

The Right of Way, Volume 6.

Gilbert Parker

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THE RIGHT OF WAY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 6.

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CHAPTER L

THE PASSION PLAY AT CHAUDIERE

For the first time in its history Chaudiere was becoming notable in the eyes of the outside world.

"We'll have more girth after this," said Filion Lacasse the saddler to the wife of the Notary, as, in front of the post-office, they stood watching a little cavalcade of habitants going up the road towards Four Mountains to rehearse the Passion Play.

"If Dauphin's advice had been taken long ago, we'd have had a hotel at Four Mountains, and the city folk would be coming here for the summer," said Madame Dauphin, with a superior air.

"Pish!" said a voice behind them. It was the Seigneur's groom, with a straw in his mouth. He had a gloomy mind.

"There isn't a house but has two or three boarders. I've got three," said Filion Lacasse. "They come tomorrow."

"We'll have ten at the Manor. But no good will come of it," said the groom.

"No good! Look at the infidel tailor!" said Madame Dauphin. "He translated all the writing. He drew all the dresses, and made a hundred pictures--there they are at the Cure's house."

"He should have played Judas," said the groom malevolently. "That'd be right for him."

"Perhaps you don't like the Passion Play," said Madame Dauphin disdainfully.

"We ain't through with it yet," said the death's-head groom.

"It is a pious and holy mission," said Madame Dauphin. "Even that Jo Portugais worked night and day till he went away to Montreal, and he always goes to Mass now. He's to take Pontius Pilate when he comes back. Then look at Virginie Morrissette, that put her brother's eyes out quarrelling--she's to play Mary Magdalene."

"I could fit the parts better," said the groom.

"Of course. You'd have played St. John," said the saddler--" or, maybe, Christus himself!"

"I'd have Paulette Dubois play Mary the sinner."

"Magdalene repented, and knelt at the foot of the cross. She was sorry and sinned no more," said the Notary's wife in querulous reprimand.

"Well, Paulette does all that," said the stolid, dark-visaged groom.

Filion Lacasse's ears pricked up. "How do you know--she hasn't come back?"

"Hasn't she, though! And with her child too--last night."

"Her child!" Madame Dauphin was scandalised and amazed.

The groom nodded. "And doesn't care who knows it. Seven years old, and as fine a child as ever was!"

"Narcisse--Narcisse!" called Madame Dauphin to her husband, who was coming up the street. She hastily repeated the groom's news to him.

The Notary stuck his hand between the buttons of his waistcoat. "Well, well, my dear Madame," he said consequentially, "it is quite true."

"What do you know about it--whose child is it?" she asked, with curdling scorn.

"Sh-'sh!" said the Notary. Then, with an oratorical wave of his free hand: "The Church opens her arms to all--even to her who sinned much because she loved much, who, through woful years, searched the world for her child and found it not--hidden away, as it was, by the duplicity of sinful man"--and so on through tangled sentences, setting forth in broken terms Paulette Dubois's life.

"How do you know all about it?" asked the saddler. "I've known it for years," said the Notary grandly--stoutly too, for he would freely risk his wife's anger that the vain-glory of the moment might be enlarged.

"And you keep it even from madame!" said the saddler, with a smile too broad to be sarcastic. "Tiens! if I did that, my wife'd pick my eyes out with a bradawl."

"It was a professional secret," said the Notary, with a desperate resolve to hold his position.

"I'm going home, Dauphin--are you coming?" questioned his wife, with an air.

"You will remain, and hear what I've got to say. This Paulette Dubois--she should play Mary Magdalene, for--"

"Look--look, what's that?" said the saddler. He pointed to a wagon coming slowly up the road. In front of it a team of dogs drew a cart. It carried some thing covered with black. "It's a funeral! There's the coffin. It's on Jo Portugais' little cart," added Filion Lacasse.

"Ah, God be merciful, it's Rosalie Evanturel and Mrs. Flynn! And M'sieu' Evanturel in the coffin!" said Madame Dauphin, running to the door of the postoffice to call the Cure's sister.

"There'll be use enough for the baker's Dead March now," remarked M. Dauphin sadly, buttoning up his coat, taking off his hat, and going forward to greet Rosalie. As he did so, Charley appeared in the doorway of his shop.

"Look, Monsieur," said the Notary. "This is the way Rosalie Evanturel comes home with her father."

"I will go for the Cure" Charley answered, turning white. He leaned against the doorway for a moment to steady himself, then hurried up the street. He did not dare meet Rosalie, or go near her yet. For her sake it was better not.

"That tailor infidel has a heart. His eyes were leaking," said the Notary to Filion Lacasse, and went on to meet the mournful cavalcade.

CHAPTER LI

FACE TO FACE

"If I could only understand!"--this was Rosalie's constant cry in these weeks wherein she lay ill and prostrate after her father's burial. Once and once only had she met Charley alone, though she knew that he was keeping watch over her. She had first seen him the day her father was buried, standing apart from the people, his face sorrowful, his eyes heavy, his figure bowed.

The occasion of their meeting alone was the first night of her return, when the Notary and Charley had kept watch beside her father's body.

She had gone into the little hallway, and had looked into the room of death. The Notary was sound asleep in his arm-chair, but Charley sat silent and moveless, his eyes gazing straight before him. She murmured his name, and though it was only to herself, not even a whisper, he got up quickly and came to the hall, where she stood grief-stricken, yet with a smile of welcome, of forgiveness, of confidence. As she put out her hand to him, and he swallowed it, she could not but say to him--so contrary is the heart of woman, so does she demand a Yes by asserting a No, and hunger for the eternal assurance--she could not but say:

"You do not love me--now."

It was but a whisper, so faint and breathless that only the heart of love could hear it. There was no answer in words, for some one was stirring beyond Rosalie in the dark, and a great figure heaved through the kitchen doorway, but his hand crushed hers in his own; his heart said to her, "My love is an undying light; it will not change for time or tears"--the words they had read together in a little snuff-coloured book on the counter in the shop one summer day a year ago. The words flashed into his mind, and they were carried to hers. Her fingers pressed his, and then Charley said, over her shoulder, to the approaching Mrs. Flynn: "Do not let her come again, Madame. She should get some sleep," and he put her hand in Mrs. Flynn's. "Be good to her, as you know how, Mrs. Flynn," he added gently.

He had won the heart of Mrs. Flynn that moment, and it may be she had a conviction or an inspiration, for she said, in a softer voice than she was wont to use to any one save Rosalie:

"I'll do by her as you'd do by your own, sir," and tenderly drew Rosalie to her own room.

Such had been their first meeting after her return. Afterwards she was taken ill, and the torture of his heart drove him out into the night, to walk the road and creep round her house like a sentinel, Mrs. Flynn's words ringing in his ears to reproach him--"I'll do by her as you would do by your own, sir." Night after night it was the same, and Rosalie heard his footsteps and listened and was less sorrowful, because she knew that she was ever in his thoughts. But one day Mrs. Flynn came to him in his shop.

"She's wantin' a word with ye on business," she said, and gestured towards the little house across the way. "'Tis few words ye do be shpakin' to annybody, but if y' have kind words to shpake and good things to say, y' naidn't be bitin' yer tongue," she added in response to his nod, and left him.

Charley looked after her with a troubled face. On the instant it seemed to him that Mrs. Flynn knew all. But his second thought told him that it was only an instinct on her part that there was something between them--the beginning of love, maybe.

In another half-hour he was beside Rosalie's chair. "Perhaps you are angry," she said, as he came towards her where she sat in the great arm-chair. She did not give him time to answer, but hurried on. "I wanted to tell you that I have heard you every night outside, and that I have been glad, and sorry too--so sorry for us both."

"Rosalie! Rosalie!" he said hoarsely, and dropped on a knee beside her chair, and took her hand and kissed it. He did not dare do more.

"I wanted to say to you," she said, dropping a hand on his shoulder, "that I do not blame you for anything--not for anything. Yet I want you to be sorry too. I want you to feel as sorry for me as I feel sorry for you."

"I am the worst man and you the best woman in the world."

She leaned over him with tears in her eyes. "Hush!" she said. "I want

to help you--Charles. You are wise. You know ten thousand things more than I; but I know one thing you do not understand."

"You know and do whatever is good," he said brokenly.

"Oh, no, no, no! But I know one thing, because I have been taught, and because it was born with me. Perhaps much was habit with me in the past, but now I know that one thing is true. It is God."

She paused. "I have learned so much since--since then."

He looked up with a groan, and put a finger on her lips. "You are feeling bitterly sorry for me," she said. "But you must let me speak--that is all I ask. It is all love asks. I cannot bear that you should not share my thoughts. That is the thing that has hurt--hurt so all these months, these long hard months, when I could not see you, and did not know why I could not. Don't shake so, please! Hear me to the end, and we shall both be the better after. I felt it all so cruelly, because I did not--and I do not--understand. I rebelled, but not against you. I rebelled against myself, against what you called Fate. Fate is one's self, what one brings on one's self. But I had faith in you--always--always, even when I thought I hated you."

"Ah, hate me! Hate me! It is your loving that cuts me to the quick," he said. "You have the magnanimity of God."

