

The Pomp of the Laviettes

Gilbert Parker

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Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

I believe that 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes' has elements which justify consideration. Its original appearance was, however, not made under wholly favourable conditions. It is the only book of mine which I ever sold outright. This was in 1896. Mr. Lamson, of Messrs. Lamson Wolffe, energetic and enterprising young publishers of Boston, came to see me at Atlantic City (I was on a visit to the United States at the time), and made a gallant offer for the English, American and colonial book and serial rights. I felt that some day I could get the book back under my control if I so desired, while the chances of the book making an immediate phenomenal sale were not great.

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There is something in the nature of a story which determines its popularity. I knew that 'The Seats of the Mighty' and 'The Right of Way' would have a great sale, and after they were written I said as much to my publishers. There was the element of general appeal in the narratives and the characters. Without detracting from the character-drawing, the characters, or the story in 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes', I was convinced that the book would not make the universal appeal. Yet I should have written the story, even if it had been destined only to have a hundred readers. It had to be written. I wanted to write what was in me, and that invasion of a little secluded French-Canadian society by a ne'er-do-well of the over-sea aristocracy had a psychological interest, which I could not resist. I thought it ought to be worked out and recorded, and particularly as the time chosen;⁸³⁷ marked a large collision between the British and the French interests in French Canada, or rather of French political interests and the narrow administrative prejudices and nepotism of the British executive in Quebec.

It is a satisfaction to include this book in a definitive edition of my works, for I think that, so far as it goes, it is truthfully characteristic of French life in Canada, that its pictures are faithful, and that the character-drawing represents a closer observation than any of the previous works, slight as the volume is. It holds the same relation to 'The Right of Way' that 'The Trail of the Sword' holds to 'The Seats of the Mighty', that 'A Ladder of Swords' holds to 'The Battle of the Strong', that 'Donovan Pasha' holds to 'The Weavers'. Instinctively, and, as I believe, naturally, I gave to each ambitious, and so far as conception goes to each important novel of mine, an *avant-coureur*. 'The Trail of the Sword, A Ladder of Swords, Donovan Pasha and The Pomp of the Lavillettes', are all very short novels, not exceeding in any case sixty thousand words, while the novels dealing in a larger way with the same material the same people and environment, with the same *mise-en-scène*, were each of them at least one hundred and forty thousand words in length, or over two and a half times as long. I do not say that this is a system which I devised; but it was, from the first, the method I pursued instinctively; on the basis that dealing with a smaller subject with what one might call a genre picture first, I should get well into my field, and acquire greater familiarity with my material than I should have if I attempted the larger work at once.

This is not to say that the smaller work was immature. On the contrary, I believe that at least these shorter works are quite mature in their treatment and in their workmanship and design. Naturally, however, they made less demand on all one's resources, they were narrower in scope and less complicated, than the longer works, like 'The Seats of the Mighty', which made heavier call upon the capacities of one's art. The only occasion on which I have not preceded a very long novel of life in a new field, by a very short one, is in the writing of 'The Judgment House'. For this book, however, it might be said, that all the last twenty years was a preparation, since the scenes were scenes in which I had lived and moved, and in a sense played a part; while the ten South African chapters of the book placed in the time of the Natal campaign needed no pioneer narrative to increase familiarity with the material, the circumstances and the country itself. I knew it all from study on the spot.

From 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes', with which might be associated 'The Lane That Had no Turning', to 'The Right of Way', was a natural progression; it was the emergence of a big subject which must be treated in a large bold way, if it was to succeed. It succeeded to a degree which could not fail to gratify any one who would rather have a wide audience than a contracted one, who believes that to be popular is not necessarily to be contemptible as the ancient Pistol put it, "base, common and popular."

CHAPTER I

You could not call the place a village, nor yet could it be called a town. Viewed from the bluff, on the English side of the river, it was a long stretch of small farmhouses some painted red, with green shutters, some painted white, with red shutters set upon long strips of land, green, yellow, and brown, as it chanced to be pasture land, fields of grain, or "plough-land."

These long strips of property, fenced off one from the other, so narrow and so precise, looked like pieces of

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ribbon laid upon a wide quilt of level country. Far back from this level land lay the dark, limestone hills, which had rambled down from Labrador, and, crossing the River St. Lawrence, stretched away into the English province. The farmhouses and the long strips of land were in such regular procession, it might almost have seemed to the eye of the whimsical spectator that the houses and the ribbon were of a piece, and had been set down there, sentinel after sentinel, like so many toy soldiers, along the banks of the great river. There was one important break in the long line of precise settlement, and that was where the Parish Church, about the middle of the line, had gathered round it a score or so of buildings. But this only added to the strength of the line rather than broke its uniformity. Wide stretches of meadow-land reached back from the Parish Church until they were lost in the darker verdure of the hills.

On either side of the Parish Church, with its tall, stone tower, were two stout-built houses, set among trees and shrubbery. They were low set, broad and square, with heavy-studded, old-fashioned doors. The roofs were steep and high, with dormer windows and a sort of shelf at the gables.

They were both on the highest ground in the whole settlement, a little higher than the site of the Parish Church. The one was the residence of the old seigneur, Monsieur Duhamel; the other was the Manor Casimbault, empty now of all the Casimbaults. For a year it had lain idle, until the only heir of the old family, which was held in high esteem as far back as the time of Louis Quinze, returned from his dissipations in Quebec to settle in the old place or sell it to the highest bidder.

Behind the Manor Casimbault and the Seigneury, thus flanking the church at reverential distance, another large house completed the acute triangle, forming the apex of the solid wedge of settlement drawn about the church. This was the great farmhouse of the Lavillettes, one of the most noticeable families in the parish.

Of the little buildings bunched beside the church, not the least important was the post-office, kept by Papin Baby, who was also keeper of the bridge which was almost at the door of the office. This bridge crossed a stream that ran into the large river, forming a harbour. It opened in the middle, permitting boats and vessels to go through. Baby worked it by a lever. A hundred yards or so above the bridge was the parish mill, and between were the Hotel France, the little house of Doctor Montmagny, the Regimental Surgeon (as he was called), the cooper shop, the blacksmith, the tinsmith and the grocery shops. Just beyond the mill, upon the banks of the river, was the most notorious, if not the most celebrated, house in the settlement. Shangois, the travelling notary, lived in it when he was not travelling. When he was, he left it unlocked, all save one room; and people came and went through the house as they pleased, eyeing with curiosity the dusty, tattered books upon the shelves, the empty bottles in the corner, the patchwork of cheap prints, notices of sales, summonses, accounts, certificates of baptism, memoranda, receipted bills though they were few tacked or stuck to the wall.

No grown-up person of the village meddled with anything, no matter how curious; for this consistent, if unspoken, trust displayed by Shangois appealed to their better instincts. Besides, they, like the children, had a wholesome fear of the disreputable, shrunken, dishevelled little notary, with the bead-like eyes, yellow stockings, hooked nose and palsied left hand. Also the knapsack and black bag he carried under his arms contained more secrets than most people wished to tempt or challenge forth. Few cared to anger the little man, whose father and grandfather had been notaries here before him.

Like others in the settlement, Shangois was the last of his race. He could put his finger upon the secret history and private lives of nearly every person in a dozen parishes, but most of all in Bonaventure for such this long parish was called. He knew to a hair's breadth the social value of every human being in the parish. He was too cunning and acute to be a gossip, but by direct and indirect ways he made every person feel that the Cure and the Lord might forgive their pasts, but he could never forget them, nor wished to do so. For Monsieur Duhamel, the old seigneur, for the drunken Philippe Casimbault, for the Cure, and for the Lavillettes, who owned the great farmhouse at the apex of that wedge of village life, he had a profound respect. The parish generally did not share his respect for the Lavillettes.

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Once upon a time, beyond the memories of any in the parish, the Lavillettes of Bonaventure were a great people. Disaster came, debt and difficulty followed, fire consumed the old house in which their dignity had been cherished, and at last they had no longer their seigneurial position, but that of ordinary farmers who work and toil in the field like any of the fifty-acre farmers on the banks of the St. Lawrence River.

Monsieur Louis Lavilette, the present head of the house, had not married well. At the time when the feeling against the English was the strongest, and when his own fortunes were precarious, he had married a girl somewhat older than himself, who was half English and half French, her father having been a Hudson's Bay Company factor on the north coast of the river. In proportion as their fortunes and their popularity declined, and their once notable position as an old family became scarce a memory even, the pride of the Lavillettes increased.

Madame Lavilette made strong efforts to secure her place; but she was not of an old French family, and this was an easy and convenient weapon against her. Besides, she had no taste, and her manners were much inferior to those of her husband. What impression he managed to make by virtue of a good deal of natural dignity, she soon unmade by her lack of tact. She had no innate breeding, though she was not vulgar. She lacked sense a little and sensitiveness much.

The Casimbaults and the wife of the old seigneur made no friends of the Lavillettes, but the old seigneur kept up a formal habit of calling twice a year at the Lavillettes' big farmhouse, which, in spite of all misfortune, grew bigger as the years went on. Probably, in spite of everything, Monsieur Lavilette and his family would have succeeded better socially had it not been for one or two unpopular lawsuits brought by the Lavillettes against two neighbours, small farmers, one of whom was clearly in the wrong, and the other as clearly in the right.

When, after years had gone by, and the children of the Lavillettes had grown up, young Monsieur Casimbault came from Quebec to sell his property (it seemed to the people of Bonaventure like selling his birthright), he was greatly surprised to find Monsieur Lavilette ready with ten thousand dollars, to purchase the Manor Casimbault. Before the parish had time to take breath Monsieur Casimbault had handed over the deed, pocketed the money, and leaving the ancient heritage of his family in the hands of the Lavillettes, (who forthwith prepared to enter upon it, house and land), had hurried away to Quebec again without any pangs of sentiment.

It was a little before this time that impertinent peasants in the parish began to sing:

"O when you hear my little silver drum,
And when I blow my little gold trompette—a,
You must drop your work and come,
You must leave your pride at home,
And duck your heads before the Lavilette—a!"

Gatineau the miller, and Baby the keeper of the bridge, gave their own reasons for the renewed progress of the Lavillettes. They met in conference at the mill on the eve of the marriage of Sophie Lavilette to Magon Farcinelle, farrier, farmer and member of the provincial legislature, whose house lay behind the piece of maple wood, a mile or so to the right of the Lavillettes' farmhouse. Farcinelle's engagement to Sophie had come as a surprise to all, for, so far as people knew, there had been no courting. Madame Lavilette had encouraged, had even tempted, the spontaneous and jovial Farcinelle. Though he had never made a speech in the House of Assembly, and it was hard to tell why he was elected, save because everybody liked him, his official position and his popularity held an important place in Madame Lavilette's long-developed plans, which at last were to place her in a position equal to that of the old seigneur, and launch her upon society at the capital.

They had gone more than once to the capital, where their family had been well-known fifty years before, but few doors had been opened to them. They were farmers only farmers and Madame Lavilette made no remarkable impression. Her dress was florid and not in excellent taste, and her accent was rather crude. Sophie had gone to

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school at the convent in the city, but she had no ambition. She had inherited the stolid simplicity of her English grandfather. When her schooling was finished she let her school friends drop, and came back to Bonaventure, rather stately, given to reading, and little inclined to bother her head about anybody.

Christine, the younger sister, had gone to Quebec also, but after a week of rebellion, bad temper and sharp speaking, had come home again without ceremony, and refused to return. Despite certain likenesses to her mother, she had a deep, if unintelligible, admiration for her father, and she never tired looking at the picture of her great-grandfather in the dress of a chevalier of St. Louis almost the only thing that had been saved from the old Manor House, destroyed so long before her time. Perhaps it was the importance she attached to her ancestry which made her impatient with their present position, and with people in the parish who would not altogether recognise their claims. It was that which made her give a little jerky bow to the miller and the postmaster when she passed the mill.

"Come, dusty-belly," said Baby, "what's all this pom-pom of the Lavillettes?"

The miller pursed out his lips, contracted his brows, and arranged his loose waistcoat carefully on his fat stomach.

"Money," said he, oracularly, as though he had solved the great question of the universe.

"La! la! But other folks have money; and they step about Bonaventure no more louder than a cat."

"Blood," added Gatineau, corrugating his brows still more.

"Bosh!"

"Both together money and blood," rejoined the miller. Overcome by his exertions, he wheezed so tremendously that great billows of excitement raised his waistcoat, and a perspiration broke out upon his mealy face, making a paste which the sun, through the open doorway, immediately began to bake into a crust.

"Pah, the airs they have always had, those Lavillettes!" said Baby. "They will not do this because it is not polite, they will not do that because they are too proud. They say that once there was a baron in their family. Who can tell how long ago! Perhaps when John the Baptist was alive. What is that? Nothing. There is no baron now. All at once somebody die a year ago, and leave them ten thousand dollars; and then mais, there is the grand difference! They have save and save twenty years to pay their debts and to buy a seigneurie, like that baron who live in the time of John the Baptist. Now it is to stand on a ladder to speak to them. And when all's done, they marry Ma'm'selle Sophie to a farrier, to that Magon Farcinelle bah!"

"Magon was at the Laval College in Quebec; he has ten thousand dollars; he is the best judge of horses in the province, and he's a Member of Parliament to boot," said the miller, puffing. "He is a great man almost."

"He's no better judge of horses than M'sieu' Nic Lavillette eh, that's a bully bad scamp, my Gatineau!" responded Baby. "He's the best in the family. He is a grand sport; yes. It's he that fetched Ma'm'selle Sophie to the hitching-post. Voila, he can wind them all round his finger!"

Baby looked round to see if any one was near; then he drew the miller's head down by pulling at his collar, and whispered in his ear:

"He's hot foot for the Rebellion; that's one good thing," he said. "If he wipes out the English "

"Hold your tongue," nervously interrupted Gatineau, for just then two or three loiterers of the parish came shambling around the corner of the mill.

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Baby stopped short, and as they greeted the newcomers their attention was drawn to the stage-coach from St. Croix coming over the little hill near by.

"Here's M'sieu' Nic now and who's with him?" said Baby, stepping about nervously in his excitement. "I knew there was something up. M'sieu' Nic's been writing long letters from Montreal."

Baby's look suggested that he knew more than his position as postmaster entitled him to know; but the furtive droop at the corner of his eyes showed also that his secretiveness was equal to his cowardice.

On the seat, beside the driver of the coach, was Nicolas Lavillette, black-haired, brown-eyed, athletic, reckless-looking, with a cast in his left eye, which gave him a look of drollery, in keeping with his buoyant, daring nature. Beside him was a figure much more noticeable and unusual.

Lean, dark-featured, with keen-glancing eyes, and a body with a faculty for finding corners of ease; waving hair, streaked with grey, black moustache, and a hectic flush on the cheeks, lending to the world-wise face a wistful look—that, with near six feet of height, was the picture of his friend.

"Who is it?" asked the miller, with bulging eyes. "An English nobleman," answered Baby. "How do you know?" asked Gatineau.

"How do I know you are a fat, cheating miller?" replied the postmaster, with cunning care and a touch of malice. Malice was the only power Baby knew.

CHAPTER II

In the matter of power, Baby, the inquisitive postmaster and keeper of the bridge, was unlike the new arrival in Bonaventure. The abilities of the Honourable Tom Ferrol lay in a splendid plausibility, a spontaneous blarney. He could no more help being spendthrift of his affections and his morals than of his money, and many a time he had wished that his money was as inexhaustible as his emotions.

In point of morals, any of the Lavillettes presented a finer average than their new guest, who had come to give their feasting distinction, and what more time was to show. Indeed, the Hon. Mr. Ferrol had no morals to speak of, and very little honour. He was the penniless son of an Irish peer, who was himself well-nigh penniless; and he and his sister, whose path of life at home was not easy after her marriageable years had passed, drew from the consols the small sum of money their mother had left them, and sailed away for New York.

Six months of life there, with varying fortune in which a well-to-do girl in society gave him a promise of marriage, and then Ferrol found himself jilted for a baronet, who owned a line of steamships and could give the ambitious lady a title. In his sick heart he had spoken profanely of the future Lady of Title, had bade her good-bye with a smile and an agreeable piece of wit, and had gone home to his flat and sobbed like a schoolboy; for, as much as he could love anybody, he loved this girl. He and the faithful sister vanished from New York and appeared in Quebec, where they were made welcome in Government House, at the citadel, and among all who cared to know the weight of an inherited title. For a time, the fact that he had little or no money did not temper their hospitality with niggardliness or caution. But their cheery and witty guest began to take more wine than was good for him or comfortable for others; his bills at the clubs remained unpaid, his landlord harried him, his tailors pursued him; and then he borrowed cheerfully and well.

However, there came an end to this, and to the acceptance of his I O U's. Following the instincts of his Irish ancestors, he then leagued with a professional smuggler, and began to deal in contraband liquors and cigars. But before this occurred, he had sent his sister to a little secluded town, where she should be well out of earshot of his

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doings or possible troubles. He would have shielded her from harm at the cost of his life. His loyalty to her was only limited by the irresponsibility of his nature and a certain incapacity to see the difference between radical right and radical wrong. His honour was a matter of tradition, such as it was, and in all else he had the inherent invalidity of some of his distant forebears. For a time all went well, then discovery came, and only the kind intriguing of as good friends as any man deserved prevented his arrest and punishment. But it all got whispered about; and while some ladies saw a touch of romance in his doing professionally and wholesale what they themselves did in an amateurish way with laces, gloves and so on, men viewed the matter more seriously, and advised Ferrol to leave Quebec.

Since that time he had lived by his wits and pleasing, dangerous wits they were at Montreal and elsewhere. But fatal ill-luck pursued him. Presently a cold settled on his lungs. In the dead of winter, after sending what money he had to his sister, he had lived a week or more in a room, with no fire and little food. As time went on, the cold got no better. After sundry vicissitudes and twists of fortune, he met Nicolas Lavilette at a horse race, and a friendship was struck up. He frankly and gladly accepted an invitation to attend the wedding of Sophie Lavilette, and to make a visit at the farm, and at the Manor Casimbault afterwards. Nicolas spoke lightly of the Manor Casimbault, yet he had pride in it also; for, scamp as he was, and indifferent to anything like personal dignity or self-respect, he admired his father and had a natural, if good-natured, arrogance akin to Christine's self-will.

It meant to Ferrol freedom from poverty, misery and financial subterfuge for a moment; and he could be quiet for, as he said, "This confounded cold takes the iron out of my blood."

