate case, and I'd be glad if I could rely on you for a few days. The Cure would do, but you are young, you have a sense of things--take me? Half the fees are yours if you'll keep a sharp eye on him--three times a day, and be with him at night a while. Fever is the thing I'm afraid of--temperature--this way, please!" He went to the window, and for a minute engaged Charley in whispered conversation. "You take me?" he said cheerily at last, as he turned again towards Rosalie.

"Quite, Monsieur," answered Charley, and drew away, for he caught the odour of the doctor's breath, and a cold perspiration broke out over him. He felt the old desire for drink sweeping through him. "I will do what I can," he said.

"Come, my dear," the doctor said to Rosalie. "We will go and see your father."

Charley's eyes had fastened on the bottles avidly. As Rosalie turned to bid him good-bye, he said to her, almost hoarsely: "Take the tray back to Madame Dauphin--please."

She flashed a glance of inquiry at him. She was puzzled by the fire in his eyes. With her soul in her face as she lifted the tray, out of the warm-beating life in her, she said in a low tone:

"It is good to live, isn't it?"

He nodded and smiled, and the trouble slowly passed from his eyes. The woman in her had conquered his enemy.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE COMING OF MAXIMILIAN COUR AND ANOTHER

"It is good to live, isn't it?" In the autumn weather when the air drank like wine, it seemed so indeed, even to Charley, who worked all day in his shop, his door wide open to the sunlight, and sat up half the night with Narcisse Dauphin, sometimes even taking a turn at the cradle of the twins, while madame sat beside her husband's bed.

To Charley the answer to Rosalie's question lay in the fact that his eyes had never been so keen, his face so alive, or his step so buoyant as in this week of double duty. His mind was more hopeful than it had ever been since the day he awoke with memory restored in the silence of a mountain hut.

He had found the antidote to his great temptation, to the lurking, relentless habit which had almost killed him the night John Brown had sung Champagne Charlie from behind the flaring lights. From a determination to fight his own fight with no material aids, he had never once used the antidote sent him by the Cure's brother.

On St. Jean Baptiste's day his proud will had failed him; intellectual force, native power of mind, had broken like reeds under the weight of a cruel temptation. But now a new force had entered into him. As his fingers were about to reach for the spirit-bottle in the house of the Notary, and he had, for the first time in his life, made an appeal for help, a woman's voice had said, "It is good to live, isn't it?" and his hand was stayed. A woman's look had stilled the strife. Never before in his life had he relied on a moral or a spiritual impulse in him. What of these existed in him were in unseen quantities--for which there was neither multiple nor measure--had been primitive and hereditary, flowing in him like a feeble tincture diluted to inefficacy.

Rosalie had resolved him back to the original elements. The quiet days he had spent in Chaudiere, the self-sacrifice he had been compelled to make, the human sins, such as those of Jo Portugais and Louis Trudel, with which he had had to do, the simplicity of the life around him--the uncomplicated lie and the unvarnished truth, the obvious sorrow and the patent joy, the childish faith, and the rude wickedness so pardonable because so frankly brutal--had worked upon him. The elemental spirit of it all had so invaded his nature, breaking through the crust of old habit

to the new man, that, when he fell before his temptation, and his body became saturated with liquor, the healthy natural being and the growing natural mind were overpowered by the coarse onslaught, and death had nearly followed.

It was his first appeal to a force outside himself, to an active principle unfamiliar to the voluntary working of his nature, and the answer had been immediate and adequate. Yet what was it? He did not ask; he had not got beyond the mere experience, and the old questioning habit was in abeyance. Each new and great emotion has its dominating moment, its supreme occasion, before taking its place in the modulated moral mechanism. He was touched with helplessness.

As he sat beside Narcisse Dauphin's bedside, one evening, the sick man on his way to recovery, there came to him the text of a sermon he had once heard John Brown preach: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." He had been thinking of Rosalie and that day at Vadrome Mountain. She would not only have died with him, but she would have died for him, if need had been. What might he give in return for what she gave?

The Notary interrupted his thoughts. He had lain watching Charley for a long time, his brow drawn down with thought. At last he said:

"Monsieur, you have been good to me." Charley laid a hand on the sick man's arm.

"I don't see that. But if you won't talk, I'll believe you think so."

The Notary shook his head. "I've not been talking for an hour, I've no fever, and I want to say some things. When I've said them, I'll feel better--voila! I want to make the amende honorable. I once thought you were this and that--I won't say what I thought you. I said you interfered--giving advice to people, as you did to Filion Lacasse, and taking the bread out of my mouth. I said that!"

He paused, raised himself on his elbow, smoothed back his grizzled hair behind his ears, looked at himself in the mirror opposite with satisfaction, and added oracularly: "But how prone is the mind of man to judge amiss! You have put bread into my mouth--no, no, Monsieur, you shall hear me! As well as doing your own work, you have done my business since my accident as well as a lawyer could do it; and you've given every penny to my wife."

"As for the work I've done," answered Charley, "it was nothing--you notaries have easy times. You may take your turn with my shears and needle one day."

With a dash of patronage true to his nature, "You are wonderful for a tailor," the Notary rejoined. Charley laughed--seldom, if ever, had he laughed since coming to Chaudiere. It was, however, a curious fact that he took a real pleasure in the work he did with his hands. In making clothes for habitant farmers, and their sons and their sons' sons, and jackets for their wives and daughters, he had had the keenest pleasure of his life.

He had taken his earnings with pride, if not with exultation. He knew the Notary did not mean that he was wonderful as a tailor, but he answered to the suggestion.

"You liked that last coat I made for you, then," he said drily;
"I believe you wore it when you were shot. It was the thing for your figure, man."

The Notary looked in the large mirror opposite with sad content. "Ah, it was a good figure, the first time I went to that hut at Four Mountains!"

"We can't always be young. You have a waist yet, and your chest-barrel gives form to a waistcoat. Tut, tut! Think of the twins in the way of vainglory and hypocrisy."

"'Twins' and 'hypocrisy'; there you have struck the nail on the head, tailor. There is the thing I'm going to tell you about."

After a cautious glance at the door and the window, Dauphin continued in quick, broken sentences: "It wasn't an accident at Four Mountains--not quite. It was Paulette Dubois--you know the woman that lives at the Seigneur's gate? Twelve years ago she was a handsome girl. I fell in love with her, but she left here. There were two other men. There was a timber-merchant,--and there was a lawyer after. The timber-merchant was married; the lawyer wasn't. She lived at first with the timber-merchant. He was killed--murdered in the woods."