Her eyes leapt up. "Of God!--you believe in God!" she said eagerly. "God is God to you? He is the one thing that has come out of all this to me." She reached out her hand and took her Bible from a table. "Read that to yourself," she said, and, opening the Book, pointed to a passage. He read it:

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Closing the Book, Charley said: "I understand--I see."

"Will you say a prayer with me?" she urged. "It is all I ask. It is the only--the only thing I want to hurt you, because it may make you happier in the end. What keeps us apart, I do not know. But if you will say one prayer with me, I will keep on trusting, I will never complain, and I will wait--wait."

He kissed both her hands, but the look in his eyes was that of a man being broken on the wheel. She slipped to the floor, her rosary in her fingers. "Let us pray," she said simply, and in a voice as clear as a child's, but with the anguish of a woman's struggling heart behind.

He did not move. She looked at him, caught his hands in both of hers,

and cried: "But you will not deny me this! Haven't I the right to ask it? Haven't I a right to ask of you a thousand times as much?"

"You have the right to ask all that is mine to give life, honour, my body in pieces inch by inch, the last that I can call my own. But, Rosalie, this is not mine to give! How can I pray, unless I believe!"

"You do--oh, you do believe in God," she cried passionately.

"Rosalie--my life," he urged, hoarse misery in his voice, "the only thing I have to give you is the bare soul of a truthful man--I am that now at least. You have made me so. If I deceived the whole world, if I was as the thief upon the cross, I should still be truthful to you. You open your heart to me--let me open mine to you, to see it as it is. Once my soul was like a watch, cased and carried in the pocket of life, uncertain, untrue, because it was a soul made, not born. I must look at the hands to know the time, and because it varied, because the working did not answer to the absolute, I said: 'The soul is a lie.' You--you have changed all that, Rosalie. My soul now is like a dial to the sun. But the clouds are there above, and I do not know what time it is in life. When the clouds break--if they ever break--and the sun shines, the dial will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth--"

He paused, confused, for he had repeated the words of a witness taking the oath in court.

"So help me God!" she finished the oath for him. Then, with a sudden change of manner, she came to her feet with a spring. She did not quite understand. She was, however, dimly conscious of the power she had over his chivalrous mind: the power of the weak over the strong--the tyranny of the defended over the defender. She was a woman tortured beyond bearing; and she was fighting for her very life, mad with anguish as she struggled.

"I do not understand you," she cried, with flashing eyes. "One minute you say you do not believe in anything, and the next you say, 'So help me God!'"

"Ah, no, you said that, Rosalie," he interposed gently.

"You said I was as magnanimous as God. You were laughing at me then, mocking me, whose only fault is that I loved and trusted you. In the wickedness of your heart you robbed me of happiness, you--"

"Don't--don't! Rosalie! Rosalie!" he exclaimed in shrinking protest.

That she had spoken to him as her deepest heart abhorred only increased her agitated denunciation. "Yes, yes, in your mad selfishness, you did not care for the poor girl who forgot all, lost all, and now--" She stopped short at the sight of his white, awe stricken face. His eye-glass seemed like a frost of death over an eye that looked upon some shocking scene of woe. Yet he appeared not to see, for his fingers fumbled on his waistcoat for the monocle--fumbled--vaguely, helplessly. It was the realisation of a soul cast into the outer darkness. Her abrupt silence came upon him like the last engulfing wave to a drowning man--the final assurance of the end, in which there is quiet and the deadly smother.

"Now--I know-the truth!" he said, in a curious even tone, different from

any she had ever heard from him. It was the old Charley Steele who spoke, the Charley Steele in whom the intellect was supreme once more. The judicial spirit, the inveterate intelligence which put justice before all, was alive in him, almost rejoicing in its regained governance. The new Charley was as dead as the old had been of late, and this clarifying moment left the grim impression behind that the old law was not obsolete. He felt that in the abandonment of her indignation she had mercilessly told the truth; and the irreducible quality of mind in him which in the old days made for justice, approved. There was a new element now, however--that conscience which never possessed him fully until the day he saw Rosalie go travelling over the hills with her crippled father. That picture of the girl against the twilight, her figure silhouetted in the clear air, had come to him in sleeping and waking dreams, the type and sign of an everlasting melancholy. As he looked at her blindly now, he saw, not herself, but that melancholy figure. Out of the distance his own voice said again:

"Now--I know-the truth!"

She had struck with a violence she did not intend, which, she knew, must rend her own heart in the future, which put in the dice-box the last hopes she had. But she could not have helped it--she could not have stayed the words, though a suspended sword were to fall with the saying. It was the cry of tradition and religion, and every home-bred, convent-nurtured habit, the instinct of heredity, the wail of woman, for whom destiny, or man, or nature, has arranged the disproportionate share of life's penalties. It was the impotent rebellion against the first curse, that man in his punishment should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow--which he might do with joy--while the woman must work out her ordained sentence "in sorrow all the days of her life."

In her bitter words was the inherent revolt of the race of woman. But now she suddenly felt that she had flung him an infinite distance from her; that she had struck at the thing she most cherished--his belief that she loved him; that even if she had told the truth--and she felt she had not--it was not the truth she wished him most to feel.

For an instant she stood looking at him, shocked and confounded, then her changeless love rushed back on her, the maternal and protective spirit welled up, and with a passionate cry she threw herself in the chair again in very weakness, with outstretched hands, saying:

"Forgive me--oh, forgive me! I did not mean it--oh, forgive your Rosalie!"

Stooping over her, he answered:

"It is good for me to know the whole truth. What hurts you may give me will pass--for life must end, and my life cannot be long enough to pay the price of the hurts I have given you. I could bear a thousand--one for every hour--if they could bring back the light to your eye, the joy to your heart. Could prayer, do you think, make me sorrier than I am? I have hurt what I would have spared from hurt at the cost of my life--and all the lives in all the world!" he added fiercely.

"Forgive me--oh, forgive your Rosalie!" she pleaded. "I did not know what I was saying--I was mad."

"It was all so sane and true," he said, like one who, on the brink of

death, finds a satisfaction in speaking the perfect truth. "I am glad to hear the truth--I have been such a liar."

She looked up startled, her tears blinding her. "You have not deceived me?" she asked bitterly. "Oh, you have not deceived me--you have loved me, have you not?" It was that which mattered, that only. Moveless and eager, she looked--looked at him, waiting, as it were, for sentence.

"I never lied to you, Rosalie--never!" he answered, and he touched her hand.

She gave a moan of relief at his words. "Oh, then, oh, then . . ." she said, in a low voice, and the tears in her eyes dried away.

"I meant that until I knew you, I kept deceiving myself and others all my life--"

"But without knowing it?" she said eagerly.

"Perhaps, without quite knowing it."

"Until you knew me?" she asked, in quick, quivering tones.

"Till I knew you," he answered.

"Then I have done you good--not ill?" she asked, with painful breathlessness.

"The only good there may be in me is you, and you only," he said, and he choked something rising in his throat, seeing the greatness of her heart, her dear desire to have entered into his life to his own good. He would have said that there was no good in him at all, but that he wished to comfort her.

A little cry of joy broke from her lips. "Oh, that--that!" she cried, with happy tears. "Won't you kiss me now?" she added softly.

He clasped her in his arms, and though his eyes were dry, his heart wept tears of blood.

CHAPTER LII

THE COMING OF BILLY

Chaudiere had made--and lost--a reputation. The Passion Play in the valley had become known to a whole country--to the Cure's and the Seigneur's unavailing regret. They had meant to revive the great story for their own people and the Indians--a homely, beautiful object-lesson, in an Eden--like innocence and quiet and repose; but behold the world had invaded them! The vanity of the Notary had undone them. He had written to the great papers of the province, telling of the advent of the play, and pilgrimages had been organised, and excursions had been made to the spot, where a simple people had achieved a crude but noble picture of the life and death of the Hero of Christendom. The Cure viewed with consternation the invasion of their quiet. It was no longer his own Chaudiere; and when, on a Sunday, his dear people were jostled from the

church to make room for strangers, his gentle eloquence seemed to forsake him, he spoke haltingly, and his intoning of the Mass lacked the old soothing simplicity.

"Ah, my dear Seigneur!" he said, on the Sunday before the playing was to end, "we have overshot the mark."

The Seigneur nodded and turned his head away. "There is an English play which says, 'I have shot mine arrow o'er the house and hurt my brother.' That's it--that's it! We began with religion, and we end with greed, and pride, and notoriety."

"What do we want of fame! The price is too high, Maurice. Fame is not good for the hearts and minds of simple folk."

"It will soon be over."

"I dread a sordid reaction."

The Seigneur stood thinking for a moment. "I have an idea," he said at last. "Let us have these last days to ourselves. The mission ends next Saturday at five o'clock. We will announce that all strangers must leave the valley by Wednesday night. Then, during those last three days, while yet the influence of the play is on them, you can lead your own people back to the old quiet feelings."

"My dear Maurice--it is worthy of you! It is the way. We will announce it to-day. And see now. . . . For those three days we will change the principals; lest those who have taken the parts so long have lost the pious awe which should be upon them. We will put new people in their places. I will announce it at vespers presently. I have in my mind who should play the Christ, and St. John, and St. Peter--the men are not hard to find; but for Mary the Mother and Mary Magdalene--"

The eyes of the two men suddenly met, a look of understanding passed between them.