Like all people stricken with this disease, he never called it anything but a cold. All those illusions which accompany the malady were his. He would always be better "to-morrow." He told the two or three friends who came from their beds in the early morning to see him safely off from Montreal to Bonaventure that he would be all right as soon as he got out into the country; that he sat up too late in the town; and that he had just got a new prescription which had cured a dozen people "with colds and hemorrhages." His was only a cold just a cold; that was all. He was a bit weak sometimes, and what he needed was something to pull up his strength. The country would do this—plenty of fresh air, riding, walking, and that sort of thing.

He had left Montreal behind in gay spirits, and he continued gay for several hours, holding himself erect in the seat, noting the landscape, telling stories; but he stumbled with weakness as they got out of the coach for luncheon. He drank three full portions of whiskey at table, and ate nothing. The silent landlady who waited on them at last brought a huge bowl of milk, and set it before him without a word. A flush passed swiftly across his face and faded away, as, with quick sensitiveness, he glanced at Nicolas and another passenger, a fat priest. They took no notice, and, reassured, he said, with a laugh, that the landlady knew exactly what he wanted. Lifting the dish, he drained it at a gasp, though the milk almost choked him, and, to the apprehension of his hostess, set the bowl spinning on the table like a top. Another illusion of the disease was his: that he succeeded perfectly in deceiving everybody round him with his pathetic make-believe; and, unlike most deceivers, he deceived himself as well. The two actions, inconsistent as they were, were reconciled in him, as in all the race of consumptives, by some strange chemistry of the mind and spirit. He was on the broad, undiverging highway to death; yet, with every final token about him that he was in the enemy's country, surrounded, trapped, soon to be passed unceremoniously inside the citadel at the end of the avenue, he kept signalling back to old friends that all was well, and he told himself that to-morrow the king should have his own again "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!"

He was not very thin in body; his face was full, and at times his eyes were singularly and fascinatingly bright. He had colour that hectic flush which, on his cheek, was almost beautiful. One would have turned twice to see. The quantities of spirits that he drank (he ate little) would have killed a half-dozen healthy men. To him it was food, taken up, absorbed by the fever of his disease, giving him a real, not a fictitious strength; and so it would continue to do till some artery burst and choked him, or else, by some miracle of air and climate, the hole in his lung healed up again; which he, in his elation, believed would be "to-morrow." Perhaps the air, the food, and life of

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Bonaventure were the one medicine he needed!

But, in the moment Nicolas said to him that Bonaventure was just over the hill, that they would be able to see it now, he had a sudden feeling of depression. He felt that he would give anything to turn back. A perspiration broke out on his forehead and his cheek. His eyes had a wavering, anxious look. Some of that old sanity of the once healthy man was making a last effort for supremacy, breaking in upon illusive hopes and irresponsible deceptions.

It was only for a moment. Presently, from the top of the hill, they looked down upon the long line of little homes lying along the banks of the river like peaceful watchmen in a pleasant land, with corn and wine and oil at hand. The tall cross on the spire of the Parish Church was itself a message of hope. He did not define it so; but the impression vaguely, perhaps superstitiously, possessed him. It was this vague influence, perhaps (for he was not a Catholic), which made him involuntarily lift his hat, as did Nicolas, when they passed a calvary; which induced him likewise to make the sacred gesture when they met a priest, with an acolyte and swinging censer, hurrying silently on to the home of some dying parishioner. The sensations were different from anything he had known. He had been used to the Catholic religion in Ireland; he had seen it in France, Spain, Italy and elsewhere; but here was something essentially primitive, archaically touching and convincing.

His spirits came back with a rush; he had a splendid feeling of exaltation. He was not religious, never could be, but he felt religious; he was ill, but he felt that he was on the open highway to health; he was dishonest, but he felt an honest man; he was the son of a peer, but he felt himself brother to the fat miller by the roadway, to Baby, the postmaster and keeper of the bridge, to the Regimental Surgeon, who stood in his doorway, pulling at his moustache and blowing clouds of tobacco smoke into the air.

Shangois, the notary, met his eye as they dashed on. A new sensation not a change in the elation he felt, but an instant's interruption came to him. He asked who Shangois was, and Nicolas told him.

"A notary, eh?" he remarked gaily. "Well, why does he disguise himself? He looks like a ragpicker, and has the eye of Solomon and the devil in one. He ought to be in some Star Chamber Palmerston could make use of him."

"Oh, he's kept busy enough with secrets here!" was Nicolas's laughing reply.

"It's only a difference of size in the secrets anyhow," was Ferrol's response in the same vein; and in a few moments they had passed the Seignury, and were drawn up before the great farmhouse.

Its appearance was rather comfortable and commodious than impressive, but it had the air of home and undepreciating use. There was one beautiful clump of hollyhocks and sunflowers in the front garden; a corner of the main building was covered with morning-glories; a fence to the left was overgrown with grape-vines, making it look like a hedge; a huge pear tree occupied a spot opposite to the pretty copse of sunflowers and hollyhocks; and the rest of the garden was green, save just round a little "summer-house," in the corner, with its back to the road, near which Sophie had set a palisade of the golden-rod flower. Just beside the front door was a bush of purple lilac; and over the door, in copper, was the coat-of-arms of the Lavillettes, placed there, at Madame's insistence, in spite of the dying wish of Lavilette's father, a feeble, babbling old gentleman in knee-breeches, stock, and swallow-tailed coat, who, broken down by misfortune, age and loneliness, had gathered himself together for one last effort for becomingness against his daughter-in-law's false tastes and had died the day after. He was spared the indignity of the coat-of-arms on the tombstone only by the fierce opposition of Louis Lavilette, who upon this point had his first quarrel with his wife.

Ferrol saw no particular details in his first view of the house. The picture was satisfying to a tired man comfort, quiet, the bread of idleness to eat, and welcome, admiring faces round him. Monsieur Lavilette stood in the doorway, and behind him, at a carefully disposed distance, was Madame, rather more emphatically dressed than necessary. As he shook hands genially with Madame he saw Sophie and Christine in the doorway of the parlour.

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His spirits took another leap. His inexhaustible emotions were out upon cheerful parade at once.

The Lavillettes immediately became pensioners of his affections. The first hour of his coming he himself did not know which sister his ample heart was spending itself on most Sophie, with her English face, and slow, docile, well-bred manner, or Christine, dark, petite, impertinent, gay-hearted, wilful, unsparing of her tongue for others or for herself. Though Christine's lips and cheeks glowed, and her eyes had wonderful warm lights, incredulity was constantly signalled from both eyes and lips. She was a fine, daring little animal, with as great a talent for untruth as truth, though, to this point in her life, truth had been more with her. Her temptations had been few.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Ferrol seemed honestly to like the old farmhouse, with its low ceilings, thick walls, big beams and wide chimneys, and he showed himself perfectly at home. He begged to be allowed to sit for an hour in the kitchen, beside the great fireplace. He enjoyed this part of his first appearance greatly. It was like nothing he had tasted since he used, as a boy, to visit the huntsman's home on his father's estate, and gossip and smoke in that Galway chimney-corner. It was only when he had to face the too impressive adoration of Madame Lavilette that his comfort got a twist.

He made easy headway into the affections of his hostess; for, besides all other predilections, she had an adoring awe of the nobility. It rather surprised her that Ferrol seemed almost unaware of his title. He was quite without self-consciousness, although there was that little touch of irresponsibility in him which betrayed a readiness to sell his dignity for a small compensation. With a certain genial capacity for universal blarney, he was at first as impressive with Sophie as he was attentive to Christine. It was quite natural that presently Madame Lavilette should see possibilities beyond all her past imaginations. It would surely advance her ambitions to have him here for Sophie's wedding; but even as she thought that, she had twinges of disappointment, because she had promised Farcinelle to have the wedding as simple and bourgeois as possible.

Farcinelle did not share the social ambitions of the Lavillettes. He liked his political popularity, and he was only concerned for that. He had that touch of shrewdness to save him from fatuity where the Lavillettes were concerned. He was determined to associate with the ceremony all the primitive customs of the country. He had come of a race of simple farmers, and he was consistent enough to attempt to live up to the traditions of his people. He was entirely too good-natured to take exception to Ferrol's easy-going admiration of Sophie.

Ferrol spoke excellent French, and soon found points of pleasant contact with Monsieur Lavilette, who, despite the fact that he had coarsened as the years went on, had still upon him the touch of family tradition, which may become either offensive pride or defensive self-respect. With the Cure, Ferrol was not quite so successful. The ascetic, prudent priest, with that instinctive, long-sighted accuracy which belongs to the narrow-minded, scented difficulty. He disliked the English exceedingly; and all Irishmen were English men to him. He resisted Ferrol's blarney. His thin lips tightened, his narrow forehead seemed to grow narrower, and his very cassock appeared to contract austere on his figure as he talked to the refugee of misfortune.

When the most pardonable of gossips, the Regimental Surgeon, asked him on his way home what he thought of Ferrol, he shrugged his shoulders, tightened his lips again, and said:

"A polite, designing heretic."

The Regimental Surgeon, though a Frenchman, had once belonged to a British battery of artillery stationed at Quebec, and there he had acquired an admiration for the English, which betrayed itself in his curious attempts to imitate Anglo-Saxon bluffness and blunt spontaneity. When the Cure had gone, he flung back his shoulders, with

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a laugh, as he had seen the major-general do at the officers' mess at the citadel, and said in English:

"Heretics are damn' funny. I will go and call. I have also some Irish whiskey. He will like that; and pipes pipes, plenty of them!"

The pipe he was smoking at the moment had been given to him by the major-general, and he polished the silver ferrule, with its honourable inscription, every morning of his life.

On the morning of the second day after Ferrol came, he was carried off to the Manor Casimbault to see the painful alterations which were being made there under the direction of Madame Lavilette. Sophie, who had a good deal of natural taste, had in the old days fought against her mother's incongruous ideas, and once, when the rehabilitation of the Manor Casimbault came up, she had made a protest; but it was unavailing, and it was her last effort. The Manor Casimbault was destined to be an example of ancient dignity and modern bad taste. Alterations were going on as Madame Lavilette, Ferrol and Christine entered.

For some time Ferrol watched the proceedings with a casual eye, but presently he begged his hostess that she would leave the tall, old oak clock where it was in the big hall, and that the new, platter-faced office clock, intended for its substitute, be hung up in the kitchen. He eyed the well-scraped over-mantel askance and saw, with scarcely concealed astonishment, a fine, old, carved wooden seat carried out of doors to make room for an American rocking-chair. He turned his head away almost in anger when he saw that the beautiful brown wainscoting was being painted an ultra-marine blue. His partly disguised astonishment and dissent were not lost upon the crude but clever Christine. A new sense was opened up in her, and she felt somehow that the ultra-marine blue was not right, that the over-mantel had been spoiled, that the new walnut table was too noticeable, and that the American rocking-chair looked very common. Also she felt that the plush, with which her mother and the dressmaker at St. Croix had decorated her bodice, was not the thing. Presently this made her angry.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked a little maliciously, pointing to the rocking-chair in the salon.

"I prefer standing with you," he answered, eyeing the chair with a sly twinkle.

"No, that isn't it," she rejoined sharply. "You don't like the chair." Then suddenly breaking into English "Ah! I know, I know. You can't fool me. I see de leetla look in your eye; and you not like the paint, and you'd pitch that painter, Alcide, out into the snow if it is your house."

"I wouldn't, really," he answered he coughed a little "Alcide is doing his work very well. Couldn't you give me a coat of blue paint, too?"

The piquant, intelligent, fiery peasant face interested him. It had warmth, natural life and passion.

She flushed and stamped her foot, while he laughed heartily; and she was about to say something dangerous, when the laugh suddenly stopped and he began coughing. The paroxysm increased until he strained and caught at his breast with his hand. It seemed as if his chest and throat must burst.

She instantly changed. The flush of anger passed from her face, and something else came into it. She caught his hand.

"Oh! what can I do, what can I do to help you?" she asked pitifully. "I did not know you were so ill. Tell me, what can I do?"

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He made a gentle, protesting motion of his free arm he could not speak yet while she held and clasped his other hand.

"It's the worst I ever had," he said, after a moment "the very worst!"

He sat down, and again he had a fit of coughing, and the sweat started out violently upon his forehead and cheek. When his head at last lay back against the chair, the paroxysm over, a little spot of blood showed and spread upon his white lips. With a pained, shuddering little gasp she caught her handkerchief from her bosom, and, running one hand round his shoulder, quickly and gently caught away the spot of blood, and crumpled the handkerchief in her hand to hide it from him.

"Oh! poor fellow, poor fellow!" she said. "Oh! poor fellow!"

Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at him with that look which is not the love of a woman for a man, or of a lover for a lover, but that latent spirit of care and motherhood which is in every woman who is more woman than man. For there are women who are more men than women.

For himself, a new fact struck home in him. For the first time since his illness he felt that he was doomed. That little spot of blood in the crumpled handkerchief which had flashed past his eye was the fatal message he had sought to elude for months past. A hopeless and ironical misery shot through him. But he had humour too, and, with the taste of the warm red drop in his mouth still, his tongue touched his lips swiftly, and one hand grasping the arm of the chair, and the fingers of the other dropping on the back of her hand lightly, he said in a quaint, ironical tone:

"Dead for a ducat!"

When he saw the look of horror in her face, his eyes lifted almost gaily to hers, as he continued:

"A little brandy, if you can get it, mademoiselle."

"Yes, yes. I'll get some for you some whiskey!" she said, with frightened, terribly eager eyes.

"Alcide always has some. Don't stir. Sit just where you are." She ran out of the room swiftly a light-footed, warm-spirited, dramatic little thing, set off so garishly in the bodice with the plush trimming; but she had a big heart, and the man knew it. It was the big-heartedness which was the touch of the man in her that made her companionable to him.

He said to himself when she left him:

"What cursed luck!" And after a pause, he added: "Good-hearted little body, how sorry she looked!" Then he settled back in his chair, his eyes fixed upon her as she entered the room, eager, pale and solicitous. A half-hour later they two were on their way to the farmhouse, the work of despoiling going on in the Manor behind them. Ferrol walked with an easy, half-languid step, even a gay sort of courage in his bearing. The liquor he had drunk brought the colour to his lips. They were now hot and red, and his eyes had a singular feverish brilliancy, in keeping with the hectic flush on his cheek. He had dismissed the subject of his illness almost immediately, and Christine's adaptable nature had instantly responded to his mood.

He asked her questions about the country-side, of their neighbours, of the way they lived, all in an easy, unintrusive way, winning her confidence and provoking her candour.

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Two or three times, however, her face suddenly flushed with the memory of the scene in the Manor, and her first real awakening to her social insufficiency; for she of all the family had been least careful to see herself as others might see her. She was vain; she was somewhat of a barbarian; she loved nobody and nobody's opinion as she loved herself and her own opinion. Though, if any people really cared for her, and she for them, they were the Regimental Surgeon and Shangois the notary.

Once, as they walked on, she turned and looked back at the Manor House, but only for an instant. He caught the glance, and said:

"You'll like to live there, won't you?"

"I don't know," she answered almost sharply. "But if the Casimbaults liked it, I don't see why we shouldn't."

There was a challenge in her voice, defiance in the little toss of her head. He liked her spirit in spite of the vanity. Her vanity did not concern him greatly; for, after all, what was he doing here? Merely filling in dark days, living a sober-coloured game out. He had one solitary hundred dollars no more; and half of that he had borrowed, and half of it he got from selling his shooting-traps and his hunting-watch. He might worry along on that till the end of the game; but he had no money to send his sister in that secluded village two hundred miles away. She had never known how really poor he was; and she had lived in her simple way without want and without any unusual anxiety, save for his health. More than once he had practically starved himself to send money to her. Perhaps also he would have starved others for the same purpose.

"I'll warrant the Casimbaults never enjoyed the Manor as much as I've done that big kitchen in your house," he said, "and I can't see why you want to leave it. Don't you feel sorry you are going to leave the old place? Hadn't you got your own little spots there, and made friends with them? I feel as if I should like to sit down by the side of your big, warm chimney-corner, till the wind came along that blows out the candle."

"What do you mean by 'blowing out the candle'?" she asked.

"Well," he answered, "it means, shut up shop, drop the curtain, or anything you like. It means X Y Z and the grand finale!"

"Oh!" she said, with a little start, as the thing dawned upon her. "Don't speak like that; you're not going to die."

"Give me your handkerchief," he answered. "Give it to me, and I'll tell you how soon."

She jammed her hand down in her pocket. "No, I won't," she answered. "I won't!"

She never did, and he liked her none the less for that. Somehow, up to this time, he had always thought that he would get well, and to-morrow he would probably think so again; but just for the moment he felt the real truth.

Presently she said (they spoke in French):

"Why is it you like our old kitchen so much? It isn't nearly as nice as the parlour."

"Well, it's a place to live in, anyhow; and I fancy you all feel more at home there than anywhere else."

"I feel just as much at home in the parlour as there," she retorted.

"Oh, no, I think not. The room one lives in the most is the room for any one's money."

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She looked at him in a puzzled way. Too many sensations were being born in her all at once; but she did recognise that he was not trying to subtract anything from the pomp of the Lavillettes.

He belonged to a world that she did not know and yet he was so perfectly at home with her, so idly easygoing.

"Did you ever live in a castle?" she asked eagerly. "Yes," he said, with a dry little laugh. Then, after a moment, with the half-abstracted manner of a man who is recalling a long-forgotten scene, he added: "I lived in the North Tower, looking out on Farcalladen Moor. When I wasn't riding to the hounds myself I could see them crossing to or from the meet. The River Stavely ran between; and just under the window of the North Tower is the prettiest copse you ever saw. That was from one side of the tower. From the other side you looked into the court-yard. As a boy, I liked the court-yard just as well as the moor; for the pigeons, the sparrows, the horses and the dogs were all there. As a man, I liked the moor better. Well, I had jolly good times in Castle Stavely once upon a time."

"Yet, you like our kitchen!" she again urged, in a maze of wonderment.

"I like everything here," he answered; "everything everything, you understand!" he said, looking meaningly into her eyes.

"Then you'll like the wedding Sophie's wedding," she answered, in a little confusion.

A half-hour later, he said much the same sort of thing to Sophie, with the same look in his eyes, and only the general purpose, in either case, of being on easy terms with them.