"What was the timber-merchant's name?" interrupted Charley in an even voice.

"Turley--but that doesn't matter!" continued the Notary. "He was murdered, and then the lawyer came on the scene. He lived with her for a year. She had a child by him. One day he sent the child away to a safe place and told her he was going to turn over a new leaf--he was going to stand for Parliament, and she must go. She wouldn't go without the child. At last he said the child was dead; and showed her the certificate of death. Then she came back here, and for a while, alas! she disgraced the parish. But all at once she changed--she got a message that her child was alive. To her it was like being born again. It was at this time they were going to drive her from the parish. But the Seigneur and then the Cure spoke for her, and so did I--at last."

He paused and plaintively admired himself in the mirror. He was grateful that he had been clean-shaved that morning, and he was content to catch the citrine odour of the bergamot upon his hair.

New phases of the most interesting case Charley had ever defended spread out before him--the case which had given him his friend Jo Portugais, which had turned his own destiny. Yet he could not quite trace in it the vital association of this vain Notary now in the confessional mood.

"You behaved very well," said Charley tentatively.

"Ah, you say that, knowing so little! What will you say when you know all--ah! That I should take a stand also was important. Neither the Seigneur nor the Cure was married; I was. I have been long-suffering for a cause. My marital felicity has been bruised--bruised--but not broken."

"There are the twins," said Charley, with a half-closed eye.

"Could woman ask greater proof?" urged the Notary seriously, for the other's voice had been so well masked that he did not catch its satire.

"But see my peril, and mark the ground of my interest in this poor wanton! Yet a woman--a woman-frail creatures, as we know, and to be pitied, not made more pitiable by the stronger sex. . . . But, see now! Why should I have perilled mine own conjugal peace, given ground for suspicion even--for I am unfortunate, unfortunate in the exterior with which Dame Nature has honoured me!" Again he looked in the mirror with sad complacency.

On these words his listener offered no comment, and he continued:

"For this reason I lifted my voice for the poor wanton. It was I who wrote the letter to her that her child was alive. I did it with high purpose--I foresaw that she would change her ways if she thought her child was living. Was I mistaken? No. I am an observer of human nature. Intellect conquered. 'Io triumphe'. The poor fly-away changed, led a new life. Ever since then she has tried to get the man--the lawyer--to tell her where her child is. He has not done so. He has said the child is dead--always. When she seemed to give up belief, then would come another letter to her, telling her the child was living--but not where. So she would keep on writing to the man, and sometimes she would go away searching--searching. To what end? Nothing! She had a letter some months ago, for she had got restless, and a young kinsman of the Seigneur had come to visit at the seigneurie for a week, and took much notice of her. There was danger. Voila, another letter."

"From you?"

"Monsieur, of course! Will you keep a secret--on your sacred honour?"

"I can keep a secret without sacred honour."

"Ah, yes, of course! You have a secret of your own--pardon me, I am only saying what every one says. Well, this is the secret of the woman Paulette Dubois. My cousin, Robespierre Dauphin, a notary in Quebec, is the agent of the lawyer, the father of the child. He pities the poor woman. But he is bound in professional honour to the lawyer fellow, not to betray. When visiting Robespierre once I found out the truth-by accident.

"I told him what I intended. He gave permission to tell the woman her child was alive; and, if need be for her good, to affirm it over and over again--no more."

"And this?" said Charley, pointing to the injured leg, for he now associated the accident with the secret just disclosed.

"Ah, you apprehend! You have an avocat's mind--almost. It was at Four Mountains. Paulette is superstitious; so not long ago she went to live there alone with an old half-breed woman who has second-sight. Monsieur, it is a gift unmistakably. For as soon as the hag clapped eyes on me in the hut, she said: 'There is the man that wrote you the letters.' Well--what! Paulette Dubois came down on me like an avalanche--Monsieur, like an avalanche! She believed the old witch; and there was I lying with an unconvincing manner"--he sighed--"lying requires practice, alas! She saw I was lying, and in a rage snatched up my gun. It went off by accident, and brought me down. Did she relent? Not so. She helped to bind me up, and the last words she said to me were: 'You will suffer; you will have time to think. I am glad. You have kept me on the rack. I shall only be sorry if you die, for then I shall not be able to torture you till you

tell me where my child is!' Monsieur, I lied to the last, lest she should come here and make a noise; but I'm not sure it wouldn't have been better to break faith with Robespierre, and tell the poor wanton where her child is. What would you do, Monsieur? I cannot ask the Cure or the Seigneur--I have reasons. But you have the head of a lawyer--almost--and you have no local feelings, no personal interest--eh?"

"I should tell the truth."

"Your reasons, Monsieur?"

"Because the lawyer is a scoundrel. Your betrayal of his secret is not a thousandth part so bad as one lie told to this woman, whose very life is her child. Is it a boy or a girl?"

"A boy."

"Good! What harm can be done? A left-handed boy is all right in the world. Your wife has twins--then think of the woman, the one ewe lamb of 'the poor wanton.' If you do not tell her, you will have her here making a noise, as you say. I wonder she has not been here on your door-step."

"I had a letter from her to-day. She is coming--ah, mon dieu!"

"When?"

There was a tap at the window. The Notary started. "Ah, Heaven, here she is!" he gasped, and drew over to the wall.

A voice came from outside. "Shall I play for you, Dauphin? It is as good as medicine."

The Notary recovered himself at once. His volatile nature sprang back to its pose. He could forget Paulette Dubois for the moment.

"It is Maximilian Cour in the garden," he said happily. Then he raised his voice. "Play on, baker; but something for convalescence--the return of spring, the sweet assonance of memory."

"A September air, and a gush of spring," said the baker, trying to crane his long neck through the window. "Ah, there you are, Dauphin! I shall give you a sleep to-night like a balmy eve." He nodded to the tailor. "M'sieu', you shall judge if sentiment be dead."

"I have racked my heart to play this time. I have called it, 'The Baffled Quest of Love'. I have taken the music of the song of Alsace, 'Le Jardin d'Amour', and I have made variations on it, keeping the last verse of the song in my mind. You know the song, M'sieu':

"Quand je vais au jardin, Jardin d'amour,
Je crois entendu des pas,
Je veux fuir, et n'ose pas.
Voici la fin du jour . . .
Je crains et j'hésite,
Mon coeur bat plus vite
En ce séjour . . .
Quand je vais au jardin, jardin d'amour."