"Will she do it?" said the Seigneur.

The Cure nodded. "Paulette Dubois has heard the word, 'Go and sin no more'; she will obey."

Walking through the village as they talked, the Cure shrank back painfully several times, for voices of strangers, singing festive songs, rolled out upon the road. "Who can they be?" he said distressfully.

Without a word the Seigneur went to the door of the inn whence the sounds proceeded, and, without knocking, entered. A moment afterwards the voices stopped, but broke out again, quieted, then once more broke out, and presently the Seigneur issued from the door, white with anger, three strangers behind him. All were intoxicated.

One was violent. It was Billy Wantage, whom the years had not improved. He had arrived that day with two companions--an excursion of curiosity as an excuse for a "spree."

"What's the matter with you, old stick-in-the-mud?" he shouted. "Mass is over, isn't it? Can't we have a little guzzle between prayers?"

By this time a crowd had gathered, among them Filion Lacasse. At a motion from the Seigneur, and a whisper that went round quickly, a dozen habitants swiftly sprang on the three men, pinioned their arms, and carrying them bodily to the pump by the tavern, held them under it, one by one, till each was soaked and sober. Then their horses and wagon were brought, and they were given five minutes to leave the village.

With a devilish look in his eye, and drenched and furious, Billy was disposed to resist the command, but the faces around him were determined, and, muttering curses, the three drove away towards the next parish.

CHAPTER LIII

THE SEIGNEUR AND THE CURE HAVE A SUSPICION

Presently the Seigneur and the Cure stood before the door of the tailor-shop. The Cure was about to knock, when the Seigneur laid a hand upon his arm.

"There is no use; he has been gone several days," he said.

"Gone--gone!" said the Cure.

"I came to see him yesterday, and not finding him, I asked at the post-office." M. Rossignol's voice lowered. "He told Mrs. Flynn he was going into the hills, so Rosalie says."

The Cure's face fell. "He went away also just before the play began. I almost fear that--that we get no nearer. His mind prompts him to do good and not evil, and yet--and yet. . . . I have dreamed a good dream, Maurice, but I sometimes fear I have dreamed in vain."

"Wait--wait!"

M. Loisel looked towards the post-office musingly. "I have thought sometimes that what man's prayers may not accomplish a woman's love might do. If--but, alas, what do we know of his past! Nothing. What do we know of his future? Nothing. What do we know of the human heart? Nothing--nothing!"

The Seigneur was astounded. The Cure's meaning was plain. "What do you mean?" he asked, almost gruffly.

"She--Rosalie--has changed--changed." In his heart he dwelt sorrowfully upon the fact that she had not been to confession to him for many, many months.

"Since her father's death--since her illness?"

"Since she went to Montreal seven months ago. Even while she was so ill these past weeks, she never asked for me; and when I came . . . Ah, if it is that her heart has gone out to the man, and his does not respond!"

"A good thing, too!" said the other gloomily. "We don't know where he came from, and we do know that he is a pagan."

"Yet there she sits now, hour after hour, day after day--so changed."

"She has lost her father," urged M. Rossignol anxiously.

"I know the grief of children--this is not such a grief. There is something more. But I cannot ask. If she were a sinner--but she is without fault. Have we not watched her grow up here, mirthful, brave, pure-souled--"

"Fitted for any station," interposed the Seigneur huskily. Presently he laid a hand upon the Cure's arm. "Shall I ask her again?" he said, breathing hard. "Do you think she has found out her mistake?"

The Cure was so taken aback that at first he could not speak. When he realised, however, he could scarce suppress a smile at the other's simple vanity. But he mastered himself, and said: "It is not that, Maurice. It is not you."

"How did you know I had asked her?" asked his friend querulously.

"You have just told me."

M. Rossignol felt a kind of reproof in the Cure's tone. It made him a little nervous. "I'm an old fool, but she needed some one," he protested. "At least I am a gentleman, and she would not be thrown away."

"Dear Maurice!" said the Cure, and linked his arm in the other's. "In all respects save one, it would have been to her advantage. But youth is the only comrade for youth. All else is evasion of life's laws."

The Seigneur pressed his arm. "I thought you less worldly-wise than myself; I find you more," he said.

"Not worldly-wise. Life is deeper than the world or worldly wisdom. Come, we will both go and see Rosalie."

M. Rossignol suddenly stopped at the post-office door, and half turned towards the tailor-shop. "He is young. Suppose that he drew her love his way, but gave her nothing in return, and--"

"If it were so"--the Cure paused, and his face darkened--"if it were so, he should leave her forever; and so my dream would end."

"And Rosalie?"

"Rosalie would forget. To remember, youth must see and touch and be near, else it wears itself out in excess of feeling. Youth feels more deeply than age, but it must bear daily witness."

"Upon my honour, Cure, you shall write your little philosophies for the world," said M. Rossignol, and then knocked at the door.

"I will go in alone, Maurice," the Cure urged. "Good-you are right," answered the other. "I will go write the proclamation denying strangers the valley after Wednesday. I will enforce it, too," he added, with vigour, and, turning, walked up the street, as Mrs. Flynn admitted the Cure to the post-office.

A half-hour later M. Loisel again appeared at the post-office door, a pale, beautiful face at his shoulder.

He had not been brave enough to say what was on his mind. But as he bade her good-bye, he plucked up needful courage.

"Forgive me, Rosalie," he said, "but I have sometimes thought that you have more griefs than one. I have thought"--he paused, then went on bravely--"that there might be--there might be unwelcomed love, or love deceived."

A mist came before her eyes, but she quietly and firmly answered: "I have never been deceived in love, Monsieur Loisel."

"There, there!" he hurriedly and gently rejoined. "Do not be hurt, my child. I only want to help you." A moment afterwards he was gone.

As the door closed behind him, she drew herself proudly up.

"I have never been deceived," she said aloud. "I love him--love him--love him."

CHAPTER LIV

M. ROSSIGNOL SLIPS THE LEASH

It was the last day of the Passion Play, and the great dramatic mission was drawing to a close. The confidence of the Cure and the Seigneur was restored. The prohibition against strangers had had its effect, and for three whole days the valley had been at rest again. Apparently there was not a stranger within its borders, save the Seigneur's brother, the Abbe Rossignol, who had come to see the moving spectacle.

The Abbe, on his arrival, had made inquiries concerning the tailor of Chaudiere and Jo Portugais, as persistently about the one as the other. Their secrets had been kept inviolate by him.

It was disconcerting to hear the tales people told of the tailor's charity and wisdom. It was all dangerous, for what was, accidentally, no evil in this particular instance, might be the greatest disaster in another case. Principle was at stake. He heard in stern silence the Cure's happy statement that Jo Portugais had returned to the bosom of the Church, and attended Mass regularly.

"So it may be, my dear Abbe," said M. Loisel, "that the friendship between him and our 'infidel' has been the means of helping Portugais. I hope their friendship will go on unbroken for years and years."

"I have no idea that it will," said the Abbe grimly. "That rope of friendship may snap untimely."

"Upon my soul, you croak like a raven!" testily broke in M. Rossignol, who was present. "I didn't know there was so much in common between you and my surly-jowled groom. He gets his pleasure out of croaking. 'Wait, wait, you'll see--you'll see! Death, death, death--every man must die! The devil has you by the hair--death--death--death!' Bah! I'm heartily

sick of croakers. I suppose, like my grunting groom, you'll say about the Passion Play, 'No good will come of it--wait--wait--wait!' Bah!"

"It may not be an unmixed good," answered the ascetic.

"Well, and is there any such thing on earth as an unmixed good? The play yesterday was worth a thousand sermons. It was meant to serve Holy Church, and it will serve it. Was there ever anything more real--and touching--than Paulette Dubois as Mary Magdalene yesterday?"

"I do not approve of such reality. For that woman to play the part is to destroy the impersonality of the scene."

"You would demand that the Christus should be a good man, and the St. John blameless--why shouldn't the Magdalene be a repentant woman?"

"It might impress the people more, if the best woman in your parish were to play the part. The fall of virtue, the ruin of innocence, would be vividly brought home. It does good to make the innocent feel the terror and shame of sin. That is the price the good pay for the fall of man--sorrow and shame for those who sin." The Seigneur, rising quickly from the table, and kicking his chair back, said angrily: "Damn your theories!" Then, seeing the frozen look on his brother's face, continued, more excitedly: "Yes, damn, damn, damn your theories! You always took the crass view. I beg your pardon, Cure--I beg your pardon."

He then went to the window, threw it open, and called to his groom.

"Hi, there, coffin-face," he said, "bring round the horses--the quietest one in the stable for my brother--you hear? He can't ride," he added maliciously.

This was his fiercest stroke, for the Abbe's secret vanity was the belief that he looked well on a horse, and rode handsomely.

CHAPTER LV

ROSALIE PLAYS A PART

From a tree upon a little hill rang out a bell--a deep-toned bell, bought by the parish years before for the missions held at this very spot. Every day it rang for an instant at the beginning of each of the five acts. It also tolled slowly when the curtain rose upon the scene of the Crucifixion. In this act no one spoke save the abased Magdalene, who knelt at the foot of the cross, and on whose hair red drops fell when the Roman soldier pierced the side of the figure on the cross. This had been the Cure's idea. The Magdalene should speak for mankind, for the continuing world. She should speak for the broken and contrite heart in all ages, should be the first-fruits of the sacrifice, a flower of the desert earth, bedewed by the blood of the Prince of Peace.