CHAPTER IV

The day of the wedding there was a gay procession through the parish of the friends and constituents of Magon Farcinelle. When they came to his home he joined them, and marched at the head of the procession as had done many a forefather of his, with ribbons on his hat and others at his button-hole. After stopping for exchange of courtesies at several houses in the parish, the procession came to the homestead of the Lavillettes, and the crowd were now enough excited to forget the pride which had repelled and offended them for many years.

Monsieur Lavillette made a polite speech, sending round cider and "white wine" (as native whiskey was called) when he had finished. Later, Nicolas furnished some good brandy, and Farcinelle sent more. A good number of people had come out of curiosity to see what manner of man the Englishman was, well prepared to resent his overbearing snobbishness they were inclined to believe every Englishman snobbish. But Ferrol was so entirely affable, and he drank so freely with everyone that came to say "A votre sante, M'sieu' le Baron," and kept such a steady head in spite of all those quantities of white wine, brandy and cider, that they were almost ready to carry him on their shoulders; though, with their racial prejudice, they would probably have repented of that indiscretion on the morrow.

Presently, dancing began in a paddock just across the road from the house; and when Madame Lavillette saw that Mr. Ferrol gave such undisguised countenance to the primitive rejoicings, she encouraged the revellers and enlarged her hospitality, sending down hampers of eatables. She preened with pleasure when she saw Ferrol walking up and down in very confidential conversation with Christine. If she had been really observant she would have seen that Ferrol's tendency was towards an appearance of confidential friendliness with almost everybody. Great ideas had entered Madame's head, but they were vaguely defining themselves in Christine's mind also. Where might not this friendship with Ferrol lead her?

Something occurred in the midst of the dancing which gave a new turn to affairs. In one of the pauses a song came monotonously lilting down the street; yet it was not a song, it was only a sort of humming or chanting. Immediately there was a clapping of hands, a flutter of female voices, and delighted exclamations of children.

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"Oh, it's a dancing bear, it's a dancing bear!" they cried.

"Is it Pito?" asked one.

"Is it Adrienne?" cried another.

"But no; I'll bet it's Victor!" exclaimed a third. As the man and the bear came nearer, they saw it was neither of these. The man's voice was not unpleasant; it had a rolling, crooning sort of sound, a little weird, as though he had lived where men see few of their kind and have much to do with animals.

He was bearded, but young; his hair grew low on his forehead, and, although it was summer time, a fur cap was set far back, like a fez, upon his black curly hair. His forehead was corrugated, like that of a man of sixty who had lived a hard life; his eyes were small, black and piercing. He wore a thick, short coat, a red sash about his waist, a blue flannel shirt, and a loose red scarf, like a handkerchief, at his throat. His feet were bare, and his trousers were rolled half way up to his knee. In one hand he carried a short pole with a steel pike in it, in the other a rope fastened to a ring in the bear's nose.

The bear, a huge brown animal, upright on his hind legs, was dancing sideways along the road, keeping time to the lazy notes of his leader's voice.

In front of the Hotel France they halted, and the bear danced round and round in a ring, his eyes rolling savagely, his head shaking from side to side in a bad-tempered way.

Suddenly some one cried out: "It's Vanne Castine! It's Vanne!"

People crowded nearer: there was a flurry of exclamations, and then Christine took a few steps forward where she could see the man's face, and as swiftly drew back into the crowd, pale and distraite.

The man watched her until she drew away behind a group, which was composed of Ferrol, her brother and her sister Sophie. He dropped no note of his song, and the bear kept jiggling on. Children and elders threw coppers, which he picked up, with a little nod of his head, a malicious sort of smile on his lips. He kept a vigilant eye on the bear, however, and his pole was pointed constantly towards it. After about five minutes of this entertainment he moved along up the road. He spoke no word to anybody though there were some cries of greeting, but passed on, still singing the monotonous song, followed by a crowd of children. Presently he turned a corner, and was lost to sight. For a moment longer the lullaby floated across the garden and the green fields, then the cornet and the concertina began again, and Ferrol turned towards Christine.

He had seen her paleness and her look of consternation, had observed the sulky, penetrating look of the bear-leader's eye, and he knew that he was stumbling upon a story. Her eye met his, then swiftly turned away. When her look came to his face again it was filled with defiant laughter, and a hot brilliancy showed where the paleness had been.

"Will you dance with me?" Ferrol asked.

"Dance with you here?" she responded incredulously.

"Yes, just here," he said, with a dry little laugh, as he ran his arm round her waist and drew her out upon the green.

"And who is Vanne Castine?" he asked as they swung away in time with the music.

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The rest stopped dancing when they saw these two appear in the ring— through curiosity or through courtesy.

She did not answer immediately. They danced a little longer, then he said:

"An old friend, eh?"

After a moment, with a masked defiance still, and a hard laugh, she answered in English, though his question had been in French:

"De frien' of an ol frien'."

"You seem to be strangers now," he suggested. She did not answer at all, but suddenly stopped dancing, saying: "I'm tired."

The dance went on without them. Sophie and Farcinelle presently withdrew also. In five minutes the crowd had scattered, and the Lavillettes and Mr. Ferrol returned to the house.

Meanwhile, as they passed up the street, the droning, vibrating voice of the bear—leader came floating along the air and through the voices of the crowd like the thread of motive in the movement of an opera.

CHAPTER V

That night, while gaiety and feasting went on at the Lavillettes', there was another sort of feasting under way at the house of Shangois, the notary.

On one side of a tiny fire in the chimney, over which hung a little black kettle, sat Shangois and Vanne Castine. Castine was blowing clouds of smoke from his pipe, and Shangois was pouring some tea leaves into a little tin pot, humming to himself snatches of an old song as he did so:

"What shall we do when the King comes home?
What shall we do when he rides along
With his slaves of Greece and his serfs of Rome?
What shall we sing for a song
When the King comes home?"

"What shall we do when the King comes home?
What shall we do when he speaks so fair?
Shall we give him the house with the silver dome
And the maid with the crimson hair
When the King comes home?"

A long, heavy sigh filled the room, but it was not the breath of Vanne Castine. The sound came from the corner where the huge brown bear huddled in savage ease. When it stirred, as if in response to Shangois's song, the chains rattled. He was fastened by two chains to a staple driven into the foundation timbers of the house. Castine's bear might easily be allowed too much liberty!

Once he had killed a man in the open street of the City of Quebec, and once also he had nearly killed Castine. They had had a fight and struggle, out of which the man came with a lacerated chest; but since that time he had become the master of the bear. It feared him; yet, as he travelled with it, he scarcely ever took his eyes off it, and he never trusted it. That was why, although Michael was always near him, sleeping or waking, he kept him

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chained at night.

As Shangois sang, Castine's brow knotted and twitched and his hand clinched on his pipe with a sudden ferocity.

"Name of a black cat, what do you sing that song for, notary?" he broke out peevishly. "Nose of a little god, are you making fun of me?"

Shangois handed him some tea. "There's no one to laugh why should I make fun of you?" he asked, jeeringly, in English, for his English was almost as good as his French, save in the turn of certain idioms. "Come, my little punchinello, tell me, now, why have you come back?"

Castine laughed bitterly.

"Ha, ha, why do I come back? I'll tell you." He sucked at his pipe. "Bon'venture is a good place to come to—yes. I have been to Quebec, to St. John, to Fort Garry, to Detroit, up in Maine and down to New York. I have ride a horse in a circus, I have drive a horse and sleigh in a shanty, I have play in a brass band, I have drink whiskey every night for a month enough whiskey. I have drink water every night for a year it is not enough. I have learn how to speak English; I have lose all my money when I go to play a game of cards. I go back to de circus; de circus smash; I have no pay. I take dat damn bear Michael as my share yes. I walk trough de State of New York, all trough de State of Maine to Quebec, all de leetla village, all de big city yes. I learn dat damn funny song to sing to Michael. Ha, why do I come to Bon'venture? What is there to Bon'venture? Ha! you ask that? I know and you know, M'sieu' Shangois. There is nosing like Bon'venture in all de worl'.

"What is it you would have? Do you want nice warm house in winter, plenty pork, molass', patat, leetla drop whiskey 'hind de door in de morning? Ha! you come to Bon'venture. Where else you fin' it? You want people say: 'How you do, Vanne Castine how you are? Adieu, Vanne Castine; to see you again ver' happy, Vanne Castine.' Ha, that is what you get in Bon'venture. Who say 'God bless you' in New York! They say 'Damn you!' yes, I know.

"Where have you a church so warm, so ver' nice, and everybody say him mass and God—have—mercy? Where you fin' it like that leetla place on de hill in Bon'venture? Yes. There is anoser place in Bon'venture, ver' nice place yes, ha! On de side of de hill. You have small—pox, scarlet fev', difthere; you get smash your head, you get break your leg, you fall down, you go to die. Ha, who is there in all de worl' like M'sieu' Vallier, the Cure? Who will say to you like him: 'Vanne Castine, you have break all de commandments: you have swear, you have steal, you have kill, you have drink. Ver' well, now, you will be sorry for dat, and say your prayer. Perhaps, after hunder fifty tousen' years of purgator', you will be forgive and go to Heaven. But first, when you die, we will put you way down in de leetla warm house in de ground, on de side of de hill, in de Parish of Bon'venture, because it is de only place for a gipsy like Vanne Castine.'

"You ask me—ah! I see you look at me, M'sieu' le Notaire, you look at me like a leetla dev'. You t'ink I come for somet'ing else" his black eyes flashed under his brow, he shook his head, and his hands clinched "You ask me why I come back? I come back because there is one thing I care for mos' in all de worl'. You t'ink I am happy to go about with a damn brown bear and dance trough de village? Moi? no, no, no! What a Jack I look when I sing ah, that fool's song all down de street! I come back for one thing only, M'sieu' Shangois.

"You know that night ah, four, five years ago? You remember, M'sieu' Shangois? Ah! she was so beautiful, so sweet; her hair it fall down about her face, her eyes all black, her cheeks like the snow, her lips, her lips! You rememb' her father curse me, tell me to go. Why? Because I have kill a man! Eh bien, what if I kill a man! He would have kill me: I do it to save myself. I say I am not guilty; but her father say I am a sc'undrel, and turn me out de house.

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"De girl, Christine, she love me. Yes, she love Vanne Castine. She say to me, 'I will go with you. Go anywhere, and I will go!'

"It is night and it is all dark. I wait at de place, an' she come. We start to walk to Montreal. Ah! dat night, it is like fire in my heart. Well, a great storm come down, and we have to come back. We come to your house here, light a fire, and sit just in de spot where I am, one hour, two hour, three hour. Saprie, how I love her! She is in me like fire, like de wind and de sea. Well, I am happy like no other man. I sit here and look at her, and t'ink of to-morrow-for ever. She look at me; oh, de love of God, she look at me! So I kneel down on de floor here beside her and say, 'Who shall take you from me, Christine, my leetla Christine?'

"She look at me and say: 'Who shall take you from me, my big Vanne?'

"All at once the door open, and "

"And a little black notary take her from you," said Shangois, dryly, and with a touch of malice also. "You, yes, you lawyer dev', you take her from me! You say to her it is wicked. You tell her how her father will weep and her mother's heart will break. You tell her how she will be ashamed', and a curse will fall on her. Then she begin to cry, for she is afraid. Ah, where is de wrong? I love her; I would go to marry her but no, what is that to you! She turn on me and say, 'I will go back to my father.' And she go back. After that I try to see her; but she will not see me. Then I go away, and I am gone five years; yes."

Shangois came over, and with his thin beautiful hand (for despite the ill-kept finger nails, it was the one fine feature of his body-long, shapely, artistic) tapped Castine's knee.

"I did right to save Christine. She hates you now. If she had gone with you that night, do you suppose she would have been happy as your wife? No, she is not for Vanne Castine."

Suddenly Shangois's manner changed; he laid his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"My poor, wicked, good-for-nothing Vanne Castine, Christine Lavilette was not made for you. You are a poor vaurien, always a poor vaurien. I knew your father and your two grandfathers. They were all vauriens; all as handsome as you can think, and all died, not in their beds. Your grandfather killed a man, your father drank and killed a man. Your grandfather drove his wife to her grave, your father broke your mother's heart. Why should you break the heart of any girl in the world? Leave her alone. Is it love to a woman when you break all the commandments, and shame her and bring her down to where you are a bad vaurien? When a man loves a woman with the true love, he will try to do good for her sake. Go back to that crazy New York it is the place for you. Ma'm'selle Christine is not for you."

"Who is she for, m'sieu' le dev'?"

"Perhaps for the English Irishman," answered Shangois, in a low suggestive tone, as he dropped a little brandy in his tea with light fingers.

"Ah, sacre! we shall see. There is vaurien in her too," was the half-triumphant reply.

"There is more woman," retorted Shangois; "much more."

"We'll see about that, m'sieu'!" exclaimed Castine, as he turned towards the bear, which was clawing at his chain.

An hour later, a scene quite as important occurred at Lavilette's great farmhouse.

CHAPTER VI

It was about ten o'clock. Lights were burning in every window. At a table in the dining-room sat Monsieur and Madame Lavilette, the father of Magon Farcinelle, and Shangois, the notary. The marriage contract was before them. They had reached a point of difficulty. Farcinelle was stipulating for five acres of river-land as another item in Sophie's dot.

The corners tightened around Madame's mouth. Lavilette scratched his head, so that the hair stood up like flying tassels of corn. The land in question lay next a portion of Farcinelle's own farm, with a river frontage. On it was a little house and shed, and no better garden-stuff grew in the parish than on this same five acres.

"But I do not own the land," said Lavilette. "You've got a mortgage on it," answered Farcinelle. "Foreclose it."

"Suppose I did foreclose; you couldn't put the land in the marriage contract until it was mine."

The notary shrugged his shoulder ironically, and dropped his chin in his hand as he furtively eyed the two men. Farcinelle was ready for the emergency. He turned to Shangois.

"I've got everything ready for the foreclosure," said he. "Couldn't it be done to-night, Shangois?"

"Hardly to-night. You might foreclose, but the property couldn't be Monsieur Lavilette's until it is duly sold under the mortgage."

"Here, I'll tell you what can be done," said Farcinelle. "You can put the mortgage in the contract as her dot, and, name of a little man! I'll foreclose it, I can tell you. Come, now, Lavilette, is it a bargain?" Shangois sat back in his chair, the fingers of both hands drumming on the table before him, his head twisted a little to one side. His little reflective eyes sparkled with malicious interest, and his little voice said, as though he were speaking to himself:

"Excuse, but the land belongs to the young Vanne Castine eh?"

"That's it," exclaimed Farcinelle.

"Well, why not give the poor vaurien a chance to take up the mortgage?"

"Why, he hasn't paid the interest in five years!" said Lavilette.

"But ah you have had the use of the land, I think, monsieur. That should meet the interest." Lavilette scowled a little; Farcinelle grunted and laughed.

"How can I give him a chance to pay the mortgage?" said Lavilette. "He never had a penny. Besides, he hasn't been seen for five years."

A faint smile passed over Shangois's face. "Yesterday," he said, "he had not been seen for five years, but to-day he is in Bonaventure."

"The devil!" said Lavilette, dropping a fist on the table, and staring at the notary; for he was not present in the afternoon when Castine passed by.

"What difference does that make?" snarled Farcinelle. "I'll bet he's got nothing more than what he went away

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with, and that wasn't a sou markee!"

A provoking smile flickered at the corners of Shangois's mouth, and he said, with a dry inflection, as he dipped and redipped his quill pen in the inkhorn:

"He has a bear, my friends, which dances very well." Farcinelle guffawed. "St. Mary!" said he, slapping his leg, "we'll have the bear at the wedding, and I'll have that farm of Vanne Castine's. What does he want of a farm? He's got a bear. Come, is it a bargain? Am I to have the mortgage? If you don't stick it in, I'll not let my boy marry your girl, Lavilette. There, now, that's my last word."

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, nor his wife, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his," said the notary, abstractedly, drawing the picture of a fat Jew on the paper before him.

The irony was lost upon his hearers. Madame Lavilette had been thinking, however, and she saw further than her husband.

"It amounts to the same thing," she said. "You see it doesn't go away from Sophie; so let him have it, Louis."

"All right," responded monsieur at last, "Sophie gets the acres and the house in her dot."

"You won't give young Vanne Castine a chance?" asked the notary. "The mortgage is for four hundred dollars and the place is worth seven hundred!"

No one replied. "Very well, my Israelites," added Shangois, bending over the contract.

An hour later, Nicolas Lavilette was in the big storeroom of the farmhouse, which was reached by a covered passage from the hall between the kitchen and the dining-room. In his off-hand way he was getting out some flour, dried fruit and preserves for the cook, who stood near as he loaded up her arms. He laughingly thrust a string of green peppers under her chin, and added a couple of sprigs of summer-savoury, then suddenly turned round, with a start, for a peculiar low whistle came to him through the half-open window. It was followed by heavy stertorous breathing.

He turned back again to the cook, gaily took her by the shoulders, and pushed her to the door. Closing it behind her, he shot the bolt and ran back to the window. As he did so, a hand appeared on the windowsill, and a face followed the hand.

"Ha! Nicolas Lavilette, is that you? So, you know my leetla whistle again!"

Nicolas's brow darkened. In old days he and this same Vanne Castine had been in many a scrape together, and Vanne, the elder, had always borne the responsibility of their adventures. Nicolas had had enough of those old days; other ambitions and habits governed him now. He was not exactly the man to go back on a friend, but Castine no longer had any particular claims to friendship. The last time he had heard Vanne's whistle was a night five years before, when they both joined a gang of river-drivers, and made a raid on some sham American speculators and surveyors and labourers, who were exploiting an oil-well on the property of the old seigneur. The two had come out of the melee with bruised heads, and Vanne with a bullet in his calf. But soon afterwards came Christine's elopement with Vanne, of which no one knew save her father, Nicolas, Shangois and Vanne himself. That ended their compact, and, after a bitter quarrel, they had parted and had never met nor seen each other till this very afternoon.

"Yes, I know your whistle all right," answered Nicolas, with a twist of the shoulder.

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"Aren't you going to shake hands?" asked Castine, with a sort of sneer on his face.

Nicolas thrust his hands down in his pockets. "I'm not so glad to see you as all that," he answered, with a contemptuous laugh.

The black eyes of the bear-leader were alive with anger.

"You're a damn' fool, Nic Lavilette. You think because I lead a bear eh? Pshaw! you shall see. I am nothing, eh? I am to walk on! Nic Lavilette, once he steal the Cure's pig and "

"See you there, Castine, I've had enough of that," was the half-angry, half-amused interruption. "What are you after here?"