The baker sat down on a stool he had brought, and began to tune his

fiddle. From inside came the voice of the Notary.

"Play 'The Woods are Green' first," he said. "Then the other."

The Notary possessed the one high-walled garden in the village, and though folk gathered outside and said that the baker was playing for the sick man, there was no one in the garden save the fiddler himself. Once or twice a lad appeared on the top of the wall, looking over, but vanished at once when he saw Charley's face at the window. Long ere the baker had finished, the song was caught up from outside, and before the last notes of the violin had died away, twenty voices were singing it in the street, and forty feet marched away with it into the dusk.

Darkness comes quickly in this land of brief twilight. Presently out of the soft shadowed stillness, broken by the note of a vagrant whippoorwill, crept out from Maximilian Cour's old violin the music of 'The Baffled Quest of Love'.

The baker was not a great musician, but he had a talent, a rare gift of pathos, and an imagination untrammelled by rigorous rules of harmony and construction. Whatever there was in his sentimental bosom he poured into this one achievement of his life. It brought tears to the eyes of Narcisse Dauphin. It opened a gate of the garden wall, and drew inside a girl's face, shining with feeling.

Maximilian Cour spoke for more than himself that night. His philandering spirit had, at middle age, begotten a desire to house itself in a quiet place, where the blinds could be drawn close, and the room of life made ready with all the furniture of love. So he had spoken to his violin, and it had answered as it had never done before. The soul of the lean baker touched the heart of a man whose life had been but a baffled quest, and the spirit of a girl whose love was her sun by day, her moon by night, and the starlight of her dreams.

From the shade of the window the man the girl loved watched her as she sank upon the ground and clasped her hands before her in abandonment to the music. He watched her when the baker, at last, overcome by his own feelings--and ashamed of them--got up and stole swiftly out of the garden. He watched her till he saw her drop her face in her hands; then, opening the door and stealing out, he came and laid a hand upon her shoulder, and she heard him say:

"Rosalie!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

BARRIERS SWEPT AWAY

Rosalie came to her feet, gasping with pleasure. She had been unhappy ever since she had returned from Quebec, for though she had sometimes been brought in contact with Charley in the Notary's house since the day of the operation, nothing had passed between them save the necessary commonplaces of a sick-room, given a little extra colour, perhaps, by the sense of responsibility which fell upon them both, and by that importance which hidden sentiment gives to every motion. The twins had been troublesome and ill, and Madame Dauphin had begged Rosalie to come in

for a couple of hours every evening. Thus the tailor and the girl who, by every rule of wisdom, should have been kept as far apart as the poles, were played into each other's hands by human kindness and damnable propinquity. The man, manlike, felt no real danger, because nothing was said--after everything had been said for all time at the hut on Vadrome Mountain. He had not realised the true situation, because of late her voice, like his, had been even and her hand cool and steady. He had not noticed that her eyes were like hungry fires, eating up her face--eating away its roundness, and leaving a pathetic beauty behind.

It seemed to him that because there was silence--neither the written word nor the speaking look--that all was well. He was hugging the chain of denial to his bosom, as though to say, "This way is safety"; he was hiding his face from the beacon-lights of her eyes, which said: "This way is home."

Home? Pictures of home, of a home such as Maximilian Cour painted in his music, had passed before him now and then since that great day on Vadrome Mountain. A simple fireside, with frugal but comfortable fare; a few books; the study of the fields and woods; the daily humble task over which he could meditate as his hands worked mechanically; the happy face of a happy woman near--he had thought of home; and he had put it from him. No matter what the temptation, his must be, perhaps for ever, the bed and board unshared. He had had his chance in the old days, and he had thrown it away with insolent indifference, and an unpardonable contempt for the opinion of the world.

Now, with a blind fatuousness which had nothing to do with his old intellectual power, but was evidence of a primitive life of feeling, had vaguely imagined that because there were no clinging hands, or stolen looks, or any vow or promise, that all might go on as at present--upon the surface. With a curious absence of his old accuracy of observation he was treating the immediate past--his and Rosalie's past--as if it did not actually exist; as if only the other and farther past was a tragedy, and this nearer one a dream.

But the film fell from his eyes as Maximilian Cour played his 'Baffled Quest', with its quaint, searching pathos; and as he saw the figure of the girl alone in the shade of the great rose-bushes, past and present became one, and the whole man was lost in that one word "Rosalie!" which called her to her feet with outstretched hands.

The tears sprang to her eyes; her face upturned to his was a mute appeal, a speechless 'Viens ici'.

Past, present, future, duty, apprehension, consequences, suddenly fell away from Charley's mind like a garment slipping from the shoulders, and the new man, swept off his feet by the onrush of unused and ungoverned emotions, caught the girl to his arms with a desperate joy.

"Oh, do you care, then--for me?" wept the girl, and hid her face in his breast.

A voice came from inside the house: "Monsieur, Monsieur--ah, come, if you please, tailor!"

The girl drew back quickly, looked up at him for one instant with a triumphant happy daring, then, suddenly covered with confusion, turned, ran to the gate, opened it, passed swiftly out, and was swallowed up in

the dusk.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CHALLENGE OF PAULETTE DUBOIS

"Monsieur, Monsieur!" came the voice from inside the house, querulously and anxiously. Charley entered the Notary's bedroom.

"Monsieur," said the Notary excitedly, "she is here--Paulette is here. My wife is asleep, thank God! but old Sophie has just told me that the woman asks to see me. Ah, Heaven above, what shall I do?"

"Will you leave it to me?"

"Yes, yes, Monsieur."

"You will do exactly as I say?"

"Ah, most sure."

"Very well. Keep still. I will see her first. Trust to me." He turned and left the room.

Charley found the woman in the Notary's office, which, while partly detached from the house, did duty as sitting-room and library. When Charley entered, the room was only lighted by two candles, and Paulette's face was hidden by a veil, but Charley observed the tremulousness of the figure and the nervous decision of manner. He had seen her before several times, and he had always noticed the air, half bravado, half shrinking, marking her walk and movements, as though two emotions were fighting in her. She was now dressed in black, save for one bright red ribbon round her throat, incongruous and garish.