So, in the long nights of the late winter and early spring, the Cure had thought and thought upon what the woman should say from the foot of the cross. At last he put into her mouth that which told the whole story of redemption and deliverance, so far as his heart could conceive it--the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men and the general thanksgiving

of humanity.

During the last three days Paulette Dubois had taken the part of Mary Magdalene. As Jo Portugais had confessed to the Abbe that notable day in the woods at Vadrome Mountain, so she had confessed to the Cure after so many years of agony--and the one confession fitted into the other: Jo had once loved her, she had treated him vilely, then a man had wronged her, and Jo had avenged her--this was the tale in brief. She it was who laughed in the gallery of the court-room the day that Joseph Nadeau was acquitted.

It had pained and shocked the Cure more than any he had ever heard, but he urged for her no penalty as Portugais had set for himself with the austere approval of the Abbe. Paulette's presence as the Magdalene had had a deep effect upon the people, so that she shared with Mary the Mother the painfully real interest of the vast audience.

Five times had the bell rung out in the perfect spring air, upon which the balm of the forest and the refreshment of the ardent sun were poured. The quick anger of M. Rossignol had passed away long before the Cure, the Abbe, and himself had reached the lake and the great plateau. Between the acts the two brothers walked up and down together, at peace once more, and there was a suspicious moisture in the Seigneur's eyes. The demeanour of the people had been so humble and rapt that the place and the plateau and the valley seemed alone in creation with the lofty drama of the ages.

The Cure's eyes shone when he saw on a little knoll in the trees, apart from the worshippers and spectators, Charley and Jo Portugais. His cup of content was now full. He had felt convinced that if the tailor had but been within these bounds during the past three days, a work were begun which should end only at the altar of their parish church. To-day the play became to him the engine of God for the saving of a man's soul. Not long before the last great tableau was to appear he went to his own little tent near the hut where the actors prepared to go upon the stage. As he entered, some one came quickly forward from the shadow of the trees and touched him on the arm.

"Rosalie!" he cried in amazement, for she wore the costume of Mary Magdalene.

"It is I, not Paulette, who will appear," she said, a deep light in her eyes.

"You, Rosalie?" he asked dumfounded. "You are distrait. Trouble and sorrow have put this in your mind. You must not do it."

"Yes, I am going there," she said, pointing towards the great stage.

"Paulette has given me these to wear"--she touched the robe--"and I only ask your blessing now. Oh, believe, believe me, I can speak for those who are innocent and those who are guilty; for those who pray and those who cannot pray; for those who confess and those who dare not! I can speak the words out of my heart with gladness and agony, Monsieur," she urged, in a voice vibrating with feeling.

A luminous look came into the Cure's face. A thought leapt up in his heart. Who could tell!--this pure girl, speaking for the whole sinful, unbelieving, and believing world, might be the one last conquering argument to the man.

He could not read the agony of spirit which had driven Rosalie to this --to confess through the words of Mary Magdalene her own woe, to say it out to all the world, and to receive, as did Paulette Dubois, every day after the curtain came down, absolution and blessing. She longed for the old remembered peace.

The Cure could not read the struggle between her love for a man and the ineradicable habit of her soul; but he raised his hand, made the sacred gesture over her, and said: "Go, my child, and God be with you."

He could not see her for tears as she hurried away to where Paulette Dubois awaited her--the two at peace now. At the hands of the lately despised and injurious woman Rosalie was made ready to play the part in the last act, none knowing save the few who appeared in the final tableau, and they at the last moment only.

The bell began to toll.

A thousand people fell upon their knees, and with fascinated yet abashed and awe-struck eyes saw the great tableau of Christendom: the three crosses against the evening sky, the Figure in the centre, the Roman populace, the trembling Jews, the pathetic groups of disciples. A cloud passed across the sky, the illusion grew, and hearts quivered in piteous sympathy. There was no music now--not a sound save the sob of some overwrought woman. The woe of an oppressed world absorbed them. Even the stolid Indians, as Roman soldiers, shrank awe-stricken from the sacred tragedy. Now the eyes of all were upon the central Figure, then they shifted for a moment to John the Beloved, standing with the Mother.

"Pauvre Mere! Pauvre Christ!" said a weeping woman aloud.

A Roman soldier raised a spear and pierced the side of the Hero of the World. Blood flowed, and hundreds gasped. Then there was silence--a strange hush as of a prelude to some great event.

"It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," said the Figure.

The hush was broken by such a sound as one hears in a forest when a wind quivers over the earth, flutters the leaves, and then sinks away--neither having come nor gone, but only lived and died.

Again there was silence, and then all eyes were fixed upon the figure at the foot of the cross--Mary the Magdalene.

Day after day they had seen this figure rise, come forward a step, and speak the epilogue to this moving miracle-drama. For the last three days Paulette Dubois had turned a sorrowful face upon them, and with one hand upraised had spoken the prayer, the prophecy, the thanksgiving, the appeal of humanity and the ages. They looked to see the same figure now, and waited. But as the Magdalene turned, there was a great stir in the multitude, for the face bent upon them was that of Rosalie Evanturel. Awe and wonder moved the people.

Apart from the crowd, under a clump of trees, knelt a woodsman from Vadrome Mountain, and the tailor of Chaudiere stood beside him.

When Charley, touched by the heavy scene, saw the figure of the Magdalene

rise, he felt a curious thrill of fascination. When she turned, and he saw the face of Rosalie, the blood rushed to his face; then his heart seemed to stand still. Pain and shame travelled to the farthest recesses of his nature. Jo Portugais rose to his feet with a startled exclamation.

Rosalie began to speak. "This is the day of which the hours shall never cease--in it there shall be no night. He whom ye have crucified hath saved you from the wrath to come. He hath saved others, Himself He would not save. Even for such as I, who have secretly opened, who have secretly entered, the doors of sin--"

With a gasp of horror and a mad desire to take her away from the sight of this gaping, fascinated crowd, Charley made to rush forward, but Jo Portugais held him back.

"Be still. You will ruin her, M'sieu!" said Jo.

--even for such as I am," the beautiful voice went on, "hath He died. And in the ages to come, women such as I, and all women who sorrow, and all men who err and are deceived, and all the helpless world, will know that this was the Friend of the human soul." Not a gesture, not a movement, only that slight, pathetic figure, with pale, agonised face, and eyes that looked--looked--looked beyond them, over their heads to the darkening east, the clouded light of evening behind her. Her voice rang out now valiant and clear, now searching and piteous, yet reaching to where the farthest person knelt, and was lost upon the lake and in the spreading trees.

"What ye have done may never be undone; what He hath said shall never be unsaid. His is the Word which shall unite all languages, when ye that are Romans shall be no more Romans, and ye that are Jews shall still be Jews, reproached and alone. No longer shall men faint in the glare--the shadow of the Cross shall screen them. No more shall woman bear her black sorrows, alone; the Light of the World shall cheer her."

As she spoke, the cloud drew back from the sunset, and the saffron glow behind lighted the cross, and shone upon her hair, casting her face in a gracious shadow. Her voice rose higher. "I, the Magdalene, am the first-fruits of this sacrifice: from the foot of the cross I come. I have sinned more than all. I have shamed all women. But I have confessed my sin, and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Her voice now became lower, but clear and even, pathetically exulting:

"O world, forgive, as He hath forgiven you! Fall, dark curtain, and hide this pain, and rise again upon forgiven sin and a redeemed people!"

She stood still, with her eyes upraised, and the curtain came slowly down.

For a long time no one in all the gathered multitude stirred. Far over under the trees a man sat upon the ground, his head upon his arms, and his arms upon his knees, in a misery unmeasurable. Beside him stood a woodsman, who knew of no word to say that might comfort him.

A girl, in the garb of the Magdalene, entered the tent of the Cure, and, speaking no word, knelt and received absolution of her sins.

CHAPTER LVI

MRS. FLYNN SPEAKS

CHARLEY left Jo Portugais behind, and went home alone. He watched at a window till he saw Rosalie return. As she passed quickly down the street with Mrs. Flynn to her own door, he observed that her face was happier than he had seen it for many a day. Her step was lighter, there was a freedom in her air, a sense of confidence in her carriage.

She bore herself as one who had done a thing which relaxed a painful tension. There was a curious glow in her eyes and face, and this became deeper as, showing himself at the door, she saw him, smiled, and stood still. He came across the street and took her hand.

"You have been away," she said softly. "For a few days," he answered.

"Far?"

"At Vadrome Mountain."

"You have missed these last days of the Passion Play," she said, a shadow in her eyes.

"I was present to-day," he answered.

She turned away her head quickly, for the look in his eyes told her more than any words could have done, and Mrs. Flynn said:

"'Tis a day for everlastin' mimory, sir. For the part she played this day, the darlin', only such as she could play! 'Tis the innocent takin' the shame o' the guilty, and the tears do be comin' to me eyes. 'Tis not ould Widdy Flynn's eyes alone that's wet this day, but hearts do be weepin' for the love o' God."