"What was I after five years ago?" was the meaning reply.

Lavilette's face suddenly flushed with fury. He gripped the window with both hands, and made as if he would leap out; but beside Castine's face there appeared another, with glaring eyes, red tongue, white vicious teeth, and two huge claws which dropped on the ledge of the window in much the same way as did Lavilette's.

There was a moment's silence as the man and the beast looked at each other, and then Castine began laughing in a low, sneering sort of way.

"I'll shoot the beast, and I'll break your neck if ever I see you on this farm again," said Lavilette, with wild anger.

"Break my neck that's all right; but shoot this leetla Michael! When you do that you will not have to wait for a British bullet to kill you. I will do it with a knife just where you can hear it sing under your ear!"

"British bullet!" said Lavilette, excitedly; "what about a British bullet eh what?"

"Only that the Rebellion's coming quick now," answered Castine, his manner changing, and a look of cunning crossing his face. "You've given your name to the great Papineau, and I am here, as you see."

"You you what have you got to do with the Revolution? with Papineau?"

"Pah! do you think a Lavilette is the only patriot! Papineau is my friend, and "

"Your friend "

"My friend. I am carrying his message all through the parishes. Bon'venture is the last almost. The great General Papineau sends you a word, Nic Lavilette here."

He drew from his pocket a letter and handed it over. Lavilette tore it open. It was a captain's commission for M. Nicolas Lavilette, with a call for money and a company of men and horses.

"Maybe there's a leetla noose hanging from the tail of that, but then it is the glory eh? Captain Lavilette eh?" There was covert malice in Castine's voice. "If the English whip us, they won't shoot us like grand seigneurs, they will hang us like dogs."

Lavilette scarcely noticed the sneer. He was seeing visions of a captain's sword and epaulettes, and planning to get men, money and horses together for this matter had been brooding for nearly a year, and he had been the active leader in Bonaventure.

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"We've been near a hundred years, we Frenchmen, eating dirt in the country we owned from the start; and I'd rather die fighting to get back the old citadel than live with the English heel on my nose," said Lavilette, with a play-acting attempt at oratory.

"Yes, an' dey call us Johnny Pea-soups," said Castine, with a furtive grin. "An' perhaps that British Colborne will hang us to our barn doors eh?"

There was silence for a moment, in which Lavilette read the letter over again with gloating eyes. Presently Castine started and looked round.

"What's that?" he said in a whisper. "I heard nothing."

"I heard the feet of a man yes."

They both stood moveless, listening. There was no sound; but, at the same time, the Hon. Mr. Ferrol had the secret of the Rebellion in his hands.

A moment later Castine and his bear were out in the road. Lavilette leaned out of the window and mused. Castine's words of a few moments before came to him:

"That British Colborne will hang us to our barn doors eh?"

He shuddered, and struck a light.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. Ferrol slept in the large guest-chamber of the house. Above it was Christine's bedroom. Thick as were the timbers and boards of the floor, Christine could hear one sound, painfully monotonous and frequent, coming from his room the whole night the hacking, rending cough which she had heard so often since he came. The fear of Vanne Castine, the memories of the wild, half animal-like love she had had for him in the old days, the excitement of the new events which had come into her life; these kept her awake, and she tossed and turned in feverish unrest. All that had happened since Ferrol had arrived, every word that he had spoken, every motion that he had made, every look of his face, she recalled vividly. All that he was, which was different from the people she had known, she magnified, so that to her he had a distant, overwhelming sort of grandeur. She beat the bedclothes in her restlessness. Suddenly she sat up straight in bed.

"Oh, if I hadn't been a Lavilette! If I'd only been born and brought up with the sort of people he comes from, I'd not have been ashamed of myself or him of me."

The plush bodice she had worn that day danced before her eyes. She knew how horribly ugly it was. Her fingers ran over the patchwork quilt on her bed; and although she could not see it, she loathed it, because she knew it was a painful mess of colours. With a little touch of dramatic extravagance, she leaned over and down, and drew her fingers contemptuously along the rag-carpet on the floor. Then she cried a little hysterically:

"He never saw anything like that before. How he must laugh as he sits there in that room!"

As if in reply, the hacking cough came faintly through the time-worn floor.

"That cough's going to kill him, to kill him," she said.

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Then, with a little start and with a sort of cry, which she stopped by putting both hands over her mouth, she said to herself, brokenly:

"Why shouldn't he why shouldn't he love me! I could take care of him; I could nurse him; I could wait on him; I could be better to him than any one else in the world. And it wouldn't make any difference to him at all in the end. He's going to die before long I know it. Well, what does it matter what becomes of me afterwards? I should have had him; I should have loved him; he should have been mine for a little while anyway. I'd be good to him; oh, I'd be good to him! Who else is there? He'll get worse and worse; and what will any of the fine ladies do for him then, I'd like to know. Why aren't they here? Why isn't he with them? He's poor Nic says so and they're rich. Why don't they help him? I would. I'd give him my last penny and the last drop of blood in my heart. What do they know about love?"

Her little teeth clinched, she shook her brown hair back in a sort of fury.

"What do they know about love? What would they do for it? I'd have my fingers chopped off one by one for it. I'd break every one of the ten commandments for it. I'd lose my soul for it.

"I've got twenty times as much heart as any one of them, I don't care who they are. I'd lie for him; I'd steal for him; I'd kill for him. I'd watch everything that he says, and I'd say it as he says it. I'd be angry when he was angry, miserable when he was miserable, happy when he was happy. Vanne Castine what was he! What was it that made me care for him then? And now now he travels with a bear, and they toss coppers to him; a beggar, a tramp a dirty, lazy tramp! He hates me, I know or else he loves me, and that's worse. And I'm afraid of him; I know I'm afraid of him. Oh, how will it all end? I know there's going to be trouble. I could see it in Vanne's face. But I don't care, I don't care, if Mr. Ferrol "

The cough came droning through the floor.

"If he'd only ah! I'd do anything for him, anything; anybody would. I saw Sophie look at him as she never looked at Magon. If she did if she dared to care for him "

All at once she shivered as if with shame and fright, drew the bedclothes about her head, and burst into a fit of weeping. When it passed, she lay still and nerveless between the coarse sheets, and sank into a deep sleep just as the dawn crept through the cracks of the blind.

CHAPTER VIII

The weeks went by. Sophie had become the wife of the member for the country, and had instantly settled down to a quiet life. This was disconcerting to Madame Lavilette, who had hoped that out of Farcinelle's official position she might reap some praise and pence of ambition. Meanwhile, Ferrol became more and more a cherished and important figure in the Manor Casimbault, where the Lavillettes had made their home soon after the wedding. The old farmhouse had also secretly become a rendezvous for the mysterious Nicolas Lavilette and his rebel comrades. This was known to Mr. Ferrol. One evening he stopped Nic as he was leaving the house, and said:

"See, Nic, my boy, what's up? I know a thing or so what's the use of playing peek-a-boo?"

"What do you know, Ferrol?"

"What's between you and Vanne Castine, for instance. Come, now, own up and tell me all about it. I'm British; but I'm Nic Lavilette's friend anyhow."

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He insinuated into his tone that little touch of brogue which he used when particularly persuasive. Nic put out his hand with a burst of good-natured frankness.

"Meet me in the store-room of the old farmhouse at nine o'clock, and I'll tell you. Here's a key." Handing over the key, he grasped Ferrol's hand with an effusive confidence, and hurried out. Nic Lavilette was now an important person in his own sight and in the sight of others in Bonaventure. In him the pomp of his family took an individual form.

Earlier than the appointed time, Ferrol turned the key and stepped inside the big despoiled hallway of the old farmhouse. His footsteps sounded hollow in the empty rooms. Already dust had gathered, and an air of desertion and decay filled the place in spite of the solid timbers and sound floors and window-sills. He took out his watch; it was ten minutes to nine. Passing through the little hallway to the store-room, he opened the door. It was dark inside. Striking a match, he saw a candle on the window-sill, and, going to it, he lighted it with a flint and steel lying near. The window was shut tight. From curiosity only he tried to open the shutter, but it was immovable. Looking round, he saw another candle on the window-sill opposite. He lighted it also, and mechanically tried to force the shutters of the window, but they were tight also.

Going to the door, which opened into the farmyard, he found it securely fastened. Although he turned the lock, the door would not open.

Presently his attention was drawn by the glitter of something upon one of the crosspieces of timber halfway up the wall. Going over, he examined it, and found it to be a broken bayonet left there by a careless rebel. Placing the steel again upon the ledge, he began walking up and down thoughtfully.

Presently he was seized with a fit of coughing. The paroxysm lasted a minute or more, and he placed his arm upon the window-sill, leaning his head upon it. Presently, as the paroxysm lessened, he thought he heard the click of a lock. He raised his head, but his eyes were misty, and, seeing nothing, he leaned his head on his arm again.

Suddenly he felt something near him. He swung round swiftly, and saw Vanne Castine's bear not fifteen-feet away from him! It raised itself on its hind legs, its red eyes rolling, and started towards him. He picked up the candle from the window-sill, threw it in the animal's face, and dashed towards the door.

It was locked. He swung round. The huge beast, with a loud snarl, was coming down upon him.

Here he was, shut within four solid walls, with a wild beast hungry for his life. All his instincts were alive. He had little hope of saving himself, but he was determined to do what lay in his power.

His first impulse was to blow out the other candle. That would leave him in the dark, and it struck him that his advantage would be greater if there were no light. He came straight towards the bear, then suddenly made a swift movement to the left, trusting to his greater quickness of movement. The bear was nearly as quick as he, and as he dashed along the wall towards the candle, he could hear its breath just behind him.

As he passed the window, he caught the candle in his hands, and was about to throw it on the floor or in the bear's face, when he remembered that, in the dark, the bear's sense of smell would be as effective as eyesight, while he himself would be no better off.

He ran suddenly to the centre of the room, the candle still in his hand, and turned to meet his foe. It came savagely at him. He dodged, ran past it, turned, doubled on it, and dodged again. A half-dozen times this was repeated, the candle still flaring. It could not last long. The bear was enraged. Its movements became swifter, its vicious teeth and lips were covered with froth, which dripped to the floor, and sometimes splattered Ferrol's clothes as he ran past. No matador ever played with the horns of a mad bull as Ferrol played his deadly game with Michael, the

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dancing bear. His breath was becoming shorter and shorter; he had a stifling sensation, a terrible tightness across his chest. He did not cough, however, but once or twice he tasted warm drops of his heart's blood in his mouth. Once he drew the back of his hand across his lips mechanically, and a red stain showed upon it.

In his boyhood and early manhood he had been a good sportsman; had been quick of eye, swift of foot, and fearless. But what could fearlessness avail him in this strait? With the best of rifles he would have felt himself at a disadvantage. He was certain his time had come; and with that conviction upon him, the terror of the thing and the horrible physical shrinking almost passed away from him. The disease, eating away his life, had diminished that revolt against death which is in the healthy flesh of every man. He was levying upon the vital forces remaining in him, which, distributed naturally, might cover a year or so, to give him here and now a few moments of unnatural strength for the completion of a hopeless struggle.

It was also as if two brains in him were working: one busy with all the chances and details of his wild contest, the other with the events of his life.

Pictures flashed before him. Some having to do with the earliest days of his childhood; some with fighting on the Danube, before he left the army, impoverished and ashamed; some with idle hours in the North Tower in Stavely Castle; and one with the day he and his sister left the old castle, never to return, and looked back upon it from the top of Farcalladen Moor, waving a "God bless you" to it. The thought of his sister filled him with a desire, a pitiful desire to live.

Just then another picture flashed before his eyes. It was he himself, riding the mad stallion, Bolingbroke, the first year he followed the hounds: how the brute tried to smash his leg against a stone wall; how it reared until it almost toppled over and backwards; how it jibbed at a gate, and nearly dashed its own brains out against a tree; and how, after an hour's hard fighting, he made it take the stiffest fence and water-course in the county.

This thought gave him courage now. He suddenly remembered the broken bayonet upon the ledge against the wall. If he could reach it there might be a chance chance to strike one blow for life. As his eye glanced towards the wall he saw the steel flash in the light of the candle.

The bear was between him and it. He made a feint towards the left, then as quickly to the right. But doing so, he slipped and fell. The candle dropped to the floor and went out. With a lightning-like instinct of self-preservation he swung over upon his face just as the bear, in its wild rush, passed over his head. He remembered afterwards the odour of the hot, rank body, and the sprawling huge feet and claws. Scrambling to his feet swiftly, he ran to the wall. Fortune was with him. His hand almost instantly clutched the broken bayonet. He whipped out his handkerchief, tore the scarf from his neck, and wound them around his hand, that the broken bayonet should not tear the flesh as he fought for his life; then, seizing it, he stood waiting for the bear to come on. His body was bent forwards, his eyes straining into the dark, his hot face dripping, dripping sweat, his breath coming hard and laboured from his throat.

For a minute there was absolute silence, save for the breathing of the man and the savage panting of the beast. Presently he felt exactly where the bear was, and listened intently. He knew that it was now but a question of minutes, perhaps seconds. Suddenly it occurred to him that if he could but climb upon the ledge where the bayonet had been, there might be safety. Yet again, in getting up, the bear might seize him, and there would be an end to all immediately. It was worth trying, however.

Two things happened at that moment to prevent the trial: the sound of knocking on a door somewhere, and the roaring rush of the bear upon him. He sprang to one side, striking at the beast as he did so. The bayonet went in and out again. There came voices from the outside; evidently somebody was trying to get in.

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The bear roared again and came on. It was all a blind man's game. But his scent, like the animal's, was keen. He had taken off his coat, and he now swung it out before him in a half-circle, and as it struck the bear it covered his own position. He swung aside once more and drove his arm into the dark. The bayonet struck the nose of the beast.

Now there was a knocking and a hammering at the window, and the wrenching of the shutters. He gathered himself together for the next assault. Suddenly he felt that every particle of strength had gone out of him. He pulled himself up with a last effort. His legs would not support him; he shivered and swayed. God, would they never get that window open!

His senses were abnormally acute. Another sound attracted him: the opening of the door, and a voice Vanne Castine's calling to the bear.

His heart seemed to give a leap, then slowly to roll over with a thud, and he fell to the floor as the bear lunged forwards upon him.

A minute afterwards Vanne Castine was goading the savage beast through the door and out to the hallway into the yard as Nic swung through the open window into the room.

Castine's lantern stood in the middle of the floor, and between it and the window lay Ferrol, the broken bayonet still clutched in his right hand. Lavilette dropped on his knees beside him and felt his heart. It was beating, but the shirt and the waistcoat were dripping with blood where the bear had set its claws and teeth in the shoulder of its victim.

An hour later Nic Lavilette stood outside the door of Ferrol's bedroom in the Manor Casimbault, talking to the Regimental Surgeon, as Christine, pale and wildeyed, came running towards them.

CHAPTER IX

"Is he dead? is he dead?" she asked distractedly. "I've just come from the village. Why didn't you send for me? Tell me, is he dead? Oh, tell me at once!"

She caught the Regimental Surgeon's arm. He looked down at her, over his glasses, benignly, for she had always been a favourite of his, and answered:

"Alive, alive, my dear. Bad rip in the shoulder worn out weak shattered but good for a while yet yes, yes certainment!"

With a wayward impulse, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the cheek. The embrace disarranged his glasses and flushed his face like a schoolgirl's, but his eyes were full of embarrassed delight.

"There, there," he said, "we'll take care of him !" Then suddenly he paused, for the real significance of her action dawned upon him.

"Dear me," he said in disturbed meditation; "dear me!"

She suddenly opened the bedroom door and went in, followed by Nic. The Regimental Surgeon dropped his mouth and cheeks in his hand reflectively, his eyes showing quaintly and quizzically above the glasses and his fingers.

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"Well, well! Well, well!" he said, as if he had encountered a difficulty. "It will never be possible. He would not marry her," he added, and then, turning, went abstractedly down the stairs.

Ferrol was in a deep sleep when Christine and her brother entered the chamber. Her face turned still more pale when she saw him, flushed, and became pale again. There were leaden hollows round his eyes, and his hair was matted with perspiration. Yet he was handsome and helpless. Her eyes filled with tears. She turned her head away from her brother and went softly to the window, but not before she had touched the pale hand that lay nerveless upon the coverlet.

"It's not feverish," she said to Nic, as if in necessary explanation of the act.

She stood at the window for a moment, looking out, then said:

"Come here, Nic, and tell me all about it."

He told her all he knew: how he had come to the old house by appointment with Ferrol; had tried to get into the store-room; had found the doors bolted; had heard the noise of a wild animal inside; had run out, tried a window, at last wrenched it open and found Ferrol in a dead faint. He went to the table and brought back the broken bayonet.

"That's all he had to fight with," he said. "Fire of a little hell, but he had grit after all!"

"That's all he had to fight with!" she repeated, as she untwisted the handkerchief from the hilt end. "Why did you say he had true grit 'after all'? What do you mean by that 'after all'?"

"Well, you don't expect much from a man with only one lung eh?"

"Courage isn't in the lungs," she answered. Then she added: "Go and fetch me a bottle of brandy I'm going to bathe his hands and feet in brandy and hot water as soon as he's awake."

"Better let mother do that, hadn't you?" he asked rather hesitatingly, as he moved towards the door.

Her eyes snapped fire. "Nic mon Dieu, hear the nice Nic!" she said. "The dear Nic, who went in swimming with "

She said no more, for he had no desire to listen to an account of his misdeeds, which were not a few, and Christine had a galling tongue.

When the door was shut she went to the bed, sat down on a chair beside it, and looked at Ferrol earnestly and sadly.

"My dear! my dear, dear, dear!" she said in a whisper, "you look so handsome and so kind as you lie there like no man I ever saw in my life. Who'd have fought as you fought and nearly dead! Who'd have had brains enough to know just what to do! My darling, that never said 'my darling' to me, nor heard me call you so. Suppose you haven't a dollar, not a cent, in the world, and suppose you'll never earn a dollar or a cent in the world, what difference does that make to me? I could earn it; and I'd give more for a touch of your finger than a thousand dollars; and more for a month with you than for a lifetime with the richest man in the world. You never looked cross at me, or at any one, and you never say an unkind thing, and you never find fault when you suffer so. You never hurt any one, I know. You never hurt Vanne Castine "

Her fingers twitched in her lap, and then clasped very tight, as she went on:

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"You never hurt him, and yet he's tried to kill you in the most awful way. Perhaps you'll die now perhaps you'll die to-night but no, no, you shall not!" she cried in sudden fright and eagerness, as she got up and leaned over him. "You shall not die; you shall live for a while oh! yes, for a while yet," she added, with a pitiful yearning in her voice; "just for a little while till you love me, and tell me so! Oh, how could that devil try to kill you!"