When she saw Charley she started, for she had expected the servant with a message from the Notary--her own message had been peremptory.

"I wish to see the Notary," she said defiantly.

"He is not able to come to you."

"What of that?"

"Did you expect to go to his bedroom?"

"Why not?" She was abrupt to discourtesy.

"You are neither physician, nor relative."

"I have important business."

"I transact his business for him, Madame."

"You are a tailor."

"I learned that; I am learning to be a notary."

"My business is private."

"I transact his private business too--that which his wife cannot do. Would you prefer his wife to me? It must be either the one or the other."

The woman started towards the door in a rage. He stepped between. "You cannot see the Notary."

"I'll see his wife, then--"

"That would only put the fat in the fire. His wife would not listen to you. She is quick-tempered, and she fancies she has reasons for not liking you."

"She's a fool. I haven't been always particular, but as for Narcisse Dauphin--"

"He has been a good friend to you at some expense, the world says."

The woman struggled with herself. "The world lies!" she said at last.

"But he doesn't. The village was against you once. That was when the Notary, with the Seigneur, was for you--it has cost him something ever since, I'm told. You've never thanked him."

"He has tortured me for years, the oily, smirking, lying--"

"He has been your best friend," he interrupted. "Please sit down, and listen to me for a moment."

She hesitated, then did as he asked.

"He tells me that years ago he was in love with you. Hasn't he behaved better than some who said they loved you?"

The woman half started up, her eyes flashing, but met a deprecating motion of his hand and sat down again.

"He thought that if you knew your child lived, you would think better of life--and of yourself. He has his good points, the Notary."

"Why doesn't he tell me where my child is?"

"The Notary is in bed--you shot him! Don't you think it is doing you a good turn not to have you arrested?"

"It was an accident."

"Oh no, it wasn't! You couldn't make a jury believe that. And if you were in prison, how could you find your child? You see, you have treated the Notary very badly."

She was silent, and he added, slowly: "He had good reasons for not telling you. It wasn't his own secret, and he hadn't come by it in a strictly professional way. Your child was being well cared for, and he told you simply that it was alive--for your own sake. But he has changed his mind at last, and--"

The woman sprang from her seat. "He will tell me--he will tell me?"

"I will tell you."

"Monsieur-Monsieur--ah, my God, but you are kind! How should you know--what do you know?"

"I give you my word that by to-morrow evening you shall know where your child is."

For a moment she was bewildered and overcome, then a look of gratitude, of luminous hope, covered her face, softening the hardness of its contour, and she fell on her knees beside the table, dropped her head in her arms, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"My little lamb, my little, little lamb-my own dearest!" she sobbed.

"I shall have you again. I shall have you again--all my own!"

He stood and watched her meditatively. He was wondering why it was that grief like this had never touched him so before. His eyes were moist. Though he had been many things in his life, he had never been abashed; but a curious timidity possessed him now.

He leaned over and touched her shoulder with a kindly abruptness, a friendly awkwardness. "Cheer up," he said. "You shall have your child, if Dauphin can help you to it."

"If he ever tries to take him from me"--she sprang to her feet, her face in a fury--"I will--"

For an instant her overpowering passion possessed her, and she stood violent and wilful; then, under his fixed, exacting gaze, her rage ceased; she became still and grey and quiet.

"I shall know to-morrow evening, Monsieur? Where?" Her voice was weak and distant.

He thought for a time. "At my house-at nine o'clock," he answered at last.

"Monsieur," she said, in a choking voice, "if I get my child again, I will bless you to my dying day."

"No, no; it will be Dauphin you must bless," he said, and opened the door for her. As she disappeared into the dusk and silence he adjusted his eye-glass, and stared musingly after her, though there was nothing to see save the summer darkness, nothing to hear save the croak of the frogs in the village pond. He was thinking of the trial of Joseph Nadeau, and of a woman in the gallery, who laughed.

"Monsieur, Monsieur," called the voice of the Notary from the bedroom.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CURE AND THE SEIGNEUR VISIT THE TAILOR

It had been a perfect September day. The tailor of Chaudiere had been busier than usual, for winter was within hail, and careful habitants were renewing their simple wardrobes. The Seigneur and the Cure arrived together, each to order the making of a greatcoat of the Irish frieze which the Seigneur kept in quantity at the Manor. The Seigneur was in rare spirits. And not without reason; for this was Michaelmas eve, and tomorrow would be Michaelmas day, and there was a promise to be redeemed on Michaelmas day! He had high hopes of its redemption according to his own wishes; for he was a vain Seigneur, and he had had his way in all things all his life, as everybody knew. Importunity with discretion was his motto, and he often vowed to the Cure that there was no other motto for the modern world.

The Cure's visit to the tailor's shop on this particular day had unusual interest, for it concerned his dear ambition, the fondest aspiration of his life: to bring the infidel tailor (they could not but call a man an infidel whose soul was negative--the word agnostic had not then become usual) from the chains of captivity into the freedom of the Church. The Cure had ever clung to his fond hope; and it was due to his patient confidence that there were several parishioners who now carried Charley's name before the shrine of the blessed Virgin, and to the little calvaries by the road-side. The wife of Filion Lacasse never failed to pray for him every day. The thousand dollars gained by the saddler on the tailor's advice had made her life happier ever since, for Filion had become saving and prudent, and had even got her a "hired girl." There were at least a half-dozen other women, including Madame Dauphin, who did the same.

That he might listen again to the good priest on his holy hobby, inflamed with this passion of missionary zeal, the Seigneur, this morning, had thrown doubt upon the ultimate success of the Cure's efforts.

"My dear Cure" said the Seigneur, "it is true, I think, what the tailor suggested to my brother--on my soul, I wonder the Abbe gave in, for a more obstinate fellow I never knew!--that a man is born with the disbelieving maggot in his brain, or the butterfly of belief, or whatever it may be called. It's constitutional--may be criminal, but constitutional. It seems to me you would stand more chance with the Jew, Greek, or heretic, than our infidel. He thinks too much--for a tailor, or for nine tailors, or for one man."

He pulled his nose, as if he had said a very good thing indeed. They were walking slowly towards the village during this conversation, and the Cure, stopping short, brought his stick emphatically down in his palm several times, as he said:

"Ah, you will not see! You will not understand. With God all things are possible. Were it the devil himself in human form, I should work and pray and hope, as my duty is, though he should still remain the devil to the end. What am I? Nothing. But what the Church has done, the Church may do. Think of Paul and Augustine, and Constantine!"