Rosalie suddenly opened the door, and, without another look at Charley, entered the house.

"'Tis one in a million!" said Mrs. Flynn, in a confidential tone, for she had a fixed idea that Rosalie loved Charley and that he loved her, and that the only thing that stood in the way of their marriage was religion. From the first Charley had conquered Mrs. Flynn. That he was a tailor was a pity and a shame, but love was love, and the man had a head on him and a heart in him; and love was love! So Mrs. Flynn said:

"'Tis one that a man that's a man should do annything for, was it havin' the heart cut out uv him, or givin' the last drop uv his blood. Shure, for such as her, murder, or false witness, or givin' up the last wish or thought a man hugged to his boosom, would be as aisy as aisy."

Charley laughed to himself, her purpose was so obvious, but his heart went out to her, for she was a friend, and, whatever came to him, Rosalie would not be alone.

"I believe every word of yours," he said, shaking her hand, "and we'll

see, you and I, that no man marries her who isn't ready to do what you say."

"Would you do it yourself--if it was you?" she asked, flushing for her boldness.

"I would," he answered.

"Then do it," she said, and fled inside the house and shut the door.

"Mrs. Flynn--good Mrs. Flynn!" he said, and went back sadly to his house, and shut himself up with his thoughts. When night drew on he went to bed, but he could not sleep. He got up after a time, and taking pen and paper, wrote for a long time. Having finished, he took what he had written, and placing it with the two packets-of money and pearls--which he had brought from his old home, he addressed it to the Cure, and going to the safe in the wall of the shop, placed them inside and locked the door.

Then he went to bed, and slept soundly--the deep sleep of the just.

CHAPTER LVII

A BURNING FIERY FURNACE

Every man within the limits of the parish was in his bed, save one. He was a stranger who, once before, had visited Chaudiere for one brief day, when he had been saved from death at the Red Ravine, and had fled the village that night because, as he thought, he had heard the voice of his old friend's ghost in the trees. Since that time he had travelled in many parishes, healing where he could, entertaining where he might, earning money as the charlatan. He was now on his way back through the parishes to Montreal, and his route lay through Chaudiere. He had hoped to reach Chaudiere before nightfall--he remembered with fear the incident from which he had fled many months before; but his horse had broken its leg on a corduroy bridge, a few miles out from the parish in the hills, and darkness came upon him before he could hide his wagon in the woods and proceed afoot to Chaudiere. He had shot his horse, and rolled it into the swift torrent beneath the bridge.

Travelling the lonely road, he drank freely from the whiskey-horn he carried, to keep his spirits up, so that by the time he came to the outskirts of Chaudiere he was in a state of intoxication, and reeled impudently along with the "Dutch courage" the liquor had given him. Arrived at the first cluster of houses in the place, he paused uncertain. Should he knock here or go on to the tavern? He shivered at thought of the tavern, for it was near it he had heard Charley Steele's voice calling to him out of the trees. If he knocked here, would the people admit him in his present state?--he had sense enough to know that he was very drunk. As he shook his head in owlsh gravity, he saw the church on the hill not far away. He chuckled to himself. The carpet in the chancel and the hassocks at the altar would make a good bed. No fear of Charley's ghost coming inside the church--it wouldn't be that kind of a ghost. As he travelled the intervening space, shrugging his shoulders, staggering serenely, he told himself in confidence that he would leave the church at dawn, go to the tavern, purchase a horse as soon as might

be, and get back to his wagon.

The church door was unlocked, and he entered and made his way to the chancel, found surplices in the vestry and put a hassock inside one for a pillow. Then he sat down and drew the loose rug of the chancel-floor over him, and took another drink from the whiskey horn. Lighting his pipe, he smoked for a while, but grew drowsy, and his pipe fell into his lap. With eyes nearly shut he struck another match, made to light his pipe again, but threw the match away, still burning. As he did so the pipe dropped again from his mouth, and he fell back on the hassock-pillow he had made.

The lighted match fell on a surplice which had dropped from his arms as he came from the vestry, and set it afire. In five minutes the whole chancel was burning, and the sleeping man waked in the midst of smoke and flame. He staggered to his feet with a terror-stricken cry, stumbled down the aisle, through the front door, and out into the night. Reaching the road, he turned his face again to the hill where his wagon lay hid. If he could reach that, he would be safe; nobody would suspect him. He clutched the whiskey-horn tight and broke into a run. As he passed beyond the village his excited imagination heard Charley Steele's ghost calling after him. He ran harder. The voice kept calling from Chaudiere.

Not Charley's voice, but the voices of many people in Chaudiere were calling. Some wakeful person had seen the glare in the church windows and had given the alarm, and now there rang through the streets the call—"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Charley and Jo were among the last to wake, for both had slept soundly, but Jo was roused by a handful of gravel thrown at his window and a warning cry, and a few moments later he and Charley were in the street with a hurrying crowd. Over all the village was a red glare, lighting up the sky, burnishing the trees. The church was a mass of flames.

Charley was as pale as the rest of the crowd; for he thought of the Cure, he thought of this people to whom their church meant more than home and vastly more than friend and fortune. His heart was with them all: not because it was their church that was burning, but because it was something dear to them.

Reaching the hill, he saw the Cure coming from the vestry of the burning church, bearing some vessels of the altar. Depositing them in the arms of his weeping sister, he turned again towards the door. People clung to him, and would not let him go.

"See, it is all inflames," they cried. "Your cassock is singed. You shall not go."

At that moment Charley and Portugais came up. A hurried question to the Cure from Charley, a key handed over, a nod from Jo, and before the Cure could prevent them the two men had rushed through the smoke and flame into the vestry, Portugais holding Charley's hand.

The crowd outside waited in a terrible anxiety. The timbers of the chancel portion of the building seemed about to fall, and still the two men did not appear. The people called; the Cure clinched his hands at his side--he was too fearful even to pray.

But now the two men appeared, loaded with the few treasures of the church. They were scorched and singed, and the beards of both were burned, but, stumbling and exhausted, they brought their loads to the eager arms of the waiting habitants.

Then from the other end of the church came a cry: "The little cross--the little iron cross!" Then another cry: "Rosalie Evanturel! Rosalie Evanturel!" Some one came running to the Cure.

"Rosalie Evanturel has gone inside for the little cross on the pillar. She is in the flames; the door has fallen in. She can't get out again."

With a hoarse cry, Charley darted back inside the vestry door. A cry of horror went up.

It was only a minute and a half, but it seemed like years, and then a man in flames appeared in the fiery porch--and not alone. He carried a girl in his arms. He wavered even at the threshold with the timbers swaying overhead, but, with a last effort, he plunged forward through the furnace, and was caught by eager hands on the margin of endurable heat. The two were smothered in quilts brought from the Cure's house, and carried swiftly to the cool safety of the grass and trees beyond. The woman had fainted in the flame of the church; the man dropped insensible as they caught her from his arms.

As they tore away Charley's coat muffling his face, and opened his shirt, they stared in awe. The cross which Rosalie had torn from the pillar, Charley had thrust into his bosom, and there it now lay on the red scar made by itself in the hands of Louis Trudel.

M. Loisel waved the people back. He raised Charley's head. The Abbe Rossignol, who had just arrived with the Seigneur, lifted the cross from the insensible man's breast.

He started when he saw the scar. Then he remembered the tale he had heard. He turned away gravely to his brother. "Was it the cross or the woman he went for?" he asked.

"Great God--do you ask!" the Seigneur said indignantly. "And he deserves her," he muttered under his breath.

Charley opened his eyes. "Is she safe?" he asked, starting up.

"Unscathed, my son," the Cure said.

Was this tailor-man not his son? Had he not thirsted for his soul as a hart for the water-brooks?

"I am very sorry for you, Monsieur," said Charley.

"It is God's will," was the reply, in a choking voice. "It will be years before we have another church--many, many years."

The roof gave way with a crash, and the spire shot down into the flaming debris.

The people groaned.

"It will cost sixty thousand dollars to build it up again," said Filion

Lacasse.

"We have three thousand dollars from the Passion Play," said the Notary.
"That could go towards it."

"We have another two thousand in the bank," said Maximilian Cour.

"But it will take years," said the saddler disconsolately.

Charley looked at the Cure, mournful and broken but calm. He saw the Seigneur, gloomy and silent, standing apart. He saw the people in scattered groups, looking more homeless than if they had no homes. Some groups were silent; others discussed angrily the question, who was the incendiary--that it had been set on fire seemed certain.

"I said no good would come of the play-acting," said the Seigneur's groom, and was flung into the ditch by Filion Lacasse.

Presently Charley staggered to his feet, purpose in his face. These people, from the Cure and Seigneur to the most ignorant habitant, were hopeless and inert. The pride of their lives was gone.

"Gather the people together," he said to the Notary and Filion Lacasse. Then he turned to the Cure and the Seigneur.

"With your permission, messieurs," he said, "I will do a harder thing than I have ever done. I will speak to them all."

Wondering, M. Loisel added his voice to the Notary's, and the word went round. Slowly they all made their way to a spot the Cure indicated.

Charley stood on the embankment above the road, the notables of the parish round him.