She suddenly drew herself up.

"I'll kill him and his bear too now, now, while you lie there sleeping. And when you wake I'll tell you what I've done, and you'll love me then, and tell me so, perhaps. Yes, yes, I'll "

She said no more, for her brother entered with the brandy.

"Put it there," she said, pointing to the table. "You watch him till I come. I'll be back in an hour; and then, when he wakes, we'll bathe him in the hot water and brandy."

"Who told you about hot water and brandy?" he asked her, curiously.

She did not answer him, but passed through the door and down the hall till she came to Nic's bedroom; she went in, took a pair of pistols from the wall, examined them, found they were fully loaded, and hurried from the room.

About a half-hour later she appeared before the house which once had belonged to Vanne Castine. The mortgage had been foreclosed, and the place had passed into the hands of Sophie and Magon Farcinelle; but Castine had taken up his abode in the house a few days before, and defied anyone to put him out.

A light was burning in the kitchen of the house. There were no curtains to the window, but an old coat had been hung up to serve the purpose, and light shone between a sleeve of it and the window-sill. Putting her face close to the window, the girl could see the bear in the corner, clawing at its chain and tossing its head from side to side, still panting and angry from the fight.

Now and again, also, it licked the bayonet-wound between its shoulders, and rubbed its lacerated nose on its paw. Castine was mixing some tar and oil in a pan by the fire, to apply to the still bleeding wounds of his Michael. He had an ugly grin on his face.

He was dressed just as in the first day he appeared in the village, even to the fur cap; and presently, as he turned round, he began to sing the monotonous measure to which the bear had danced. It had at once a soothing effect upon the beast.

After he had gone from the store-room, leaving Ferrol dead, as he thought, it was this song alone which had saved himself from peril; for the beast was wild from pain, fury and the taste of blood. As soon as they had cleared the farmyard, he had begun this song, and the bear, cowed at first by the thrusts of its master's pike, quieted to the well-known ditty.

He approached the bear now, and, stooping, put some of the tar and oil upon its nose. It sniffed and rubbed off the salve, but he put more on; then he rubbed it into the wound of the breast. Once the animal made a fierce snap at his shoulder, but he deftly avoided it, gave it a thrust with a sharp-pointed stick, and began the song again. Presently he rose and came towards the fire.

As he did so he heard the door open. Turning round quickly, he saw Christine standing just inside. She had a shawl thrown round her, and one hand was thrust in the pocket of her dress. She looked from him to the bear, then back again to him.

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He did not realise why she had come. For a moment, in his excited state, he almost thought she had come because she loved him. He had seen her twice since his return; but each time she would say nothing to him further than that she wished not to meet or to speak to him at all. He had pleaded with her, had grown angry, and she had left him. Who could tell perhaps she had come to him now as she had come to him in the old days. He dropped the pan of tar and oil. "Chris!" he said, and started forward to her.

At that moment the bear, as if it knew the girl's mission, sprang forward, with a growl. Its huge mouth was open, and all its fierce lust for killing showed again in its wild lunges. Castine turned, with an oath, and thrust the steel-set pike into its leg. It cowered at the voice and the punishment for an instant, but came on again.

Castine saw the girl raise a pistol and fire at the beast. He was so dumfounded that at first he did not move. Then he saw her raise another pistol. The wounded bear lunged heavily on its chain once twice in a devilish rage, and as Christine prepared to fire, snapped the staple loose and sprang forward.

At the same moment Castine threw himself in front of the girl, and caught the onward rush. Calling the beast by its name, he grappled with it. They were man and servant no longer, but two animals fighting for their lives. Castine drew out his knife, as the bear, raised on its hind legs, crushed him in its immense arms, and still calling, half crazily, "Michael! Michael! down, Michael!" he plunged the knife twice in the beast's side.

The bear's teeth fastened in his shoulder; the horrible pressure of its arms was turning his face black; he felt death coming, when another pistol shot rang out close to his own head, and his breath suddenly came back. He staggered to the wall, and then came to the floor in a heap as the bear lurched downwards and fell over on its side, dead.

Christine had come to kill the beast and, perhaps, the man. The man had saved her life, and now she had saved his; and together they had killed the bear which had maltreated Tom Ferrol.

Castine's eyes were fixed on the dead beast. Everything was gone from him now even the way to his meagre livelihood; and the cause of it all, as he in his blind, unnatural way thought, was this girl before him this girl and her people. Her back was towards the door. Anger and passion were both at work in him at once.

"Chris," he said, "Chris, let's call it even—eh? Let's make it up. Chris, ma cherie, don't you remember when we used to meet, and was fond of each other? Let's make it up and leave here now to—night—eh?"

"I'm not so poor, after all. I'll be paid by Papineau, the leader of the Rebellion " He made a couple of unsteady steps towards her, for he was weak yet. "What's the good you're bound to come to me in the end! You've got the same kind of feelings in you; you've "

She had stood still at first, dazed by his words; but she grew angry quickly, and was about to speak as she felt, when he went on:

"Stay here now with me. Don't go back. Don't you remember Shangois's house? Don't you remember that night that night when ah! Chris, stay here "

Her face was flaming. "I'd rather stay in a room full of wild beasts like that" she pointed to the bear" than be with you one minute you murderer!" she said, with choking anger.

He started towards her, saying:

"By the blood of Joseph! but you'll stay just the same; and "

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He got no further, for she threw the pistol in his face with all her might. It struck between his eyes with a thud, and he staggered back, blind, bleeding and faint, as she threw open the door and sped away in the darkness.

Reaching the Manor safely, she ran up to her room, arranged her hair, washed her hands, and came again to Ferrol's bedroom. Knocking softly she was admitted by Nic. There was an unnatural brightness in her eyes. "Where've you been?" he asked, for he noticed this. "What've you been doing?"

"I've killed the bear that tried to kill him," she answered.

She spoke louder than she meant. Her voice awakened Ferrol.

"Eh, what?" he said, "killed the bear, mademoiselle, my dear friend," he added, "killed the bear!" He coughed a little, and a twinge of pain crossed over his face.

She nodded, and her face was alight with pleasure. She lifted up his head and gave him a little drink of brandy. His fingers closed on hers that held the glass. His touch thrilled her.

"That's good, that's easier," he remarked.

"We're going to bathe you in brandy and hot water, now Nic and I," she said.

"Bathe me! Bathe me!" he said, in amused consternation.

"Hands and feet," Nic explained.

A few minutes later as she lifted up his head, her face was very near him; her breath was in his face. Her eyes half closed, her fingers trembled. He suddenly drew her to him and kissed her. She looked round swiftly, but her brother had not noticed.

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CHAPTER X

Ferrol's recovery from his injuries was swifter than might have been expected. As soon as he was able to move about Christine was his constant attendant. She had made herself his nurse, and no one had seriously interfered, though the Cure had not at all vaguely offered a protest to Madame Lavilette. But Madame Lavilette was now in the humour to defy or evade the Cure, whichever seemed the more convenient or more necessary. To be linked by marriage with the nobility would indeed be the justification of all her long-baffled hopes. Meanwhile, the parish gossiped, though little of that gossip was heard at the Manor Casimbault. By and by the Cure ceased to visit the Manor, but the Regimental Surgeon came often, and sometimes stayed late. He, perhaps, could have given Madame Lavilette the best advice and warning; but, in truth, he enjoyed what he considered a piquant position. Once, drawing at his pipe, as little like an Englishman as possible, he tried to say with an English accent, "Amusing and awkward situation!" but he said, "Damn funny and chic!" instead. He had no idea that any particular harm would be done either by love or marriage; and neither seemed certain.

One day as Ferrol, entirely convalescent, was sitting in an arbour of the Manor garden, half asleep, he was awakened by voices near him.

He did not recognise one of the voices; the other was Nic Lavilette's.

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The strange voice was saying: "I have collected five thousand dollars all that can be got in the two counties. It is at the Seigneury. Here is an order on the Seigneur Duhamel. Go there in two days and get the money. You will carry it to headquarters. These are General Papineau's orders. You will understand that your men "

Ferrol heard no more, for the two rebels passed on, their voices becoming indistinct. He sat for a few moments moveless, for an idea had occurred to him even as Papineau's agent spoke.

If that money were only his!

Five thousand dollars how that would ease the situation! The money belonged to whom? To a lot of rebels: to be used for making war against the British Government. After the money left the hands of the men who gave it Lavilette and the rest it wasn't theirs. It belonged to a cause. Well, he was the enemy of that cause. All was fair in love and war!

There were two ways of doing it. He could waylay Nicolas as he came from the house of the old seigneur, could call to him to throw up his hands in good highwayman fashion, and, well disguised, could get away with the money without being discovered. Or again, he could follow Nic from the Seigneury to the Manor, discover where he kept the money, and devise a plan to steal it.

For some time he had given up smoking; but now, as a sort of celebration of his plan, he opened his cigar case, and finding two cigars left, took one out and lighted it.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "thieving is a nice come-down, I must say! But a man has to live, and I'm sick of charity sick of it. I've had enough."

He puffed his cigar briskly, and enjoyed the forbidden and deadly luxury to the full.

Presently he got up, took his stick, came down-stairs, and passed out into the garden. The shoulder which had been lacerated by the bear drooped forward some what, and seemed smaller than the other. Although he held himself as erect as possible, you still could have laid your hand in the hollow of his left breast, and it would have done no more than give it a natural fulness. Perhaps it was a sort of vanity, perhaps a kind of courage, which made him resolutely straighten himself, in spite of the deadly weight dragging his shoulder down. He might be melancholy in secret, but in public he was gay and hopeful, and talked of everything except himself. On that interesting topic he would permit no discussion. Yet there often came jugs and jars from friendly people, who never spoke to him of his disease they were polite and sensitive, these humble folk but sent him their home-made medicines, with assurances scrawled on paper that "it would cure Mr. Ferrol's cold, oh, absolutely."

Before the Lavillettes he smiled, and received the gifts in a debonair way, sometimes making whimsical remarks. At the same time the jugs and jars of cordial (whose contents varied from whiskey, molasses and boneset, to rum, licorice, gentian and sarsaparilla roots) he carried to his room; and he religiously tried them all by turn. Each seemed to do him good for a few days, then to fail of effect; and he straightway tried another, with renewed hope on every occasion, and subsequent disappointment. He also secretly consulted the Regimental Surgeon, who was too kindhearted to tell him the truth; and he tried his hand at various remedies of his own, which did no more than to loosen the cough which was breaking down his strength.

As now, he often walked down the street swinging his cane, not as though he needed it for walking, but merely for occupation and companionship. He did not delude the villagers by these sorrowful deceptions, but they made believe he did. There were a few people who did not like him; but they were of that cantankerous minority who put thorns in the bed of the elect.

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To-day, occupied with his thoughts, he walked down the main road, then presently diverged on a side road which led past Magon Farcinelle's house to an old disused mill, owned by Magon's father. He paused when he came opposite Magon's house, and glanced up at the open door. He was tired, and the coolness of the place looked inviting. He passed through the gate, and went lightly up the path. He could see straight through the house into the harvest-fields at the back. Presently a figure crossed the lane of light, and made a cheerful living foreground to the blue sky beyond the farther door. The light and ardour of the scene gave him a thrill of pleasure, and hurried his footsteps. The air was palpitating with sleepy comfort round him, and he felt a new vitality pass into him: his imagination was feeding his enfeebled body; his active brain was giving him a fresh counterfeit of health. The hectic flush on his pale face deepened. He came to the wooden steps of the piazza, or stoop, and then paused a moment, as if for breath; but, suddenly conscious of what he was doing, he ran briskly up the steps, knocked with his cane upon the door jamb, and, without waiting, stepped inside.

Between him and the outer door, against the ardent blue background, stood Sophie Farcinelle the English faced Sophie a little heavy, a little slow, but with the large, long profile which is the type of English beauty docile, healthy, cow-like. Her face, within her sunbonnet, caught the reflected light, and the pink calico of her dress threw a glow over her cheeks and forehead, and gave a good gleam to her eyes. She had in her hands a dish of strawberries. It was a charming picture in the eyes of a man to whom the feelings of robustness and health were mostly a reminiscence. Yet, while the first impression was on him, he contrasted Sophie with the impetuous, fiery-hearted Christine, with her dramatic Gallic face and blood, to the latter's advantage, in spite of the more harmonious setting of this picture.

Sophie was in place in this old farmhouse, with its dormer windows, with the weaver's loom in the large kitchen, the meat-block by the fireplace, and the big bread-tray by the stove, where the yeast was as industrious as the reapers beyond in the fields. She was in keeping with the chromo of the Madonna and the Child upon the wall, with the sprig of holy palm at the shrine in the corner, with the old King Louis blunderbuss above the chimney.

Sophie tried to take off her sunbonnet with one hand, but the knot tightened, and it tipped back on her head, giving her a piquant air. She flushed.

"Oh, m'sieu!" she said in English, "it's kind of you to call. I am quite glad yes."

Then she turned round to put the strawberries upon a table, but he was beside her in an instant and took the dish out of her hands. Placing it on the table, he took a couple of strawberries in his fingers.

"May I?" he asked in French.

She nodded as she whipped off the sunbonnet, and replied in her own language:

"Certainly, as many as you want."

He bit into one, but got no further with it. Her back was turned to him, and he threw the berry out of the window. She felt rather than saw what he had done. She saw that he was fagged. She instantly thought of a cordial she had in the house, the gift of a nun from the Ursuline Convent in Quebec; a precious little bottle which she had kept for the anniversary of her wedding day. If she had been told in the morning that she would open that bottle now, and for a stranger, she probably would have resented the idea with scorn.

His disguised weariness still exciting her sympathy, she offered him a chair.

"You will sit down, m'sieu?" she asked. "It is very warm."

She did not say: "You look very tired." She instinctively felt that it would suggest the delicate state of his health.

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The chair was inviting enough, with its chintz cover and wicker seat, but he would never admit fatigue. He threw his leg half jauntily over the end of the table and said:

"No no, thanks; I'd rather not sit."

His forehead was dripping with perspiration. He took out his handkerchief and dried it. His eyes were a little heavy, but his complexion was a delicate and unnatural pink and white—like a piece of fine porcelain. It was a face without care, without vice, without fear, and without morals. For the absence of vice with the absence of morals are not incongruous in a human face. Sophie went into another room for a moment, and brought back a quaint cut-glass bottle of cordial.

"It is very good," she said, as she took the cork out; "better than peach brandy or things like that."

He watched her pour it out into a wine-glass, and as soon as he saw the colour and the flow of it he was certain of its quality.

"That looks like good stuff," he said, as she handed him a glass brimming over; "but you must have one with me. I can't drink alone, you know."

"Oh, m'sieu', if you please, no," she answered half timidly, flattered by the glance of his eye a look of flattery which was part of his stock-in-trade. It had got him into trouble all his life.

"Ah, madame, but I plead yes!" he answered, with a little encouraging nod towards her. "Come, let me pour it for you."

He took the odd little bottle and poured her glass as full as his own.

"If Magon were only here he'd like some, I know," she said, vaguely struggling with a sense of impropriety, though why, she did not know; for, on the surface, this was only dutiful hospitality to a distinguished guest. The impropriety probably lay in the sensations roused by this visit and this visitor. "I intended "

"Oh, we must try to get along without monsieur," he said, with a little cough; "he's a busy gentleman." The rather rude and flippant sentiment seemed hardly in keeping with the fatal token of his disease.

"Of course, he's far away out there in the field, mowing," she said, as if in apology for something or other. "Yes, he's ever so far away," was his reply, as he turned half lazily to the open doorway.

Neither spoke for a moment. The eyes of both were on the distant harvest-fields. Vaguely, not decisively, the hazy, indolent air of summer was broken by the lazy droning of the locusts and grasshoppers. A driver was calling to his oxen down the dusty road, the warning bark of a dog came across the fields from the gap in the fence which he was tending, and the blades of the scythes made three-quarter circles of light as the mowers travelled down the wheat-fields.

When their eyes met again, the glasses of cordial were at their lips. He held her look by the intentional warmth and meaning of his own, drinking very slowly to the last drop; and then, like a bon viveur, drew a breath of air through his open mouth, and nodded his satisfaction.

"By Jove, but it is good stuff!" he said. "Here's to the nun that made it," he added, making a motion to drink from the empty glass.

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Sophie had not drunk all her cordial. At least one third of it was still in the glass. She turned her head away, a little dismayed by his toast.

"Come, that's not fair," he said. "That elixir shouldn't be wasted. Voila, every drop of it now!" he added, with an insinuating smile and gesture.

"Oh, m'sieu'!" she said in protest, but drank it off. He still held the empty glass in his hand, twisting it round musingly.

"A little more, m'sieu'?" she asked, "just a little?" Perhaps she was surprised that he did not hesitate. He instantly held out his glass.

"It was made by a saint; the result should be health and piety I need both," he added, with a little note of irony in his voice.

"So, once again, my giver of good gifts to you!" He raised his glass again, toasting her, but paused. "No, this won't do; you must join me," he added.

"Oh, no, m'sieu', no! It is not possible. I feel it now in my head and in all of me. Oh, I feel so warm all, through, and my heart it beats so very fast! Oh, no, m'sieu', no more!"

Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes had become softer and more brilliant under the influence of the potent liqueur.

"Well, well, I'll let you off this time; but next time next time, remember."

He raised the glass once more, and let the cordial drain down lazily.

He had said, "next time" she noticed that. He seemed very fond of this strong liqueur. She placed the bottle on the table, her own glass beside it.

"For a minute, a little minute," she said suddenly, and went quickly into the other room.

He coolly picked up the bottle of liqueur, poured his glass full once more, and began drinking it off in little sips. Presently he stood up, and throwing back his shoulder, with a little ostentation of health, he went over to the chintz-covered chair, and sat down in it. His mood was contented and brisk. He held up the glass of liqueur against the sunlight.

"Better than any Benedictine I ever tasted," he said. "A dozen bottles of that would cure this beastly cold of mine. By Jove! it would. It's as good as the Gardivani I got that blessed day when we chaps of the Ninetieth breakfasted with the King of Savoy." He laughed to himself at the reminiscence. "What a day that was, what a stunning day that was!"