"They were classic barbarians to whom religion was but an emotion. This man has a brain which must be satisfied."

"I must count him as a soul to be saved through that very intelligence, as well as through the goodness of his daily life, which, in its charity, shames us all. He gives all he earns to the sick and needy. He lives on

fare as poor as the poorest of our people eat; he gives up his hours of sleep to nurse the sick. Dauphin might not have lived but for him. His heart is good, else these things were impossible. He could not act them."

"But that's just it, Cure. Doesn't he act them? Isn't it a whim? What more likely than that, tired of the flesh-pots of Egypt, he comes here to live in the desert--for a sensation? We don't know."

"We do know. The man has had sorrow and the man has had sin. Yes, believe me, there is none of us that suffers as this man has suffered. I have had many, many talks with him. Believe me, Maurice, I speak the truth. My heart bleeds for him. I think I know the thing that drove him here amongst us. It is a great temptation, which pursues him here--even here, where his life is so commendable. I have seen him fighting it. I have seen his torture, the piteous, ignoble yielding, and the struggle, with more than mortal energy, to be master of himself."

"It is--" the Seigneur said, then paused.

"No, no; do not ask me. He has not confessed to me, Maurice--naturally, nothing like that. But I know. I know and pity--ah, Maurice, I almost love. You argue, and reason, but I know this, my friend, that something was left out of this man when he was made, and it is that thing that we must find, or he will die among us a ruined soul, and his gravestone will be the monument of our shame. If he can once trust the Church, if he can once say, 'Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,' then his temptation will vanish, and I shall bring him in--I shall lead him home."

For an instant the Seigneur looked at him in amazement, for this was a Cure he had never known.

"Dear Cure, you are not your old self," he said gently.

"I am not myself--yes, that is it, Maurice. I am not the old humdrum Cure you knew. The whole world is my field now. I have sorrowed for sin, within the bounds of this little Chaudiere. Now I sorrow for unbelief. Through this man, through much thinking on him, I have come to feel the woe of all the world. I have come to hear the footsteps of the Master near. My friend, it is not a legend, not a belief now, it is a presence. I owe him much, Maurice. In bringing him home, I shall understand what it all means--the faith that we profess. I shall in truth feel that it is all real. You see how much I may yet owe to him--to this infidel tailor. I only hope I have not betrayed him," he added anxiously. "I would keep faith with him--ah, yes, indeed!"

"I only remember that you have said the man suffers. That is no betrayal."

They entered the village in silence. Presently, however, the sound of Maximilian Cour's violin, as they passed the bakery, set the Seigneur's tongue wagging again, and it wagged on till they came to the tailor's shop.

"Good-day to you, Monsieur," he said, as they entered.

"Have you a hot goose for me?"

"I have, but I will not press it on you," replied Charley.

"Should you so take my question--eh?"

"Should you so take my 'anser'?"

The pun was new to the Seigneur, and he turned to the Cure chuckling. "Think of that, Cure! He knows the classics." He laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

The next few moments Charley was busy measuring the two potentates for greatcoats. As it was his first work for them, it was necessary for the Cure to write down the Seigneur's measurements, as the tailor called them off, while the Seigneur did the same when the Cure was being measured. So intent were the three it might have been a conference of war. The Seigneur ventured a distant but self-conscious smile when the measurement of his waist was called, for he had by two inches the advantage of the Cure, though they were the same age, while he was one inch better in the chest. The Seigneur was proud of his figure, and, unheeding the passing of fashions, held to the knee-breeches and silk stockings long after they had disappeared from the province. To the Cure he had often said that the only time he ever felt heretical was when in the presence of the gaitered calves of a Protestant dean. He wore his sleeves tight and his stock high, as in the days when William the Sailor was king in England, and his long gold-topped Prince Regent cane was the very acme of dignity.

The measurement done, the three studied the fashion plates--mostly five years old--as Von Moltke and Bismarck might have studied the field of Gravelotte. The Seigneur's remarks were highly critical, till, with a few hasty strokes on brown paper, Charley sketched in his figure with a long overcoat in style much the same as his undercoat, stately and flowing and confined at the waist.

"Admirable, most admirable!" said the Seigneur. "The likeness is astonishing"--he admired the carriage of his own head in Charley's swift lines--"the garment in perfect taste. Form--there is nothing like form and proportion in life. It is almost a religion."

"My dear friend!" said the Cure, in amazement.

"I know when I am in the presence of an artist and his work. Louis Trudel had rule and measure, shears and a needle. Our friend here has eye and head, sense of form and creative gift. Ah, Cure, Cure, if I were twenty-five, with the assistance of Monsieur, I would show the bucks in Fabrique Street how to dress. What style is this called, Monsieur?" he suddenly asked, pointing to the drawing.

"Style a la Rossignol, Seigneur," said the tailor.

The Seigneur was flattered out of all reason. He looked across at the post-office, where he could see Rosalie dimly moving in the shade of the shop.

"Ah, if I had but ordered this coat sooner!" he said regretfully. He was thinking that to-morrow was Michaelmas day, when he was to ask Rosalie for her answer again, and he fancied himself appearing before her in the gentle cool of the evening, in this coat, lightly thrown back, disclosing his embroidered waistcoat, seals, and snowy linen. "Monsieur, I am highly complimented, believe me," he said. "Observe, Cure, that this coat is invented for me on the spot."

The Cure nodded appreciatively. "Wonderful! Wonderful! But do you not think," he added, a little wistfully--for, was he not a Frenchman, susceptible like all his race to the appearance of things?--"do you not think it might be too fashionable for me?"

"Not a whit--not a whit," replied the Seigneur generously. "Should not a Cure look distinguished--be dignified? Consider the length, the line, the eloquence of design! Ah, Monsieur, once again, you are an artist!"

The Cure shall wear it--indeed but he shall! Then I shall look like him, and perhaps get credit for some of his perfections."

"And the Cure?" said Charley.

"The Cure?--the Cure? Tiens, a little of my worldliness will do him good. There are no contrasts in him. He must wear the coat." He waved his walking-stick complacently, for he was thinking that the Cure's less perfect figure would set off his own well as they walked together. "May I have the honour to keep this as a souvenir?" he added, picking up the sketch.