Rosalie had been taken to the Cure's house. In that wild moment in the church when she had fallen insensible in Charley's arms, a new feeling had sprung up in her. She loved him in every fibre, but she had a strange instinct, a prescience, that she was lying on his breast for the last time. She had wound her arms round his neck, and, as his lips closed on hers, she had cried: "We shall die together--together."

As she lay in the Cure's house, she thought only of that moment.

"What are they cheering for?" she asked, as a great noise came to her through the window.

"Run and see," said the Cure's sister to Mrs. Flynn, and the fat woman hurried away.

Rosalie raised herself so that she could look out of the window. "I can see him," she cried.

"See whom?" asked the Cure's sister.

"Monsieur," she answered, with a changed voice. "He is speaking. They are cheering him."

Ten minutes later, the Cure and the Notary entered the room. M. Loisel came forward to Rosalie, and took her hands in his.

"You should not have done it," he said.

"I wanted to do something," she replied. "To get the cross for you seemed the only payment I could make for all your goodness to me."

"It nearly cost you your life--and the life of another," he said, shaking his head reproachfully.

Cheering came again from the burning church. "Why do they cheer?" she asked.

"Why do they cheer? Because the man we have feared, Monsieur Mallard--"

"I never feared him," said Rosalie, scarcely above her breath.

"Because he has taught them the way to a new church again--and at once, at once, my child."

"A remarkable man!" said Narcisse Dauphin. "There never was such a speech. Never in any courtroom was there such an appeal."

"What did he do?" asked Mademoiselle Loisel, her hand in Rosalie's.

"Everything," answered the Cure. "There he stood in his tattered clothes, the beard burnt to his chin, his hands scorched, his eyes bloodshot, and he spoke--"

"With the tongues of men and of angels," said M. Dauphin enthusiastically.

The Cure frowned and continued: "'You look on yonder burning walls,' he said, 'and wonder when they will rise again on this hill made sacred by the burial of your beloved, by the christening of your children, the marriages which have given you happy homes, and the sacraments which are to you the laws of your lives. You give one-twentieth of your income yearly towards your church--then give one-fortieth of all you possess today, and your church will be begun in a month. Before a year goes round you will come again to this venerable spot and enter another church here. Your vows, your memories, and your hopes will be purged by fire. All that you possess will be consecrated by your free-will offerings.' --Ah, if I could but remember what came afterwards! It was all eloquence, and generous and noble thought."

"He spoke of you," said the Notary--"he spoke the truth; and the people cheered. He said that the man outside the walls could sometimes tell the besieged the way relief would come. Never again shall I hear such a speech."

"What are they going to do?" asked Rosalie, and withdrew her trembling hand from that of Madame Dugal.

"This very day, at my office, they will bring their offerings, and we will begin at once," answered M. Dauphin. "There is no man in Chaudiere but will take the stocking from the hole, the bag from the chest, the credit from the bank, the grain from the barn for the market, or make the note of hand to contribute one-fortieth of all he is worth for the rebuilding of the church."

"Notes of hand are not money," said the Cure's sister, the practical sense ever uppermost.

"They shall all be money--hard cash," said the Notary. "The Seigneur is going to open a sort of bank, and take up the notes of hand, and give bank-bills in return. To-day I go with his steward to Quebec to get the money."

"What does the Abbe Rossignol say?" said the Cure's sister.

"Our church and parish are our own," interposed the Cure proudly. "We do our duty and fear no abbe."

"Voila!" said M. Dauphin, "he never can keep hands off. I saw him go to Jo Portugais a little while ago. 'Remember!' he said--I can't make out what he was after. We have enough to remember to-day, for sure."

"Good may come of it, perhaps," said M. Loisel, looking sadly out upon the ruins of his church.

"See, 'tis the sunrise!" said Mrs. Flynn's voice from the corner, her face towards the eastern window.

CHAPTER LVIII

WITH HIS BACK TO THE WALL

In four days ten thousand dollars in notes and gold had been brought to the office of the Notary by the faithful people of Chaudiere. All day in turn M. Loisel and M. Rossignol sat in the office and received that which represented one-fortieth of the value of each man's goods, estate, and wealth--the fortieth value of a woodsawyer's cottage, or a widow's garden. They did it impartially for all, as the Cure and three of the best-to-do habitants had done for the Seigneur, whose four thousand dollars had been paid in first of all.

Charley had been confined to his room for three days, because of his injuries and a feverish cold he had caught, and the habitants did not disturb his quiet. But Mrs. Flynn took him broth made by Rosalie's hands, and Rosalie fought with her desire to go to him and nurse him. She was not, however, the Rosalie of the old impulse and impetuous resolve--the arrow had gone too deep; she waited till she could see his face again and look into his eyes. Not apathy, but a sense of the inevitable was upon her, and pale and fragile, but with a calm spirit, she waited for she knew not what.

She felt that the day of fate was closing down. She must hold herself ready for the hour when he would need her most. At first, when the conviction had come to her that the end of all was near, she had revolted. She had had impulse to go to him at all hazards, to say to him: "Come away--anywhere, anywhere!" But that had given place to the deeper thing in her, and something of Charley's spirit of stoic waiting had come upon her.

She watched the people going to the Notary's office with their tributes and free-will offerings, and they seemed like people in a play--these

days she lived no life which was theirs. It was a dream, unimportant and temporary. She was feeling what was behind all life, and permanent. It could not last, but there it was; and she could not return to the transitory till this cloud of fate was lifted. She was much too young to suffer so, but the young ever suffer most.

On the fourth day she saw Charley. He came from his shop and went to the Notary's office. At first she was startled, for he was clean-shaven--the fire had burned his beard to the skin. She saw a different man, far removed from this life about them both--individual, singular. He was pale, and his eye-glass, with the cleanshaven face, gave an impression of refined separateness. She did not know that the same look was in both their faces. She watched him till he entered the Notary's shop, then she was called away to her duties.

Charley had come to give his one-fortieth with the rest. When he entered the Notary's office, the Seigneur and M. Dauphin stood up to greet him. They congratulated him on his recovery, while feeling also that the change in his personal appearance somehow affected their relations. A crowd gathered round the door of the shop. When Charley made his offering, with a statement of his goods and income, the Seigneur and Notary did not know what to do. They were disposed to decline it, for since Monsieur was no Catholic, it was not his duty to help. At this moment of delicate anxiety M. Loisel entered. With a swift bright flush to his cheek he saw the difficulty, and at once accepted freely.

"God bless you," he said, as he took the money, and Charley left. "It shall build the doorway of my church."

Later in the day the Cure sent for Charley. There were grave matters to consider, and his counsel was greatly needed. They had all come to depend on the soundness of his judgment. It had never gone astray in Chaudiere, they said. They owed to him this extraordinary scheme, which would be an example to all modern Christianity. They told him so. He said nothing in reply.

In an hour he had planned for them a scheme for the consideration of contractors; had drawn, with the help of M. Loisel, an architect's rough plan of the new church, and, his old professional instincts keenly alive, had lucidly suggested the terms and safeguards of the contracts.

Then came the question of the money contributed. The day before, M. Dauphin and the Seigneur's steward had arrived in safety from Quebec with twenty thousand dollars in bank-bills. These M. Rossignol had exchanged for the notes of hand of such of the habitants as had not ready cash to give. All of this twenty thousand dollars had been paid over. They had now thirty thousand dollars in cash, besides three thousand which the Cure had at his house, the proceeds of the Passion Play. It was proposed to send this large sum to the bank in Quebec in another two days, when the whole contributions should be complete.

As to the safety of the money, the timid M. Dauphin did not care to take responsibility. Strangers were still arriving, ignorant of the fact that the Passion Play had ceased, and some of them must be aware that this large sum of money was in the parish--no doubt also knew that it was in his house. It was therefore better, he urged, that M. Rossignol or the Cure should take charge of it. M. Loisel urged that secrecy as to the resting-place of the money was important. It was better that it should be deposited in the most unlikely place, and with some unofficial person

who might not be supposed to have it in charge.

"I have it!" said the Seigneur. "The money shall be placed in old Louis Trudel's safe in the wall of the tailor-shop."

It was so arranged, after Charley's protests of unwillingness, and counter-appeals from the others. That evening at sundown thirty-three thousand dollars was deposited in the safe in the old stone wall of the tailorshop, and the lock was sealed with the parish seal.

But the Notary's wife had wormed the secret from her husband, and she found it hard to keep. She told it to Maximilian Cour, and he kept it. She told it to her cousin, the wife of Filion Lacasse, and she did not keep it. Before twenty-four hours went round, a dozen people knew it.

The evening of the second day, another two thousand dollars was added to the treasure, and the lock was again sealed--with the utmost secrecy. Charley and Jo Portugais, the infidel and the murderer, were thus the sentries to the peace of a parish, the bankers of its gifts, the security for the future of the church of Chaudiere. Their weapons of defence were two old pistols belonging to the Seigneur.

"Money is the master of the unexpected," the Seigneur had said as he handed them over. He chuckled for hours afterwards as he thought of his epigram. That night, as he turned over in bed for the third time, as was his custom before going to sleep, another epigram came to him--"Money is the only fox hunted night and day." He kept repeating it over and over again with vain pride.