He was still smiling, his white teeth showing humorously, when Sophie again entered the room. He had forgotten her, forgotten all about her. As she came in he made a quick, courteous movement to rise too quick; for a sharp pain shot through his breast, and he grew pale about the lips. But he made essay to stand up lightly, nevertheless.

She saw his paleness, came quickly to him, and put out her hand to gently force him back into his seat, but as instantly decided not to notice his indisposition, and turned towards the table instead. Taking the bottle of cordial, she brought it over, and not looking at him, said:

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"Just one more little glass, m'sieu'?" She had in her other hand a plate of seed-cakes. "But yes, you must sit down and eat a cake," she added adroitly. "They are very nice, and I made them myself. We are very fond of them; and once, when the bishop stayed at our house, he liked them too."

Before he sat down he drank off the whole of the cordial in the glass.

She took a chair near him, and breaking a seed-cake began eating it. His tongue was loosened now, and he told her what he was smiling at when she came into the room. She was amused, and there was a little awe to her interest also. To think she was sitting here, talking easily to a man who had eaten at kings' tables with the king! Yet she was at ease too since she had drunk the cordial. It had acted on her like some philtre. He begged that she would go on with her work; and she got the dish of strawberries, and began stemming them while he talked.

It was much easier talking or listening to him while she was so occupied. She had never enjoyed anything so much in her life. She was not clever, like Christine, but she had admiration of ability, and was obedient to the charm of temperament. Whenever Ferrol had met her he had lavished little attentions on her, had said things to her that carried weight far beyond their intention. She had been pleased at the time, but they had had no permanent effect.

Now everything he said had a different influence: she felt for the first time that it was not easy to look into his eyes, and as if she never could again without betraying she knew not what.

So they sat there, he talking, she listening and questioning now and then. She had placed the bottle of liqueur and the seed-cakes at his elbow on the windowsill; and as if mechanically, he poured out a glassful, and after a little time, still another, and at last, apparently unconsciously, poured her out one also, and handed it to her. She shook her head; he still held the glass poised; her eyes met his; she made a feeble sort of protest, then took the glass and drank off the liqueur in little sips.

"Gad, that puts fat on the bones, and gives the gay heart!" he said. "Doesn't it, though?"

She laughed quietly. Her nature was warm, and she had the animal-like fondness for physical ease and content.

"It's as if there wasn't another stroke of work to do in the world," she answered, and sat contentedly back in her chair, the strawberries in her lap. Her fingers, stained with red, lay beside the bowl. All the strings of conscious duty were loose, and some of them were flying. The bumble-bee that flew in at the door and boomed about the room contributed to the day-dream.

She never quite knew how it happened that a moment later he was bending over the back of her chair, with her face upturned to his, and his lips With that touch thrilling her, she sprang to her feet, and turned away from him towards the table. Her face was glowing like a peony, and a troubled light came into her eyes. He came over to her, after a moment, and spoke over her shoulders as he just touched her waist with his fingers.

"A la bonne heure Sophie!"

"Oh, it isn't it isn't right," she said, her body slightly inclining from him.

"One minute out of a whole life What does it matter! Ce ne fait rien! Good-bye-Sophie."

Now she inclined towards him. He was about to put his arms round her, when he heard the distant sound of a horse's hoofs. He let her go, and turned towards the front door. Through it he saw Christine driving up the road. She would pass the house.

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"Good-bye-Sophie," he said again over her shoulder, softly; and, picking up his hat and stick, he left the house.

Her eyes followed him dreamily as he went up the road. She sat down in a chair, the trance of the passionate moment still on her, and began to brood. She vaguely heard the rattle of a buggy Christine's as it passed the house, and her thoughts drifted into a new-discovered hemisphere where life was all a somnolent sort of joy and bodily love.

She was roused at last by a song which came floating across the fields. The air she knew, and the voice she knew. The chanson was, "Le Voleur de grand Chemin!" The voice was her husband's.

She knew the words, too; and even before she could hear them, they were fitting into the air:

"Qui va la! There's some one in the orchard,
There's a robber in the apple-trees;
Qui va la! He is creeping through the doorway.
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

She hurriedly put away the cordial and the seed-cakes. She picked up the bottle. It was empty. Ferrol had drunk near half a pint of the liqueur! She must get another bottle of it somehow. It would never do for Magon to know that the precious anniversary cordial was all gone in this way.

She hurried towards the other room. The voice of the farrier-farmer was more distinct now. She could hear clearly the words of the song. She looked out. The square-shouldered, blue-shirted Magon was skirting the turnip field, making a short cut home. His straw hat was pushed back on his head, his scythe was over his shoulder. He had cut the last swathe in the field now for Sophie. He was not handsome, and she had known that always; but he seemed rough and coarse to-day. She did not notice how well he fitted in with everything about him; and he was so healthy that even three glasses of that cordial would have sent him reeling to bed.

As she passed into the dining-room, the words of the song followed her:

"Qui va la! If you please, I own the mansion,
And this is my grandfather's gun!
Qui va la! Now you're a dead man, robber
Ah, allez-vous-en! Va-t'-en!"

CHAPTER XI

"I saw you coming," Ferrol said, as Christine stopped the buggy.

"You have been to see Magon and Sophie?" she asked.

"Yes, for a minute," he answered. "Where are you going?"

"Just for a drive," she replied. "Come, won't you?" He got in, and she drove on.

"Where were you going?" she asked.

"Why, to the old mill," was his reply. "I wanted a little walk, then a rest."

Ten minutes later they were looking from a window of the mill, out upon the great wheel which had done all the

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work the past generations had given it to do, and was now dropping into decay as it had long dropped into disuse. Moss had gathered on the great paddles; many of them were broken, and the debris had been carried away by the freshets of spring and the floods of autumn.

They were silent for a time. Presently she looked up at him.

"You're much better to-day," she said; "better than you've been since since that night!"

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered; "right as can be." He suddenly turned on her, put his hand upon her arm, and said:

"Come, now, tell me what there was between you and Vanne Castine once upon a time.

"He was in love with me five years ago," she said.

"And five years ago you were in love with him, eh?" "How dare you say that to me!" she answered. "I never was. I always hated him."

She told her lie with unscrupulous directness. He did not believe her; but what did that matter! It was no reason why he should put her at a disadvantage, and, strangely enough, he did not feel any contempt for her because she told the lie, nor because she had once cared for Castine. Probably in those days she had never known anybody who was very much superior to Castine. She was in love with himself now; that was enough, or nearly enough, and there was no particular reason why he should demand more from her than she demanded from him. She was lying to him now because well, because she loved him. Like the majority of men, when women who love them have lied to them so, they have seen in it a compliment as strong as the act was weak. It was more to him now that this girl should love him than that she should be upright, or moral, or truthful. Such is the egotism and vanity of such men.

"Well, he owes me several years of life. I put in a bad hour that night."

He knew that "several years of life" was a misstatement; but, then, they were both sinners.

Her eyes flashed, she stamped her foot, and her fingers clinched.

"I wish I'd killed him when I killed his bear!" she said.

Then excitedly she described the scene exactly as it occurred. He admired the dramatic force of it. He thrilled at the direct simplicity of the tale. He saw Vanne Castine in the forearms of the huge beast, with his eyes bulging from his head, his face becoming black, and he saw blind justice in that death grip; Christine's pistol at the bear's head, and the shoulder in the teeth of the beast, and then!

"By the Lord Harry," he said, as she stood panting, with her hands fixed in the last little dramatic gesture, "what a little spitfire and brick you are!"

All at once he caught her away from the open window and drew her to him. Whether what he said that moment, and what he did then, would have been said and done if it were not for the liqueur he had drunk at Sophie's house would be hard to tell; but the sum of it was that she was his and he was hers. She was to be his until the end of all, no matter what the end might be. She looked up at him, her face glowing, her bosom beating beating, every pulse in her tingling.

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"You mean that you love me, and that that you want—to marry me?" she said; and then, with a fervent impulse, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him again and again.

The directness of her question dumfounded him for the moment; but what she suggested (though it might be selfish in him to agree to it) would be the best thing that could happen to him. So he lied to her, and said:

"Yes, that's what I meant. But, then, to tell you the sober truth, I'm as poor as a church mouse."

He paused. She looked up at him with a sudden fear in her face.

"You're not married?" she asked, "you're not married?" then, breaking off suddenly: "I don't care if you are, I don't! I love you love you! Nobody would look after you as I would. I don't; no, I don't care."

She drew up closer and closer to him.

"No, I don't mean that I was married," he said. "I meant what you know that my life isn't worth, perhaps, a ten-days' purchase."

Her face became pale again.

"You can have my life," she said; "have it just as long as you live, and I'll make you live a year yes, I'll make you live ten years. Love can do anything; it can do everything. We'll be married to-morrow."

"That's rather difficult," he answered. "You see, you're a Catholic, and I'm a Protestant, and they wouldn't marry us here, I'm afraid; at least not at once, perhaps not at all. You see, I've only one lung."

He had never spoken so frankly of his illness before. "Well, we can go over the border into the English province into Upper Canada," she answered. "Don't you see? It's only a few miles' drive to a village. I can go over one day, get the licence; then, a couple of days after, we can go over together and be married. And then, then "

He smiled. "Well, then it won't make much difference, will it? We'll have to fit in one way or another, eh?"

"We could be married afterwards by the Cure, if everybody made a fuss. The bishop would give us a dispensation. It's a great sin to marry a heretic, but "

"But love eh, ma cigale!" Then he took her eagerly, tenderly into his arms; and probably he had then the best moment in his life.

Sophie Farcinelle saw them driving back together. She was sitting at early supper with Magon, when, raising her head at the sound of wheels, she saw Christine laughing and Ferrol leaning affectionately towards her. Ferrol had forgotten herself and the incident of the afternoon. It meant nothing to him. With her, however, it was vital: it marked a change in her life. Her face flushed, her hands trembled, and she arose hurriedly and went to get something from the kitchen, that Magon might not see her face.

CHAPTER XII

Twenty men had suddenly disappeared from Bonaventure on the day that Ferrol visited Sophie Farcinelle, and it was only the next morning that the cause of their disappearance was generally known.

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There had been many rumours abroad that a detachment of men from the parish were to join Papineau. The Rebellion was to be publicly declared on a certain date near at hand, but nothing definite was known; and because the Cure condemned any revolt against British rule, in spite of the evils the province suffered from bad government, every recruit who joined Nic Lavilette's standard was sworn to secrecy. Louis Lavilette and his wife knew nothing of their son's complicity in the rumoured revolt one's own people are generally the last to learn of one's misdeeds. Madame would have been sorely frightened and chagrined if she had known the truth, for she was partly English. Besides, if the Rebellion did not succeed, disgrace must come, and then good-bye to the progress of the Lavillettes, and goodbye, maybe, to her son!

In spite of disappointments and rebuffs in many quarters, she still kept faith with her ambitions, and, fortunately for herself, she did not see the abject failure of many of her schemes. Some of the gentry from the neighbouring parishes had called, chiefly, she was aware, because of Mr. Ferrol. She was building the superstructure of her social ambitions on that foundation for the present. She told Louis sometimes, with tears of joy in her eyes, that a special Providence had sent Mr. Ferrol to them, and she did not know how to be grateful enough. He suggested a gift to the church in token of gratitude, but her thanksgiving did not take that form.

Nic was entirely French at heart, and ignored his mother's nationality. He resented the English blood in his veins, and atoned for it by increased loyalty to his French origin. This was probably not so much a principle as a fancy. He had a kind of importance also in the parish, and in his own eyes, because he made as much in three months by buying and selling horses as most people did in a year. The respect of Bonaventure for his ability was considerable; and though it had no marked admiration for his character, it appreciated his drolleries, and was attracted by his high spirits. He had always been erratic, so that when he disappeared for days at a time no one thought anything of it, and when he came home to the Manor at unearthly hours it created no peculiar notice.

He had chosen very good men for his recruits; for, though they talked much among themselves, they drew a cordon of silence round their little society of revolution. They vanished in the night, and Nic with them; but he returned the next afternoon when the fire of excitement was at its height. As he rode through the streets, people stopped him and poured out questions; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and gave no information, and neither denied nor affirmed anything.

Acting under orders, he had marched his company to make conjunction with other companies at a point in the mountains twenty miles away, but had himself returned to get the five thousand dollars gathered by Papineau's agent. Now that the Rebellion was known, Nicolas intended to try and win his father and his father's money and horses over to the cause.

Because Ferrol was an Englishman he made no confidant of him, and because he was a dying man he saw in him no menace to the cause. Besides, was not Ferrol practically dependent upon their hospitality? If he had guessed that his friend knew accurately of his movements since the night he had seen Vanne Castine hand him his commission from Papineau, he would have felt less secure: for, after all, love or prejudice of country is a principle in the minds of most men deeper than any other. When all other morals go, this latent tendency to stand by the blood of his clan is the last moral in man that bears the test without treason. If he had known that Ferrol had written to the Commandant at Quebec, telling him of the imminence of the Rebellion, and the secret recruiting and drilling going on in the parishes, his popular comrade might have paid a high price for his disclosure.

That morning at sunrise, Christine, saying she was going upon a visit to the next parish, started away upon her mission to the English province. Ferrol had urged her to let him go, but she had refused. He had not yet fully recovered from his adventure with the bear, she said. Then he said they might go together; but she insisted that she must make the way clear, and have everything ready. They might go and find the minister away, and then voila, what a chance for cancan! So she went alone.

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From his window he watched her depart; and as she drove away in the fresh morning he fell to thinking what it might seem like if he had to look forward to ten, twenty, or forty years with just such a woman as his wife. Now she was at her best (he did not deceive himself), but in ten years or less the effects of her early life would show in many ways. She had once loved Vanne Castine! and now vanity and cowardice, or unscrupulousness, made her lie about it. He would have her at her best—a young, vigorous radiant nature for his short life, and then, good-bye, my lover, good-bye! Selfish? Of course. But she would rather—she had said it—have him for the time he had to live than not at all. Position? What was his position? Cast off by his family, forgotten by his old friends, in debt, penniless—let position be hanged! Self-preservation was the first law. What was the difference between this girl and himself? Morals? She was better than himself, anyhow. She had genuine passions, and her sins would be in behalf of those genuine passions. He had kicked over the moral traces many a time from absolute selfishness. She had clean blood in her veins, she was good-looking, she had a quick wit, she was an excellent horse-woman—what then? If she wasn't so "well bred," that was a matter of training and opportunity which had never quite been hers. What was he himself? A loafer, "a deuced unfortunate loafer," but still a loafer. He had no trade and no profession. Confound it! how much better off, and how much better in reality, were these people who had trades and occupations. In the vigour and lithe activity of that girl's body was the force of generations of honest workers. He argued and thought as every intelligent man in his position would have done until he had come into the old life again, and into the presence of the old advantages and temptations!

Christine pulled up for a moment on a little hill, and waved her whip. He shook his handkerchief from the window. That was their prearranged signal. He shook it until she had driven away beyond the hill and was lost to sight, and still stood there at the window looking out.

Presently Madame Lavilette appeared in the garden below, and he was sure, from the way she glanced up at the window, and from her position in the shrubbery, that she had seen the signal. Madame did not look displeased. On the contrary, though an alliance with Christine now seemed unlikely, because of the state of Ferrol's health and his religion and nationality, it pleased her to think that it might have been.

When she had passed into the house, Ferrol sat down on the broad window-sill, and looked out the way Christine had gone. He was thinking of the humiliation of his position, and how it would be more humiliating when he married Christine, should the Lavillettes turn against them which was quite possible. And from outside: the whole parish a few excepted—sympathised with the Rebellion, and once the current of hatred of the English set in, he would be swept down by it. There were only three English people in the place. Then, if it became known that he had given information to the authorities, his life would be less uncertain than it was just now. Yet, confound the dirty lot of little rebels, it served them right! He couldn't sit by and see a revolt against British rule without raising a hand. Warn Nic? To what good? The result would be just the same. But if harm came to this intended brother-in-law—well, why borrow trouble? He was not the Lord in Heaven, that he could have everything as he wanted it! It was a toss-up, and he would see the sport out. "Have to cough your way through, my boy!" he said, as he swayed back and forth, the hard cough hacking in his throat.

As he had said yesterday, there was only one thing to do: he must have that five thousand dollars which was to be handed over by the old seigneur. This time he did not attempt to find excuses; he called the thing by its proper name.

"Well, it's stealing, or it's highway robbery, no matter how one looks at it," he said to himself. "I wonder what's the matter with me. I must have got started wrong somehow. Money to spend, playing at soldiering, made to believe I'd have a pot of money and an estate, and then told one fine day that a son and heir, with health in form and feature, was come, and Esau must go. No profession, except soldiering, debt staring me in the face, and a nasty mess of it all round. I wonder why it is that I didn't pull myself together, be honest to a hair, and fight my way through? I suppose I hadn't it in me. I wasn't the right metal at the start. There's always been a black sheep in our family, a gentleman or a lady, born without morals, and I happen to be the gentleman this generation. I always knew what was right, and liked it, and I always did what was wrong, and liked it nearly always. But I suppose I

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was fated. I was bound to get into a hole, and I'm in it now, with one lung, and a wife in prospect to support. I suppose if I were to write down all the decent things I've thought in my life, and put them beside the indecent things I've done, nobody would believe the same man was responsible for them. I'm one of the men who ought to be put above temptation; be well bridled, well fed, and the mere cost of comfortable living provided, and then I'd do big things. But that isn't the way of the world; and so I feel that a morning like this, and the love of a girl like that" (he nodded towards the horizon into which Christine had gone) "ought to make a man sing a Te Deum. And yet this evening, or to-morrow evening, or the next, I'll steal five thousand dollars, if it can be done, and risk my neck in doing it to say nothing of family honour, and what not."

He got up from the window, went to his trunk, opened it, and, taking out a pistol, examined it carefully, cocking and uncorking it, and after loading it, and again trying the trigger, put it back again. There came a tap at the door, and to his call a servant entered with a glass of milk and whiskey, with which he always began the day.

The taste of the liquid brought back the afternoon of the day before, and he suddenly stopped drinking, threw back his head, and laughed softly.