"With pleasure," answered Charley. "You do not need it?"

"Not at all."

The Cure looked a little disappointed, and Charley, seeing, immediately sketched on brown paper the priestly figure in the new-created coat, a la Rossignol. On this drawing he was a little longer engaged, with the result that the Cure was reproduced with a singular fidelity--in face, figure, and expression a personality gentle yet important.

"On my soul, you shall not have it!" said the Seigneur. "But you shall have me, and I shall have you, lest we both grow vain by looking at ourselves." He thrust the sketch of himself into the Cure's hands, and carefully rolled up that of his friend.

The Cure was amazed at this gift of the tailor, and delighted with the picture of himself--his vanity was as that of a child, without guile or worldliness. He was better pleased, however, to have the drawing of his friend by him, that vanity might not be too companionable. He thanked Charley with a beaming face, and then the two friends bowed and moved towards the door. Suddenly the Cure stopped.

"My dear Maurice," said he, "we have forgotten the important thing."

"Think of that--we two old babblers!" said the Seigneur. He nodded for the Cure to begin. "Monsieur," said the Cure to Charley, "you maybe able to help us in a little difficulty. For a long time we have intended holding a great mission with a kind of religious drama like that performed at Ober-Ammergau, and called The Passion Play. You know of it, Monsieur?"

"Very well through reading, Monsieur."

"Next Easter we propose having a Passion Play in pious imitation of the famous drama. We will hold it at the Indian reservation of Four Mountains, thus quickening our own souls and giving a good object-lesson of the great History to the Indians."

The Cure paused rather anxiously, but Charley did not speak. His eyes were fixed inquiringly on the Cure, and he had a sudden suspicion that some devious means were forward to influence him. He dismissed the thought, however, for this Cure was simple as man ever was made, straightforward as the most heretical layman might demand.

The Cure, taking heart, again continued: "Now I possess an authentic description of the Ober-Ammergau drama, giving details of its presentation at different periods, and also a book of the play. But there is no one in the parish who reads German, and it occurred to the Seigneur and myself that, understanding French so well, by chance you may understand German also, and would, perhaps, translate the work for us."

"I read German easily and speak it fairly," Charley answered, relieved; "and you are welcome to my services."

The Cure's pale face flushed with pleasure. He took the little German book from his pocket, and handed it over.

"It is not so very long," he said; "and we shall all be grateful." Then an inspiration came to him; his eyes lighted.

"Monsieur," he said, "you will notice that there are no illustrations in the book. It is possible that you might be able to make us a few drawings--if we do not ask too much? It would aid greatly in the matter of costume, and you might use my library--I have a fair number of histories." The Cure was almost breathless, his heart thumped as he made the request. After a slight pause he added, hastily: "You are always doing for others. It is hardly kind to ask you; but we have some months to spare; there need be no haste." Charley hastened to relieve the Cure's anxiety. "Do not apologise," he said. "I will do what I can when I can. But as for drawing, Monsieur, it will be but amateurish."

"Monsieur," interposed the Seigneur promptly, "if you're not an artist, I'm damned!"

"Maurice!" murmured the Cure reproachfully. "Can't help it, Cure. I've held it in for an hour. It had to come; so there it is exploded. I see no damage either, save to my own reputation. Monsieur," he added to Charley, "if I had gifts like yours, nothing would hold me. I should put on more airs than Beauty Steele."

It was fortunate that, at that instant, Charley's face was turned away, or the Seigneur would have seen it go white and startled. Charley did not dare turn his head for the moment. He could not speak. What did the Seigneur know of Beauty Steele?

To hide his momentary confusion, he went over to the drawer of a cupboard in the wall, and placed the book inside. It gave him time to recover himself. When he turned round again his face was calm, his manner composed.

"And who, may I ask, is Beauty Steele?" he said. "Faith I do not know," answered the Seigneur, taking a pinch of snuff. "It's years since I first read the phrase in a letter a scamp of a relative of mine wrote me from the West. He had met a man of the name, who had a reputation as a clever fop, a very handsome fellow. So I thought it a good phrase, and I've used it ever since on occasions. 'More airs than Beauty Steele.'

--It has a sound; it's effective, I fancy, Monsieur?"

"Decidedly effective," answered Charley quietly. He picked up his shears. "You will excuse me," he said grimly, "but I must earn my living. I cannot live on my reputation."

The Seigneur and the Cure lifted their hats--to the tailor.

"Au revoir, Monsieur," they both said, and Charley bowed them out.

The two friends turned to each other a little way up the street. "Something will come of this, Cure," said the Seigneur. The Cure, whose face had a look of happiness, pressed his arm in reply.

Inside the tailor-shop, a voice kept saying, "More airs than Beauty Steele!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SCARLET WOMAN

Since the evening in the garden when she had been drawn into Charley's arms, and then fled from them in joyful confusion, Rosalie had been in a dream. She had not closed her eyes all night, or, if she closed them, they still saw beautiful things flashing by, to be succeeded by other beautiful things. It was a roseate world. To her simple nature it was not so important to be loved as to love. Selfishness was as yet the minor part of her. She had been giving all her life--to her mother, as a child; to sisters at the convent who had been kind to her; to the poor and the sick of the parish; to her father, who was helpless without her; to the tailor across the way. In each case she had given more than she had got. A nature overflowing with impulsive affection, it must spend itself upon others. The maternal instinct was at the very core of her nature, and care for others was as much a habit as an instinct with her. She had love to give, and it must be given. It had been poured like the rain from heaven on the just and the unjust; on animals as on human beings, and in so far as her nature, in the first spring--the very April--of its powers, could do.

Till Charley had come to Chaudiere, it had all been the undisciplined ardour of a girl's nature. A change had begun in the moment when she had tearfully thrust the oil and flour in upon his excoriated breast. Later came real awakening, and a riotous outpouring of herself in sympathy, in observation, in a reckless kindness which must have done her harm but that her clear intelligence balanced her actions, and because secrecy in one thing helped to restrain her in all. Yet with all the fresh overflow of her spirit, which, assisted by her new position as postmistress, made her a conspicuous and popular figure in the parish, where officialdom had rare honour and little labour, she had prejudices almost unworthy of her, due though they were to radical antipathy. These prejudices, one against Jo Portugais and the other against Paulette Dubois, she had never been able entirely to overcome, though she had honestly tried. On the way to the hospital at Quebec, however, Jo had been so careful of her father, so respectful when speaking of M'sieu', so regardful of her own comfort, that her antagonism to him was lulled. But the strong prejudice against

Paulette Dubois remained, casting a shadow on her bright spirit.