The truth of M. Rossignol's aphorisms had been demonstrated several days before. On his return from Quebec with the twenty thousand dollars of the Seigneur's money, M. Dauphin had dwelt with great pride on the discretion and energy he and the steward had shown; had told dramatically of the skill which had enabled them to make a journey of such importance so secretly and safely; had covered himself with blushes for his own coolness and intrepidity. Fortune had, however, favoured his reputation and his intrepidity, for he had been pursued from the hour he and his companion left Quebec. A taste for the picturesque had impelled him to arrange for two relays of horses, and this fact saved him and the twenty thousand dollars he carried. Two hours after he had left Quebec, four determined men had got upon his trail, and had only been prevented from overtaking him by the freshness of the horses which his dramatic foresight had provided.

The leader of these four pursuers was Billy Wantage, who had come to know of the curious action of the Seigneur of Chaudiere from an intimate friend, a clerk in the bank. Billy's fortunes were now in a bad way, and, in desperate straits for money, he had planned this bold attempt at the highwayman's art with two gamblers, to whom he owed money, and a certain notorious horse-trader of whom he had made a companion of late. Having escaped punishment for a crime once before, through Charley's supposed death, the immunity nerved him to this later and more dangerous enterprise. The four rode as hard as their horses would permit, but M. Dauphin and his companion kept always an hour or more ahead, and, from the high hills overlooking the village, Billy and his friends saw the two enter it safely in the light of evening.

His three friends urged Billy to turn back, since they were out of provisions and had no shelter. It was unwise to go to a tavern or a

farmer's house, where they must certainly be suspected. Billy, however, determined to make an effort to find the banking-place of the money, and refused to turn back without a trial. He therefore proposed that they should separate, going different directions, secure accommodation for the night, rest the following day, and meet the next night at a point indicated. This was agreed upon, and they separated.

When the four met again, Billy had nothing to communicate, as he had been taken ill during the night before, and had been unable to go secretly into Chaudiere village. They separated once more. When they met the next night Billy was accompanied by an old confederate. As he was entering Chaudiere the previous evening, he had met John Brown, with his painted wagon and a new mottled horse. John Brown had news of importance to give; for, in the stable-yard of the village tavern, he had heard one habitant confide to another that the money for the new church was kept in the safe of the tailor-shop. John Brown was as ready to share in Billy's second enterprise as he had been to incite him to his first crime.

So it was that as the Seigneur made his epigram and gloated over it, the five men, with horses at a convenient distance, armed to the teeth, broke stealthily into Charley's house.

They entered silently through the kitchen window, and made their way into the little hall. Two stood guard at the foot of the stairs, and three crept into the shop.

This night Jo Portugais was sleeping up-stairs, while Charley lay upon the bench in the tailor-shop. Charley heard the door open, heard unfamiliar steps, seized his pistol, and, springing up, with his back to the safe, called out loudly to Jo. As he dimly saw men rush at him, he fired. The bullet reached its mark, and one man fell dead. At that moment a dark-lantern was turned full on Charley, and a pistol was fired pointblank at him.

As he fell, shot through the breast, the man who had fired dropped the lantern with a shriek of terror. He had seen the ghost of his brother-in-law-Charley Steele.

With a quaking cry of warning to the others, Billy bolted from the house, followed by his companions, two of whom were struggling with Jo Portugais on the stairway. These now also broke and ran.

Jo rushed into the shop, and saw, as he thought, Charley lying dead--saw the robber dead upon the floor. His master and friend gone, the conviction seized him that his own time had come. He would give himself to justice now--but to God's justice, not to man's. The robbers were four to one, and he would avenge his master's death and give his own life to do it! It was all the thought of a second. He rushed out after the robbers, shouting as he ran, to awake the villagers. He heard the marauders ahead of him, and, fleet of foot, rushed on. Reaching them as they mounted, he fired, and brought down his man--a shivering quack-doctor, who, like his leader, had seen a sight in the tailor-shop that struck terror to his soul. Two of the others then fired at Jo, who had caught a horse by the head. He fell without a sound, and lay upon his face--he did not hear the hoofs of the escaping horses nor any other sound. He had fallen without a pang beside the quackdoctor, whose medicines would never again quicken a pulse in his own body or any other.

Behind, in the village, frightened people flocked about the tailor-shop.

Within, Mrs. Flynn and the Notary crudely but tenderly bound up the dreadful wound in Charley's side, while Rosalie pillowed his head on her bosom.

With a strange quietness Rosalie gave orders to the Notary and Mrs. Flynn. There was a light in her eyes--an unnatural light--of strength and presence of mind. Her hand was steady, and as gently as a mother with a child she wiped the moist forehead, and poured a little brandy between the set teeth.

"Stand back--give him air," she said, in a voice of authority to those who crowded round.

People fell back in awe, for, amid tears and excitement and fear, this girl had a strange convincing calm. By the time Charley's wound was stopped, messengers were on the way to the Cure and the Seigneur. By Rosalie's instructions the dead body of the robber was removed, Charley's bed up-stairs was prepared for him, a fire was lighted, and twenty hands were ready to do accurately her will. Now and again she felt his pulse, and she watched his face intently. In her bitter sorrow her heart had a sort of thankfulness, for his head was on her breast, he was in her arms. It had been given her once more to come first to his rescue, and with one wild cry, unheard by any one, to call out his beloved name.

The world of Chaudiere, roused by the shooting, had then burst in upon them; but that one moment had been hers, no matter what came after. She had no illusions--she knew that the end was near: the end of all for him and for them both.

The Cure entered and hurried forward. There was the seal of the parish intact on the door of the safe, but at what cost!

"He has given his life for the church," he said, then commanded all to leave, save those needed to carry the wounded man up-stairs.

Still it was Rosalie that directed the removal. She held his hand; she saw that he was carefully laid down; she raised his head to a proper height; she moistened his lips and fanned him. Meanwhile the Cure fell upon his knees, and the noise of talk and whispering ceased in the house.

But presently there was loud murmuring and shuffling of feet outside again, and Rosalie left the room hurriedly and went below to stop it. She met the men who were bringing the body of Jo Portugais into the shop.

Up-stairs the Cure's voice prayed: "Of Thy mercy, O Lord, hear our prayer. Grant that he be brought into Thy Church ere his last hour come. Forgive, O Lord--"

Charley stirred and opened his eyes. He saw the Cure bowed in prayer; he heard the trembling voice. He touched the white head with his hand.

CHAPTER LIX

IN WHICH CHARLEY MEETS A STRANGER

The Cure came to his feet with a joyful cry. "Monsieur--my son," he

said, bending over him.

"Is it all over?" Charley asked calmly, almost cheerfully. Death now was the only solution of life's problems, and he welcomed it from the void.

The Cure went to the door and locked it. The deepest desire of his life must here be uttered, his great aspiration be realised.

"My son," he said, as he came softly to the bedside again, "you have given to us all you had--your charity, your wisdom, your skill. You have --it was hard, but the man's wound was mortal, and it must be said "you have consecrated our new church with your blood. You have given all to us; we will give all to you--"

There was a soft knocking at the door. He went and opened it a very little. "He is conscious, Rosalie," he whispered. "Wait--wait--one moment."

Then came the Seigneur's voice saying that Jo was gone, and that all the robbers had escaped, save the two disposed of by Charley and Jo.

The Cure turned to the bed once more. "What did he say about Jo?" Charley asked.

"He is dead, my son, and the quack-doctor also. The others have escaped."

Charley turned his face away. "Au revoir, Jo," he said into the great distance.

Then there was silence for a moment, while outside the door a girl prayed, with an old woman's arm around her.

The Cure leaned over Charley again. "Shall not the sacraments of the Church comfort you in your last hours?" he said. "It is the way, the truth, and the life. It is the Voice that says: 'Peace' to the vexed mind. Human intellect is vanity; only the soul survives. Will you not hear the Voice? Will you not give us who love and honour you the right to make you ours for ever? Will you not come to the bosom of that Church for which you have given all?"

"Tell them so," Charley said, and he motioned towards the window, under which the people were gathered.

With a glad exclamation the Cure hastened to the window, and, in a voice of sorrowful exultation, spoke to the people below.

Charley reckoned swiftly with his fate. What was there now to do? If his wound was not mortal, what tragedy might now come! For Billy's hand --the hand of Kathleen's brother--had brought him low. If the robbers and murderers were captured, he must be dragged into the old life, and to what an issue--all the old problems carried into more terrible conditions. And Rosalie--in his half-consciousness he had felt her near him; he felt her near him now. Rosalie--in any case, what could there be for her? Nothing. He had heard the Cure whisper her name at the door.

She was outside-praying for him. He stretched out a hand as though he saw her, and his lips framed her name. In his weakness and fading life

he had no anguish in the thought of her. Life and Love were growing distant though he loved her as few love and live. She would be removed from want by him--there were the pearls and the money in the safe with the money of the Church; there was the letter to the Cure, his last testament, leaving all to her. He, sleeping, would fear no foe; she, awake in the living world, would hold him in dear remembrance. Death were the better thing for all. Then Kathleen in her happiness would be at peace; and even Billy might go unmolested, for, who was there to recognise Billy, now that Portugais was dead?