"By Jingo, but that liqueur was stunning and so was—Sophie . . . Sophie! That sounds compromisingly familiar this morning, and very improper also! But Sophie is a very nice person, and I ought to be well ashamed of myself. I needed the bit and curb both yesterday. It'll never do at all. If I'm going to marry Christine, we must have no family complications. 'Must have'!" he exclaimed. "But what if Sophie already? good Lord!"

It was a strange sport altogether, in which some people were bound to get a bad fall, himself probably among the rest. He intended to rob the brother, he had set the government going against the brother's revolutionary cause, he was going to marry one sister, and the other the less thought and said about that matter the better.

The afternoon brought Nic, who seemed perplexed and excited, but was most friendly. It seemed to Ferrol as if Nic wished to disclose something; but he gave him no opportunity. What he knew he knew, and he could make use of; but he wanted no further confidences. Ever since the night of the fight with the bear there had been nothing said on matters concerning the Rebellion. If Nicolas disclosed any secret now, it must surely be about the money, and that must not be if he could prevent it. But he watched his friend, nevertheless.

Night came, and Christine did not return; eight o'clock, nine o'clock. Lavilette and his wife were a little anxious; but Ferrol and Nicolas made excuses for her, and, in the wild talk and gossip about the Rebellion, attention was easily shifted from her. Besides, Christine was well used to taking care of herself.

Lavilette flatly refused to give Nic a penny for "the cause," and stormed at his connection with it; but at last became pacified, and agreed it was best that Madame Lavilette should know nothing about Nic's complicity just yet. At half past nine o'clock Nic left the house and took the road towards the Seigneury.

CHAPTER XIII

About half-way between the Seigneury and the main street of the village there was a huge tree, whose limbs stretched across the road and made a sort of archway. In the daytime, during the summer, foot travellers, carts and carriages, with their drivers, loitered in its shade as they passed, grateful for the rest it gave; but at night, even when it was moonlight, the wide branches threw a dark and heavy shadow, and the passage beneath them was gloomy travel. Many a foot traveller hesitated to pass into that umbrageous circle, and skirted the fence beyond the branches on the further side of the road instead.

When Nicolas Lavilette, returning from the Seigneury with the precious bag of gold for Papineau, came hurriedly along the road towards the village, he half halted, with sudden premonition of danger, a dozen feet or so from the

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great tree. But like most young people, who are inclined to trust nothing but their own strong arms and what their eyes can see, he withstood the temptation to skirt the fence; and with a little half-scornful laugh at himself, yet a little timidity also (or he would not have laughed at all), he hurried under the branches. He had not gone three steps when the light of a dark lantern flashed suddenly in his face, and a pistol touched his forehead. All he could see was a figure clothed entirely in black, even to hands and face, with only holes for eyes, nose and mouth.

He stood perfectly still; the shock was so sudden. There was something determined and deadly in the pose of the figure before him, in the touch of the weapon, in the clearness of the light. His eyes dropped, and fixed involuntarily upon the lantern.

He had a revolver with him; but it was useless to attempt to defend himself with it. Not a word had been spoken. Presently, with the fingers that held the lantern, his assailant made a motion of Hands up! There was no reason why he should risk his life without a chance of winning, so he put up his hands. At another motion he drew out the bag of gold with his left hand, and, obeying the direction of another gesture, dropped it on the ground. There was a pause, then another gesture, which he pretended not to understand.

"Your pistol!" said the voice in a whisper through the mask.

He felt the cold steel at his forehead press a little closer; he also felt how steady it was. He was no fool. He had been in trouble before in his lifetime; he drew out the pistol, and passed it, handle first, to three fingers stretched out from the dark lantern.

The figure moved to where the money and the pistol were, and said, in a whisper still:

"Go!"

He had one moment of wild eagerness to try his luck in a sudden assault, but that passed as suddenly as it came; and with the pistol still covering him, he moved out into the open road, with a helpless anger on him.

A crescent moon was struggling through floes of fleecy clouds, the stars were shining, and so the road was not entirely dark. He went about thirty steps, then turned and looked back. The figure was still standing there, with the pistol and the light. He walked on another twenty or thirty steps, and once again looked back. The light and the pistol were still there. Again he walked on. But now he heard the rumble of buggy wheels behind. Once more he looked back: the figure and the light had gone. The buggy wheels sounded nearer. With a sudden feeling of courage, he turned round and ran back swiftly. The light suddenly flashed again.

"It's no use," he said to himself, and turned and walked slowly along the road.

The sound of the buggy wheels came still nearer. Presently it was obscured by passing under the huge branches of the tree. Then the horse, buggy and driver appeared at the other side, and in a few moments had overtaken him. He looked up sharply, scrutinisingly. Suddenly he burst out:

"Holy mother, Chris, is that you! Where've you been? Are you all right?"

She had whipped up her horse at first sight of him, thinking he might be some drunken rough.

"Mais, mon dieu, Nic, is that you? I thought at first you were a highwayman!"

"No, you've passed the highwayman! Come, let me get in."

Five minutes afterwards she knew exactly what had happened to him.

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"Who could it be?" she asked.

"I thought at first it was that beast Vanne Castine!" he answered; "he's the only one that knew about the money, besides the agent and the old seigneur. He brought word from Papineau. But it was too tall for him, and he wouldn't have been so quiet about it. Just like a ghost. It makes my flesh creep now!"

It did not seem such a terrible thing to her at the moment, for she had in her pocket the licence to marry the Honourable Tom Ferrol upon the morrow, and she thought, with joy, of seeing him just as soon as she set foot in the doorway of the Manor Casimbault.

It was something of a shock to her that she did not see him for quite a half hour after she arrived home, and that was half past ten o'clock. But women forget neglect quickly in the delight of a lover's presence; so her disappointment passed. Yet she could not help speaking of it.

"Why weren't you at the door to meet me when I came back to-night with that—that in my pocket?" she asked him, his arm round her.

"I've got a kicking lung, you know," he said, with a half ironical, half self-pitying smile.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Tom, my love!" she said as she buried her face on his breast.

CHAPTER XIV

Before he left for the front next morning to join his company and march to Papineau's headquarters, Nic came to Ferrol, told him, with rage and disappointment, the story of the highway robbery, and also that he hoped Ferrol would not worry about the Rebellion, and would remain at the Manor Casimbault in any case.

"Anyhow," said he, "my mother's half English; so you're not alone. We're going to make a big fight for it. We've stood it as long as we can. But we're friends in this, aren't we, Ferrol?"

There was a pause, in which Ferrol sipped his whiskey and milk, and continued dressing. He set the glass down, and looked towards the open window, through which came the smell of the ripe orchard and the fragrance of the pines. He turned to Lavilette at last and said, as he fastened his collar:

"Yes, you and I are friends, Nic; but I'm a Britisher, and my people have been Britishers since Edward the Third's time; and for this same Quebec two of my great-grand-uncles fought and lost their lives. If I were sound of wind and limb I'd fight, like them, to keep what they helped to get. You're in for a rare good beating, and, see, my friend while I wouldn't do you any harm personally, I'd crawl on my knees from here to the citadel at Quebec to get a pot-shot at your rag-tag-and-bobtail 'patriots.' You can count me a first-class enemy to your 'cause,' though I'm not a first-class fighting man. And now, Nic, give me a lift with my coat. This shoulder jibs a bit since the bear-baiting."

Lavilette was naturally prejudiced in Ferrol's favour; and this deliberate and straightforward patriotism more pleased than offended him. His own patriotism was not a deep or lasting thing: vanity and a restless spirit were its fountains of inspiration. He knew that Ferrol was penniless or he was so yesterday and this quiet defiance of events in the very camp of the enemy could not but appeal to his ebullient, Gallic chivalry. Ferrol did not say these things because he had five thousand dollars behind him, for he would have said them if he were starving and dying perhaps out of an inherent stubbornness, perhaps because this hereditary virtue in him would have been as hard to resist as his sins.

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"That's all right, Ferrol," answered Lavilette. "I hope you'll stay here at the Manor, no matter what comes. You're welcome. Will you?"

"Yes, I'll stay, and glad to. I can't very well do anything else. I'm bankrupt. Haven't got a penny of my own," he added, with daring irony. "Besides, it's comfortable here, and I feel like one of the family; and, anyhow, Life is short and Time is a pacer!" His wearing cough emphasised the statement.

"It won't be easy for you in Bonaventure," said Nicolas, walking restlessly up and down. "They're nearly all for the cause, all except the Cure. But he can't do much now, and he'll keep out of the mess. By the time he has a chance to preach against it, next Sunday, every man that wants to 'll be at the front, and fighting. But you'll be all right, I think. They like you here."

"I've a couple of good friends to see me through," was the quiet reply.

"Who are they?"

Ferrol went to his trunk, took out a pair of pistols, and balanced them lightly in his hands. "Good to confuse twenty men," he said. "A brace of 'em are bound to drop, and they don't know which one."

He raised a pistol lazily, and looked out along its barrel through the open, sunshiny window. Something in the pose of the body, in the curve of the arm, struck Nicolas strangely. He moved almost in front of Ferrol. There came back to him mechanically the remembrance of a piece of silver on the butt of one of the highwayman's pistols!

The same piece of silver was on the butt of Ferrol's pistol. It startled him; but he almost laughed to him self at the absurdity of the suggestion. Ferrol was the last man in the world to play a game like that, and with him.

Still he could not resist a temptation. He stepped in front of the pistol, almost touching it with his forehead, looking at Ferrol as he had looked at the highwayman last night.

"Look out, it's loaded!" said Ferrol, lowering the weapon coolly, and not showing by sign or muscle that he understood Lavilette's meaning. "I should think you'd had enough of pistols for one twenty-four hours."

"Do you know, Ferrol, you looked just then so like the robber last night that, for one moment, I half thought! And the pistol, too, looks just the same that silver piece on the butt!"

"Oh, yes, this piece for the name of the owner!" said Ferrol, in a laughing brogue, and he coughed a little. "Well, maybe some one did use this pistol last night. It wouldn't be hard to open my trunk. Let's see; whom shall we suspect?"

Lavilette was entirely reassured, if indeed he needed reassurance. Ferrol coughed still more, and was obliged to sit down on the side of the bed and rest himself against the foot-board.

"There's a new jug of medicine or cordial come this morning from Shangois, the notary," said Lavilette. "I just happened to think of it. What he does counts. He knows a lot."

Ferrol's eyes showed interest at once.

"I'll try it. I'll try it. The stuff Gatineau the miller sent doesn't do any good now."

"Shangois is here he's downstairs if you want to see him."

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Ferrol nodded. He was tired of talking.

"I'm going," said Lavilette, holding out his hand. "I'll join my company to-day, and the scrimmage 'll begin as soon as we reach Papineau. We've got four hundred men."

Ferrol tried to say something, but he was struggling with the cough in his throat. He held out his hand, and Nicolas took it. At last he was able to say:

"Good luck to you, Nic, and to the devil with the Rebellion! You're in for a bad drubbing."

Nicolas had a sudden feeling of anger. This superior air of Ferrol's was assumed by most Englishmen in the country, and it galled him.

"We'll not ask quarter of Englishmen; no-sacre!" he said in a rage.

"Well, Nic, I'm not so sure of that. Better do that than break your pretty neck on a taut rope," was the lazy reply.

With an oath, Lavilette went out, banging the door after him. Ferrol shrugged his shoulder with a stoic ennui, and put away the pistols in the trunk. He was thinking how reckless he had been to take them out; and yet he was amused, too, at the risk he had run. A strange indifference possessed him this morning indifference to everything. He was suffering reaction from the previous day's excitement. He had got the five thousand dollars, and now all interest in it seemed to have departed.

Suddenly he said to himself, as he ran a brush around his coat-collar:

"Pon my soul, I forgot; this is my wedding day! the great day in a man's life, the immense event, after which comes steady happiness or the devil to pay."

He stepped to the window and looked out. It was only six o'clock as yet. He could see the harvesters going to their labours in the fields of wheat and oats, the carters already bringing in little loads of hay. He could hear their marche-'t-en! to the horses. Over by a little house on the river bank stood an old woman sharpening a sickle. He could see the flash of the steel as the stone and metal gently clashed.

Presently a song came up to him, through the garden below, from the house. The notes seemed to keep time to the hand of the sickle-sharpener. He had heard it before, but only in snatches. Now it seemed to pierce his senses and to flood his nerves with feeling.

The air was sensuous, insinuating, ardent. The words were full of summer and of that dramatic indolence of passion which saved the incident at Magon Farcinelle's from being as vulgar as it was treacherous. The voice was Christine's, on her wedding day.

"Oh, hark how the wind goes, the wind goes
(And dark goes the stream by the mill!)
Oh, see where the storm blows, the storm blows
(There's a rider comes over the hill!)

"He went with the sunshine one morning
(Oh, loud was the bugle and drum!)
My soldier, he gave me no warning
(Oh, would that my lover might come!)

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"My kisses, my kisses are waiting
(Oh, the rider comes over the hill!)
In summer the birds should be mating
(Oh, the harvest goes down to the mill!)"

"Oh, the rider, the rider he stayeth
(Oh, joy that my lover hath come!)
We will journey together he sayeth
(No more with the bugle and drum!)"

He caught sight of Christine for a moment as she passed through the garden towards the stable. Her gown was of white stuff, with little spots of red in it, and a narrow red ribbon was shot through the collar. Her hat was a pretty white straw, with red artificial flowers upon it. She wore at her throat a medallion brooch: one of the two heirlooms of the Lavilette family. It had belonged to the great-grandmother of Monsieur Louis Lavilette, and was the one security that this ambitious family did not spring up, like a mushroom, in one night. It had always touched Christine's imagination as a child. Some native instinct in her made her prize it beyond everything else. She used to make up wonderful stories about it, and tell them to Sophie, who merely wondered, and was not sure but that Christine was wicked; for were not these little romances little lies? Sophie's imagination was limited. As the years went on Christine finally got possession of the medallion, and held it against all opposition. Somehow, with it on this morning, she felt diminish the social distance between herself and Ferrol.

Ferrol himself thought nothing of social distance. Men, as a rule, get rather above that sort of thing. The woman: that was all that was in his mind. She was good to look at: warm, lovable, fascinating in her little daring wickednesses; a fiery little animal, full of splendid impulses, gifted with a perilous temperament: and she loved him. He had a kind of exultation at the very fierceness of her love for him, of what she had done to prove her love: her fury at Vanne Castine, the slaughter of the bear, and the intention to kill Vanne himself; and he knew that she would do more than that, if a great test came. Men feel surer of women than women feel of men.

He sat down on the broad window-ledge, still sipping his whiskey and milk, as he looked at her. She was very good to see. Presently she had to cross a little plot of grass. The dew was still on it. She gathered up her skirts and tip-toed quickly across it. The action was attractive enough, for she had a lithe smoothness of motion. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"White stockings humph!" he said.

Somehow those white stockings suggested the ironical comment of the world upon his proposed mesalliance; then he laughed good-humouredly.

"Taste is all a matter of habit, anyhow," said he to himself. "My own sister wouldn't have had any better taste if she hadn't been taught. And what am I?"

"What am I? I drink more whiskey in a day than any three men in the country. I don't do a stroke of work; I've got debts all over the world; I've mulcted all my friends; I've made fools of two or three women in my time; I've broken every commandment except well, I guess I've broken every one, if it comes to that, in spirit, anyhow. I'm a thief, a fire-eating highwayman, begad, and here I am, with a perforated lung, going to marry a young girl like that, without one penny in the world except what I stole! What beasts men are! The worst woman may be worse than the worst man, but all men are worse than most women. But she wants to marry me. She knows exactly what I am in health and prospects; so why shouldn't I?"

He drew himself up, thinking honestly. He believed that he would live if he married Christine; that his "cold" would get better; that the hole in his lung would heal. It was only a matter of climate; he was sure of it. Christine

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had a few hundred dollars she had told him so. Suppose he took three hundred dollars of the five thousand dollars: that would leave four thousand seven hundred dollars for his sister. He could go away south with Christine, and could live on five or six hundred dollars a year; then he'd be fit for something. He could go to work. He could join the Militia, if necessary. Anyhow, he could get something to do when he got well.

He drank some more whiskey and milk. "Self-preservation, that's the thing; that's the first law," he said. "And more: if the only girl I ever loved, ever really loved loved from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet were here to-day, and Christine stood beside her, little plebeian with a big heart, by Heaven, I'd choose Christine. I can trust her, though she is a little liar. She loves, and she'll stick; and she's true where she loves. Yes; if all the women in the world stood beside Christine this morning, I'd look them all over, from duchess to danseuse, and I'd say, 'Christine Lavilette, I'm a scoundrel. I haven't a penny in the world. I'm a thief; a thief who believes in you. You know what love is; you know what fidelity is. No matter what I did, you would stand by me to the end. To the last day of my life, I'll give you my heart and my hand; and as you are faithful to me, so I will be faithful to you, so help me God!'

"I don't believe I ever could have run straight in life. I couldn't have been more than four years old when I stole the peaches from my mother's dressing-table; and I lied just as coolly then as I could now. I made love to a girl when I was ten years old." He laughed to himself at the remembrance. "Her father had a foundry. She used to wear a red dress, I remember, and her hair was brown. She sang like a little lark. I was half mad about her; and yet I knew that I didn't really love her. Still, I told her that I did. I suppose it was the cursed falseness of my whole nature. I know that whenever I have said most, and felt most, something in me kept saying all the time: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying!' Was I born a liar?

I wonder if the first words I ever spoke were a lie? I wonder, when I kissed my mother first, and knew that I was kissing her, if the same little devil that sits up in my head now, said then: 'You're lying, you're lying, you're lying.' It has said so enough times since. I loved to be with my mother; yet I never felt, even when she died and God knows I felt bad enough then!

I never felt that my love was all real. It had some infernal note of falseness somewhere, some miserable, hollow place where the sound of my own voice, when I tried to speak the truth, mocked me! I wonder if the smiles I gave, before I was able to speak at all, were only blarney? I wonder, were they only from the wish to stand well with everybody, if I could? It must have been that; and how much I meant, and how much I did not mean, God alone knows!