All this day she had moved about in a mellow dream, very busy, scarcely thinking. New feelings dominated her, and she was too primitive to analyse them and too occupied with them to realise acutely the life about her. Work was an abstraction, resting rather than tiring her.

Many times she had looked across at the tailor-shop, only seeing Charley once. She did not wish to speak with him now, nor to be near him yet; she wanted this day for herself only.

So it was that, soon after the Cure and the Seigneur had bade good-bye to Charley, she left the post-office and went quickly through the village to a spot by the river, where was a place called the Rest of the Flaxbeaters. It was an overhanging rock which made a kind of canopy over a sweet spring, where, in the days when their labours sounded through the valley, the flaxbeaters from the level below came to eat their meals and to rest.

This had always been a resort for her in the months when the flax-beaters did not use it. Since a child she had made the place her own. To this day it is called Rosalie's Dell; for are not her sorrows and joys still told by those who knew and loved her? and is not the parish still fragrant with her name? Has not her history become a living legend a thousand times told?

Leaving the village behind her, Rosalie passed down the high-road till she came to a path that led off through a grove of scattered pines. There would be yet a half-hour's sun and then a short twilight, and the river and the woods and the Rest of the Flax-beaters would be her own; and she could think of the wonderful thing come upon her. She had brought with her a book of English poems, and as she went through the grove she opened it, and in her pretty English repeated over and over to herself:

"My heart is thine, and soul and body render
Faith to thy faith; I give nor hold in thrall:
Take all, dear love! thou art my life's defender;
Speak to my soul! Take life and love; take all!"

She was lifted up by the abandonment of the verse, by the fulness of her own feelings, which had only needed a touch of beauty to give it exaltation. The touch had come.

She went on abstractedly to the place where she had trysted with her thoughts only, these many years, and, sitting down, watched the sun sink beyond the trees, the shades of evening fall. All that had happened since Charley came to the parish she went over in her mind. She remembered the day he had said this, the day he had said that; she brought back the night--it was etched upon her mind!--when he had said to her, "You have saved my life, Mademoiselle!" She recalled the time she put the little cross back on the church-door, the ghostly footsteps in the church, the light, the lost hood. A shudder ran through her now, for the mystery of that hood had never been cleared up. But the words on the page caught her eye again:

"My heart is thine, and soul and body render
Faith to thy faith . . ."

It swallowed up the moment's agitation. Never till this day, never till last night, had she dared to say to herself, He loves me. He seemed so far above her--she never had thought of him as a tailor!--that she had given and never dared hope to receive, had lived without anticipation lest there should come despair. Even that day at Vadrome Mountain she had not thought he meant love, when he had said to her that he would remember to the last. When he had said that he would die for love's sake, he had not meant her, but others--some one else whom he would save by his death. Kathleen, that name which had haunted her--ah, whoever Kathleen was, or whatever Kathleen had to do with him or his life, she had no reason to fear Kathleen now. She had no reason to fear any one; for had she not heard his words of love as he clasped her in his arms last night? Had she not fled from that enfolding, because her heart was so full in the hour of her triumph that she could not bear more, could not look longer into the eyes to which she had told her love before his was spoken?

In the midst of her thoughts she heard footsteps. She started up. Paulette Dubois suddenly appeared in the path below. She had taken the river-path down from Vadrome Mountain, where she had gone to see Jo Portugais, who had not yet returned from Quebec. Paulette's face was agitated, her manner nervous. For nights she had not slept, and her approaching meeting with the tailor had made her tremble all day. Excited as she was, there was a wild sort of beauty in her face, and her figure was lithe and supple. She dressed always a little garishly, but now there was only that band of colour round the throat, worn last night in the talk with Charley.

To both women this meeting was as a personal misfortune, a mutual affront. Each had a natural antipathy. To Rosalie the invasion of her beloved retreat was as hateful as though the woman had purposely intruded.

For a moment they confronted each other without speaking, then Rosalie's natural courtesy, her instinctive good-heartedness, overcame her irritation, and she said quietly:

"Good-evening, Madame."

"I am not Madame, and you know it," answered the woman harshly.

"I am sorry. Good-evening, Mademoiselle," rejoined Rosalie evenly.

"You wanted to insult me. You knew I wasn't Madame."

Rosalie shook her head. "How should I know? You have not always lived in Chaudiere, you have lived in Montreal, and people often call you Madame."

"You know better. You know that letters come to me from Montreal addressed Mademoiselle."

Rosalie turned as if to go. "I do not recall what letters pass through the post-office. I have a good memory for forgetting. Good-evening," she added, with an excess of courtesy. Paulette read the placid scorn in the girl's face; she did not see and would not understand that Rosalie did not scorn her for what she had ever done, but for something that she was.

"You think I am the dirt under your feet," she said, now white, now red, and mad with anger. "I'm not fit to speak with you--I'm a rag for the dust pile!"

"I have never thought so," answered Rosalie. "I have not liked you, but I am sorry for you, and I never thought those things."

"You lie!" was the rejoinder; and Rosalie, turning away quickly with trouble in her face, put her hands to her ears, and, hastening down the hillside, did not hear the words the woman called after her.

"To-morrow every one shall know you are a thief. Run, run, run! You can hear what I say, white-face! They shall know about the little cross to-morrow."

She followed Rosalie at a distance, her eyes blazing. As fate would have it, she met on the highroad the least scrupulous man in the parish, an inveterate gossip, the keeper of the general store, whose only opposition in business was the post-office shop. He was the centre of the village tittle-tattle, and worse. With malicious speed Paulette told him how she had seen Rosalie Evanturel nailing the little cross on the church door of a certain night. If he wanted proof of what she said, let him ask Jo Portugais.

Having spat out her revenge, she went on to the village, and through it to her house, where she prepared to visit the shop of the tailor. Her sense of retaliation satisfied, Rosalie passed from her mind; her child only occupied it. In another hour she would know where her child was--the tailor had promised that she should. Then perhaps she would be sorry for the accident to the Notary; for it was an accident, in spite of appearances.