He heard the Cure's voice at the window--"Oh, my dear people, God has given him to us at last. I go now to prepare him for his long journey, to--"

Charley realised and shuddered. Receive the sacraments of the Church? Be made ready by the priest for his going hence--end all the soul's interrogations, with the solving of his own mortal problems? Say "I believe," confess his sins, and, receiving absolution, lie down in peace.

He suddenly raised himself on his elbow, flinging his body over. The bandage of his wound was displaced, and blood gushed out upon the white clothes of the bed. "Rosalie!" he gasped. "Rosalie, my love! God keep"

As he sank back he heard the priest's anguished voice above him, calling for help. He smiled.

"Rosalie--" he whispered. The priest ran and unlocked the door, and Rosalie entered, followed by the Seigneur and Mrs. Flynn.

"Quick! Quick!" said the priest. "The bandage slipped."

The bandage slipped--or was it slipped? Who knows!

Blind with agony, and as in a direful dream, Rosalie made her way to the bed. The sight of his ensanguined body roused her, and, murmuring his name--continually murmuring his name--she assisted Mrs. Flynn to bind up the wound again. Standing where she stood when she had stayed Louis Trudel's arm long ago, with an infinite tenderness she touched the scar--the scar of the cross--on his breast. Terrible as was her grief, her heart had its comfort in the thought--who could rob her of that for ever?--that he would die a martyr. It did not matter now who knew the story of her love. It could not do him harm. She was ready to proclaim it to all the world. And those who watched knew that they were in the presence of a great human love.

The priest made ready to receive the unconscious man into the Church. Had Charley not said, "Tell them so?" Was it not now his duty to say the sacred offices over a son of the Church in his last bitter hour? So it was done while he lay unconscious.

For hours he lay still, and then the fevered blood, poisoned by the bullet which had brought him down, made him delirious, gave him hallucinations--open-eyed illusions. All the time Rosalie knelt at the foot of the bed, her piteous tearless eyes for ever fixed on his face.

Towards evening, with an unnatural strength, he sat up in bed.

"See," he whispered, "that woman in the corner there. She has come to

take me, but I will not go." Fantasy after fantasy possessed him--fantasy, strangely mixed with facts of his own past. Now it was Kathleen, now Billy, now Jo Portugais, now John Brown, now Suzon Charlemagne at the Cote Dorion, again Jo Portugais. In strange, touching sentences he spoke to them, as though they were present before him. At length he stopped abruptly, and gazed straight before him--over the head of Rosalie into the distance.

"See," he said, pointing, "who is that? Who? I can't see his face--it is covered. So tall--so white! He is opening his arms to me. He is coming--closer--closer. Who is it?"

"It is Death, my son," said the priest in his ear, with a pitying gentleness.

The Cure's voice seemed to calm the agitated sense, to bring it back to the outer precincts of understanding. There was an awe-struck silence as the dying man fumbled, fumbled, over his breast, found his eye-glass, and, with a last feeble effort, raised it to his eye, shining now with an unearthly fire. The old interrogation of the soul, the elemental habit outlived all else in him. The idiosyncrasy of the mind automatically expressed itself.

"I beg--your--pardon," he whispered to the imagined figure, and the light died out of his eyes, "have I--ever--been--introduced--to you?"

"At the hour of your birth, my son," said the priest, as a sobbing cry came from the foot of the bed.

But Charley did not hear. His ears were for ever closed to the voices of life and time.

CHAPTER LX

THE HAND AT THE DOOR

The eve of the day of the memorable funeral two belated visitors to the Passion Play arrived in the village, unknowing that it had ended, and of the tragedy which had set a whole valley mourning; unconscious that they shared in the bitter fortunes of the tailor-man, of whom men and women spoke with tears. Affected by the gloom of the place, the two visitors at once prepared for their return journey, but the manner of the tailorman's death arrested their sympathies, touched the humanity in them. The woman was much impressed.

They asked to see the body of the man. They were taken to the door of the tailor-shop, while their horses were being brought round. Within the house itself they were met by an old Irishwoman, who, in response to their wish "to see the brave man's body," showed them into a room where a man lay dead with a bullet through his heart. It was the body of Jo Portugais, whose master and friend lay in another room across the hallway. The lady turned back in disappointment--the dead man was little like a hero.

The Irishwoman had meant to deceive her, for at this moment a girl who loved the tailor was kneeling beside his body, and, if possible, Mrs.

Flynn would have no curious eyes look upon that scene.

When the visitors came into the hall again, the man said: "There was another; Kathleen--a woodsman." But standing by the nearly closed door, behind which lay the dead tailor of Chaudiere--they could see the holy candles flickering within--Kathleen whispered "We've seen the tailor--that's enough. It's only the woodsman there. I prefer not, Tom."

With his fingers at the latch, the man hesitated, even as Mrs. Flynn stepped apprehensively forward; then, shrugging a shoulder, he responded to Kathleen's hand on his arm. They went down the stairs together, and out to their carriage.

As they drove away, Kathleen said: "It's strange that men who do such fine things should look so commonplace."

"The other one might have been more uncommon," he replied.

"I wonder!" she said, with a sigh of relief, as they passed the bounds of the village. Then she caught herself flushing, for she suddenly realised that the exclamation was one so often on the lips of a dead, disgraced man whose name she once had borne.

If the door of the little room upstairs had opened to the fingers of the man beside her, the tailor of Chaudiere, though dead, would have been dearly avenged.

CHAPTER LXI

THE CURE SPEAKS

The Cure stood with his back to the ruins of the church, at his feet two newly made graves, and all round, with wistful faces, crowds of reverent habitants. A benignant sorrow made his voice in perfect temper with the pensive striving of this latest day of spring. At the close of his address he said:

"I owe you much, my people. I owe him more, for it was given him, who knew not God, to teach us how to know Him better. For his past, it is not given you to know. It is hidden in the bosom of the Church. Sinner he once was, criminal never, as one can testify who knows all"--he turned to the Abbe Rossignol, who stood beside him, grave and compassionate--"and his sins were forgiven him. He is the one sheaf which you and I may carry home rejoicing from the pagan world of unbelief. What he had in life he gave to us, and in death he leaves to our church all that he has not left to a woman he loved--to Rosalie Evanturel."

There was a gasping murmur among the people, but they stilled again, and strained to hear.

"He leaves her a little fortune, and to us all else he had. Let us pray for his soul, and let us comfort her who, loving deeply, reaped no harvest of love.

"The law may never reach his ruthless murderers, for there is none to recognise their faces; and were they ten times punished, how should it

avail us now! Let us always remember that, in his grave, our friend bears on his breast the little iron cross we held so dear. That is all we could give--our dearest treasure. I pray God that, scarring his breast in life, it may heal all his woes in death, and be a saving image on his bosom in the Presence at the last."

He raised his hands in benediction.

EPILOGUE

Never again was there a Passion Play in the Chaudiere Valley. Spring-times and harvests and long winters came and went, and a blessing seemed to be upon the valley, for men prospered, and no untoward things befel the people. So it was for twenty years, wherein there had been going and coming in quiet. Some had gone upon short mortal journeys and had come back, some upon long immortal voyages, and had never returned. Of the last were the Seigneur and a woman once a Magdalene; but in a house beside a beautiful church, with a noble doorway, lived the Cure, M. Loisel, aged and serene. There never was a day, come rain or shine, in which he was not visited by a beautiful woman, whose life was one with the people of the valley.

There was no sorrow in the parish which the lady did not share, with the help of an old Irishwoman called Mrs. Flynn. Was there sickness in the parish, her hand smoothed the pillow and soothed the pain. Was there trouble anywhere, her face brought light to the door way. Did any suffer ill-repute, her word helped to restore the ruined name. They did not know that she forgave so much in all the world, because she thought she had so much in herself to forgive.

She was ever called "Madame Rosalie," and she cherished the name, and gave commands that when her grave came to be made near to a certain other grave, Madame Rosalie should be carved upon the stone. Cheerfulness and serenity were ever with her, undisturbed by wish to probe the mystery of the life which had once absorbed her own. She never sought to know whence the man came; it was sufficient to know whither he had gone, and that he had been hers for a brief dream of life. It was better to have lived the one short thrilling hour with all its pain, than never to have known what she knew or felt what she had felt. The mystery deepened her romance, and she was even glad that the ruffians who slew him were never brought to justice. To her mind they were but part of the mystic machinery of fate.

For her the years had given many compensations, and so she told the Cure, one midsummer day, when she brought to visit him the orphaned son of Paulette Dubois, graduated from his college in France and making ready to go to the far East.

"I have had more than I deserve--a thousand times," she said.

The Cure smiled, and laid a gentle hand upon her own. "It is right for you to think so," he said, "but after a long life, I am ready to say that, one way or another, we earn all the real happiness we have. I mean the real happiness--the moments, my child. I once had a moment full of happiness."

"May I ask?" she said.

"When my heart first went out to him"--he turned his face towards the churchyard.

"He was a great man," she said proudly.

The Cure looked at her benignly: she was a woman, and she had loved the man. He had, however, come to a stage of life where greatness alone seemed of little moment. He forbore to answer her, but he pressed her hand.

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Youth is the only comrade for youth

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