It was dark when Paulette entered the door of the tailor's house. When she came out, a half-hour later, with elation in her carriage, and tears of joy running down her face, she did not look about her; she did not care whether or not any one saw her: she was possessed with only one thought--her child! She passed like a swift wind down the street, making for home and for her departure to the hiding-place of her child.

She had not seen a figure in the shadow of a tree near by as she came from the tailor's door. She had not heard a smothered cry behind her. She was not aware that in unspeakable agony another woman knocked softly at the door of the tailor's house, and, not waiting for an answer, opened it and entered. It was Rosalie Evanturel.

CHAPTER XL

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

The kitchen was empty, but light fell through the door of the shop opening upon the little hall between. Rosalie crossed the hall and stood in the doorway of the shop, a figure of concentrated indignation, despair, and shame. Leaning on his elbow Charley was bending over a book in the light of a candle on the bench beside him. He was reading aloud, translating into English the German text of the narrative the Cure had given him:

"And because of this divine interposition, consequent upon their faithful prayers and their oblations, they did perform these holy scenes from season to season, with solemn proof of piety and godly living, so that it seemed the life of the Lord our Shepherd was ever present with them, as though, indeed, Ober-Ammergau were Nazareth or Jerusalem. And the hearts of all in the land did answer daily to that sweet and lively faith, insomuch that even in times of war the zeal of the people became an holy zeal, and their warfare noble; so that they did accept both victory and defeat with equal humbleness. Because there was no war in their hearts, but peace, and they did fight to defend and not to acquire, they buried their foe with tears and their own with singleness of heart and quiet joy, for that they did rest from their labours. In this manner was the great tragedy and glory of the world made to the people a present thing, transforming them to the body of the Life that hath neither spot nor blemish nor . . ."

Charley had not heard Rosalie enter, nor her footsteps in the hall. But now there ran through his reading a thread of something not of himself or of it. He had thrilled to the archaic but clear-hearted style of the old German chronicler, and the warmth he felt had passed into his voice, so that it became louder.

As Rosalie listened to his reading, a hundred thoughts rushed through her mind. Paulette Dubois, the wanton woman, had just left his doorway secretly, yet there he was, instantly after, calmly reading a pious book! Her mind was in tumult. She could not reason, she could not rule her judgment. She only knew that the woman had come from this house, and hurried guiltily away into the dark. She only knew that the man the woman had left here was the man she loved--loved more than her life, for he embodied all her past; all her present--she knew that she could not live without him; all her future--for where he went she would go, whatever the fate.

Her judgment had been swept from its moorings. She had been carried on the wave of her heart's fever into this room, not daring to think this or that, not planning this or that, not accusing, not reproaching, not shaming herself and him by black suspicion, but blindly, madly demanding to see him, to look into his eyes, to hear his voice, to know him, whatever he was--man, lover, or devil. She was a child-woman--a child in her primitive feelings that threw aside all convention, because there was no wrong in her heart; a woman, because she was possessed by a jealousy which shamed and angered her, because its very existence put him on trial, condemned him. Her soul was the sport of emotions and passions stronger than herself, because the heritage, the instinct, of all the race of women, the eternal predisposition. At the moment her will was not sufficient to rule them to obedience. She was in the first subservience to that power which feeds the streams of human history.

As she now listened to Charley reading, a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her. Some note in his voice reassured her heart--if it needed reassuring. The quiet force of his presence stilled the tumult in her, so that her eyes could see without mist, her heart beat without agony; but every pulse in her was throbbing, every instinct was alive. Presently there rushed upon her the words that had rung in her ears and chimed in her heart at the Rest of the Flax-beaters:

"Take all, dear love! thou art my life's defender;

Speak to my soul! Take life and love; take all."

Feelings lying beneath the mad conflict of emotion which had sent her into this room in such unmaidenly fashion--feelings that were her deepest self-welled up. Her breath came hard and broken.

As Charley read on, a breathing seemed to answer his own. It became quicker than his own, it pierced the stillness, it filled the room with feeling, it came calling to him out of the silence. He swung round, and saw the girl in the doorway.

"Rosalie!" he cried, and sprang to his feet.

With a piteously pathetic cry, she flung herself on her knees beside the tailor's bench where he worked every day, and, burying her face in her arms as they rested on the bench, wept bitterly.

"Rosalie!" he said anxiously, leaning over her. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

She wept more bitterly still; she made a despairing gesture. His hand touched her hair; he dropped on a knee beside her.

"Oh, I am so ashamed, ashamed! I have been so wicked," she murmured.

"Rosalie, what has happened?" he urged gently. His own heart was beating hard, his own eyes were responding to hers. The new feelings alive in him, the forces his love had awakened, which, last night, had kept him sleepless, and had been upon him like a dream all day--they were at height in him now. He knew not how to command them.

"Rosalie, dearest, tell me all!" he persisted.

"I shall never--I have been--oh--you will never forgive me!" she said brokenly. "I knew it wasn't true, but I couldn't help it. I saw her--the woman--come from your house, and--"

"Hush! For God's sake, hush!" he broke in almost harshly. Then a better understanding came upon him, and it made him gentle with her.

"Ah, Rosalie, you did not think! But--but it was natural you should wish to see me. . . ."

"But, as soon as I saw you, I knew that--that--" She broke down again and wept.

"I will tell you about her, Rosalie--" His fingers stroked her hair, and, bending over her, his face was near her hands.

"No, no, tell me nothing--oh, if you tell me!--"

"She came to hear from me what she ought to have heard from the Notary. She has had great trouble--the man--her child--and I have helped her, told her--" His face was so near now that his breath was on her hair. She suddenly raised her head and clasped his face in her hands.

"I knew--oh, I knew, I knew . . . !" she wept, and her eyes drank his.

"Rosalie, my life!" he cried, clasping her in his arms.

The love that was in him, new-born and but half understood, poured itself out in broken words like her own. For him there was no outside world; no past, no Kathleen, no Billy; no suspicion, or infidelity, or unfaith; no fear of disaster; no terrors of the future. Life was Now to him and to her: nothing brooded behind, nothing lay before. The candle spluttered and burnt low in the socket.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A left-handed boy is all right in the world
Damnably propinquity
Hugging the chain of denial to his bosom
I have a good memory for forgetting
Importunity with discretion was his motto
It is good to live, isn't it?
Know how bad are you, and doesn't mind
Strike first and heal after--"a kick and a lick"

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