"What a sympathy I have always had for criminals! I have always wanted, or, anyhow, one side of me has always wanted, to do right, and the other side has always done wrong. I have sympathised with the just, but I have always felt that I'd like to help the criminal to escape his punishment. If I had been more real with that girl in New York, I wonder whether she wouldn't have stuck to me? When I was with her I could always convince her; but, I remember, she told me once that, when I was away from her, she somehow felt that I didn't really love her. That's always been the way. When I was with people, they liked me; when I was away from them, I couldn't depend upon them. No; upon my soul, of all the friends I've ever had, there's not one that I know of that I could go to now except my sister, poor girl! and feel sure that no matter what I did, they'd stick to me to the end. I suppose the fault is mine. If I'd been worth the standing by, I'd have been the better stood by. But this girl, this little French provincial, with a heart of fire and gold, with a touch of sin in her, and a thumping artery of truth, she would walk with me to the gallows, and give her life to save my life yes, a hundred times. Well, then, I'll start over again; for I've found the real thing. I'll be true to her just as long as she's true to me. I'll never lie to her; and I'll do something else something else. I'll tell her "

He reached out, picked a wild rose from the vine upon the wall, and fastened it in his button-hole, with a defiant sort of smile, as there came a tap to his door. "Come in," he said.

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The door opened, and in stepped Shangois, the notary. He carried a jug under his arm, which, with a nod, he set down at the foot of the bed.

"M'sieu'," said he, "it is a thing that cured the bishop; and once, when a prince of France was at Quebec, and had a bad cold, it cured him. The whiskey in it I made myself very good white wine." Ferrol looked at the little man curiously. He had only spoken with him once or twice, but he had heard the numberless legends about him, and the Cure had told him many of his sayings, a little weird and sometimes maliciously true to the facts of life.

Ferrol thanked the little man, and motioned to a chair. There was, however, a huge chest against the wall near the window, and Shangois sat down on this, with his legs hunched up to his chin, looking at Ferrol with steady, inquisitive eyes. Ferrol laughed outright. A grotesque thought occurred to him. This little black notary was exactly like the weird imp which, he had always imagined, sat high up in his brain, dropping down little ironies and devilries his personified conscience; or, perhaps, the truth left out of him at birth and given this form, to be with him, yet not of him.

Shangois did not stir, nor show by even the wink of an eyelid that he recognised the laughter, or thought that he was being laughed at.

Presently Ferrol sat down and looked at Shangois without speaking, as Shangois looked at him. He smiled more than once, however, as the thought recurred to him.

"Well?" he said at last.

"What if she finds out about the five thousand dollars eh, m'sieu'?"

Ferrol was completely dumfounded. The brief question covered so much ground showed a knowledge of the whole case. Like Conscience itself, the little black notary had gone straight to the point, struck home. He was keen enough, however, had sufficient self-command, not to betray himself, but remained unmoved outwardly, and spoke calmly.

"Is that your business to go round the parish asking conundrums?" he said coolly. "I can't guess the answer to that one, can you?"

Shangois hated cowards, and liked clever people people who could answer him after his own fashion. Nearly everybody was afraid of his tongue and of him. He knew too much; which was a crime.

"I can find out," he replied, showing his teeth a little.

"Then you're not quite sure yourself, little devilkin?"

"The girl is a riddle. I am not the great reader of riddles."

"I didn't call you that. You're only a common little imp."

Shangois showed his teeth in a malicious smile.

"Why did you set me the riddle, then?" Ferrol continued, his eyes fixed with apparent carelessness on the other's face.

"I thought she might have told you the answer."

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"I never asked her the puzzle. Have you?"

By instinct, and from the notary's reputation, Ferrol knew that he was in the presence of an honest man at least, and he waited most anxiously for an answer, for his fate might hang on it.

"M'sieu', I have not seen her since yesterday morning."

"Well, what would you do if you found out about the five thousand dollars?"

"I would see what happened to it; and afterwards I would see that a girl of Bonaventure did not marry a Protestant, and a thief."

Ferrol rose from his chair, coughing a little. Walking over to Shangois, he caught him by both ears and shook the shaggy head back and forth.

"You little scrap of hell," he said in a rage, "if you ever come within fifty feet of me again I'll send you where you came from!"

Though Shangois's eyes bulged from his head, he answered:

"I was only ten feet away from you last night under the elm!"

Suddenly Ferrol's hand slipped down to Shangois's throat. Ferrol's fingers tightened, pressed inwards.

"Now, see, I know what you mean. Some one has robbed Nicolas Lavilette of five thousand dollars. You dare to charge me with it, curse you. Let me see if there's any more lies on your tongue!"

With the violence of the pressure Shangois's tongue was forced out of his mouth.

Suddenly a paroxysm of coughing seized Ferrol, and he let go and staggered back against the window ledge. Shangois was transformed an animal. No human being had ever seen him as he was at this moment. The fingers of his one hand opened and shut convulsively, his arms worked up and down, his face twitched, his teeth showed like a beast's as he glared at Ferrol. He looked as though he were about to spring upon the now helpless man. But up from the garden below there came the sound of a voice Christine's singing.

His face quieted, and his body came to its natural pose again, though his eyes retained an active malice. He turned to go.

"Remember what I tell you," said Ferrol: "if you publish that lie, you'll not live to hear it go about. I mean what I say." Blood showed upon his lips, and a tiny little stream flowed down the corner of his mouth. Whenever he felt that warm fluid on his tongue he was certain of his doom, and the horror of slowly dying oppressed him, angered him. It begot in him a desire to end it all. He had a hatred of suicide; but there were other ways. "I'll have your life, or you'll have mine. I'm not to be played with," he added.

The sentences were broken by coughing, and his handkerchief was wet and red.

"It is no concern of the world," answered Shangois, stretching up his throat, for he still felt the pressure of Ferrol's fingers "only of the girl and her brother. The girl I saved her once before from your friend Vanne Castine, and I will save her from you but, yes! It is nothing to the world, to Bonaventure, that you are a robber; it is everything to her. You are all robbers you English cochons!"

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He opened the door and went out. Ferrol was about to follow him, but he had a sudden fit of weakness, and he caught up a pillow, and, throwing it on the chest where Shangois had sat, stretched himself upon it. He lay still for quite a long time, and presently fell into a doze. In those days no event made a lasting impression on him. When it was over it ended, so far as concerned any disturbing remembrances of it. He was awakened (he could not have slept for more than fifteen minutes) by a tapping at his door, and his name spoken softly. He went to the door and opened it. It was Christine. He thought she seemed pale, also that she seemed nervous; but her eyes were full of light and fire, and there was no mistaking the look in her face: it was all for him. He set down her agitation to the adventure they were about to make together. He stepped back, as if inviting her to enter, but she shook her head.

"No, not this morning. I will meet you at the old mill in half an hour. The parish is all mad about the Rebellion, and no one will notice or talk of anything else. I have the best pair of horses in the stable; and we can drive it in two hours, easy."

She took a paper from her pocket.

"This is the license," she added, and she blushed. Then, with a sudden impulse, she stepped inside the room, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and he clasped her to his breast.

"My darling Tom!" she said, and then hastened away, with tears in her eyes.

He saw the tears. "I wonder what they were for?" he said musingly, as he opened up the official blue paper. "For joy?" He laughed a little uneasily as he said it. His eyes ran through the document.

"The Honourable Tom Ferrol, of Stavely Castle, County Galway, Ireland, bachelor, and Christine Marie Lavilette, of the Township of Bonaventure, in the Province of Lower Canada, spinster, Are hereby granted," etc., etc., etc., "according to the laws of the Province of Upper Canada," etc., etc., etc.

He put it in his pocket.

"For better or for worse, then," he said, and descended the stairs.

Presently, as he went through the village, he noticed signs of hostility to himself. Cries of Vive la Canada! Vive la France! a bas l'Anglais! came to him out of the murmuring and excitement. But the Regimental Surgeon took off his cap to him, very conspicuously advancing to meet him, and they exchanged a few words.

"By the way, monsieur," the Regimental Surgeon added, as he took his leave, "I knew of this some days ago, and, being a justice of the peace, it was my duty to inform the authorities yes of course! One must do one's duty in any case," he said, in imitation of English bluntness, and took his leave.

Ten minutes later Christine and Ferrol were on their way to the English province to be married.

That afternoon at three o'clock, as they left the little English-speaking village man and wife, they heard something which startled them both. It was a bear-trainer, singing to his bear the same weird song, without words, which Vanne Castine sang to Michael. Over in another street they could see the bear on his hind feet, dancing, but they could not see the man.

Christine glanced at Ferrol anxiously, for she was nervous and excited, though her face had also a look of exultant happiness.

"No, it's not Castine!" he said, as if in reply to her look.

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In a vague way, however, she felt it to be ominous.

CHAPTER XV

The village had no thought or care for anything except the Rebellion and news of it; and for several days Ferrol and Christine lived their new life unobserved by the people of the village, even by the household of Manor Casimbault.

It almost seemed that Ferrol's prophecy regarding himself was coming true, for his cheek took on a heightened colour, his step a greater elasticity, and he flung his shoulders out with a little of the old military swagger: cheerful, forgetful of all the world, and buoyant in what he thought to be his new-found health and permanent happiness.

Vague reports came to the village concerning the Rebellion. There were not a dozen people in the village who espoused the British cause; and these few were silent. For the moment the Lavillettes were popular. Nicolas had made for them a sort of grand coup. He had for the moment redeemed the snobbishness of two generations.

After his secret marriage, Ferrol was not seen in the village for some days, and his presence and nationality were almost forgotten by the people: they only thought of what was actively before their eyes. On the fifth day after his marriage, which was Saturday, he walked down to the village, attracted by shouting and unusual excitement. When he saw the cause of the demonstration he had a sudden flush of anger. A flag-staff had been erected in the centre of the village, and upon it had been run up the French tricolour. He stood and looked at the shouting crowd a moment, then swung round and went to the office of the Regimental Surgeon, who met him at the door. When he came out again he carried a little bundle under his left arm. He made straight for the crowd, which was scattered in groups, and pushed or threaded his way to the flag-staff. He was at least a head taller than any man there, and though he was not so upright as he had been, the lines of his figure were still those of a commanding personality. A sort of platform had been erected around the flag-staff and on it a drunken little habitant was talking treason. Without a word, Ferrol stepped upon the platform, and, loosening the rope, dropped the tricolour half-way down the staff before his action was quite comprehended by the crowd. Presently a hoarse shout proclaimed the anger and consternation of the habitants.

"Leave that flag alone," shouted a dozen voices. "Leave it where it is!" others repeated with oaths.

He dropped it the full length of the staff, whipped it off the string, and put his foot upon it. Then he unrolled the bundle which he had carried under his arm. It was the British flag. He slipped it upon the string, and was about to haul it up, when the drunken orator on the platform caught him by the arm with fiery courage.

"Here, you leave that alone: that's not our flag, and if you string it up, we'll string you up, bagosh!" he roared.

Ferrol's heavy walking-stick was in his right hand. "Let go my arm- quick!" he said quietly.

He was no coward, and these people were, and he knew it. The habitant drew back.

"Get off the platform," he said with quiet menace.

He turned quickly to the crowd, for some had sprung towards the platform to pull him off. Raising his voice, he said:

"Stand back, and hear what I've got to say. You're a hundred to one. You can probably kill me; but before you do that I shall kill three or four of you. I've had to do with rioters before. You little handful of people here little more

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than half a million imagine that you can defeat thirty–five millions, with an army of half a million, a hundred battle–ships, ten thousand cannon and a million rifles. Come now, don't be fools. The Governor alone up there in Montreal has enough men to drive you all into the hills of Maine in a week. You think you've got the start of Colborne? Why, he has known every movement of Papineau and your rebels for the last two months. You can bluster and riot to–day, but look out for to–morrow. I am the only Englishman here among you. Kill me; but watch what your end will be! For every hair of my head there will be one less habitant in this province. You haul down the British flag, and string up your tricolour in this British village while there is one Britisher to say, 'Put up that flag again!' You fools!"

He suddenly gave the rope a pull, and the flag ran up half–way; but as he did so a stone was thrown. It flew past his head, grazing his temple. A sharp point lacerated the flesh, and the blood flowed down his cheek. He ran the flag up to its full height, swiftly knotted the cord and put his back against the pole. Grasping his stick he prepared himself for an attack.

"Mind what I say," he cried; "the first man that comes will get what for!"

There was a commotion in the crowd; consternation and dismay behind Ferrol, and excitement and anger in front of him. Three men were pushing their way through to him. Two of them were armed. They reached the platform and mounted it. It was the Regimental Surgeon and two British soldiers. The Regimental Surgeon held a paper in his hand.

"I have here," he said to the crowd, "a proclamation by Sir John Colborne. The rebels have been defeated at three points, and half of the men from Bonaventure who joined Papineau have been killed. The ringleader, Nicolas Lavilette, when found, will be put on trial for his life. Now, disperse to your homes, or every man of you will be arrested and tried by court–martial."

The crowd melted away like snow, and they hurried not the less because the stone which some one had thrown at Ferrol had struck a lad in the head, and brought him senseless and bleeding to the ground.

Ferrol picked up the tricolour and handed it to the Regimental Surgeon.

"I could have done it alone, I believe," he said; "and, upon my soul, I'm sorry for the poor devils. Suppose we were Englishmen in France, eh?"

CHAPTER XVI

The fight was over. The childish struggle against misrule had come to a childish end. The little toy loyalists had been broken all to pieces. A few thousand Frenchmen, with a vague patriotism, had shied some harmless stones at the British flag–staff on the citadel: that was all. Obeying the instincts of blood, religion, race, and language, they had made a haphazard, sidelong charge upon their ancient conquerors, had spluttered and kicked a little, and had then turned tail upon disaster and defeat. An incoherent little army had been shattered into fugitive factors, and every one of these hurried and scurried for a hole of safety into which he could hide. Some were mounted, but most were on foot.

Officers fared little better than men. It was "Save who can": they were all on a dead level of misfortune. Hundreds reached no cover, but were overtaken and driven back to British headquarters. In their terror, twenty brave rebels of two hours ago were to be captured by a single British officer of infantry speaking bad French.

Two of these hopeless fugitives were still fortunate enough to get a start of the hounds of retaliation and revenge. They were both mounted, and had far to go to reach their destination. Home was the one word in the mind of

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each; and they both came from Bonaventure.

The one was a tall, athletic young man, who had borne a captain's commission in Papineau's patriot army. He rode a sorel horse a great, wiry raw-bone, with a lunge like a moose, and legs that struck the ground with the precision of a piston-rod. As soon as his nose was turned towards Bonaventure he smelt the wind of home in his nostrils; his hatchet head jerked till he got the bit straight between his teeth; then, gripping it as a fretful dog clamps the bone which his master pretends to wrest from him, he leaned down to his work, and the mud, the new-fallen snow and the slush flew like dirty sparks, and covered man and horse.

Above, an uncertain, watery moon flew in and out among the shifting clouds; and now and then a shot came through the mist and the half dusk, telling of some poor fugitive fighting, overtaken, or killed.

The horse neither turned head nor slackened gait. He was like a living machine, obeying neither call nor spur, but travelling with an unchanging speed along the level road, and up and down hill, mile after mile.

In the rider's heart were a hundred things; among them fear, that miserable depression which comes with the first defeats of life, the falling of the mercury from passionate activity to that frozen numbness which betrays the exhausted nerve and despairing mind. The horse could not go fast enough; the panic of flight was on him. He was conscious of it, despised himself for it; but he could not help it. Yet, if he were overtaken, he would fight; yes, fight to the end, whatever it might be. Nicolas Lavilette had begun to unwind the coil of fortune and ambition which his mother had long been engaged in winding.

A mile or two behind was another horse and another rider. The animal was clean of limb, straight and shapely of body, with a leg like a lady's, and heart and wind to travel till she dropped. This mare the little black notary, Shangois, had cheerfully stolen from beside the tent of the English general. The bridle-rein hung upon the wrist of the notary's palsied left hand, and in his right hand he carried the long sabre of an artillery officer, which he had picked up on the battlefield. He rode like a monkey clinging to the back of a hound, his shoulder hunched, his body bent forward even with the mare's neck, his knees gripping the saddle with a frightened tenacity, his small, black eyes peering into the darkness before him, and his ears alert to the sound of pursuers.

Twenty men of the British artillery were also off on a chase that pleased them well. The hunt was up. It was not only the joy of killing, but the joy of gain, that spurred them on; for they would have that little black thief who stole the general's brown mare, or they would know the reason why.

As the night wore on, Lavilette could hear hoof-beats behind him; those of the mare growing clearer and clearer, and those of the artillerymen remaining about the same, monotonously steady. He looked back, and saw the mare lightly leaning to her work, and a little man hanging to her back. He did not know who it was; and if he had known he would have wondered. Shangois had ridden to camp to fetch him back to Bonaventure for two purposes: to secure the five thousand dollars from Ferrol, and to save Nic's sister from marrying a highwayman. These reasons he would have given to Nic Lavilette, but other ulterior and malicious ideas were in his mind. He had no fear, no real fear. His body shrank, but that was because he had been little used to rough riding and to peril. But he loved this game too, though there was a troop of foes behind him; and as long as they rode behind him he would ride on.

He foresaw a moment when he would stop, slide to the ground, and with his sabre kill one man or more. Yes, he would kill one man. He had a devilish feeling of delight in thinking how he would do it, and how red the sabre would look when he had done it. He wished he had a hundred hands and a hundred sabres in those hands. More than once he had been in danger of his life, and yet he had had no fear.

He had in him the power of hatred; and he hated Ferrol as he had never hated anything in his life. He hated him as much as, in a furtive sort of way, he loved the rebellious, primitive and violent Christine.

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As he rode on a hundred fancies passed through his brain, and they all had to do with killing or torturing. As a boy dreams of magnificent deeds of prowess, so he dreamed of deeds of violence and cruelty. In his life he had been secret, not vicious; he had enjoyed the power which comes from holding the secrets of others, and that had given him pleasure enough. But now, as if the true passion, the vital principle, asserted itself at the very last, so with the shadow of death behind him, his real nature was dominant. He was entirely sane, entirely natural, only malicious.

The night wore on, and lifted higher into the sky, and the grey dawn crept slowly up: first a glimmer, then a neutral glow, then a sort of darkness again, and presently the candid beginning of day.

As they neared the Parish of Bonaventure, Lavillette looked back again, and saw the little black notary a few hundred yards behind. He recognised him this time, waved a hand, and then called to his own fagged horse. Shangois's mare was not fagged; her heart and body were like steel.

Not a quarter of a mile behind them both were three of the twenty artillerymen. Lavillette came to the bridge shouting for Baby, the keeper. Baby recognised him, and ran to the lever even as the sorel galloped up. For the first time in the ride, Nic stuck spurs harshly into the sorel's side. With a grunt of pain the horse sprang madly on. A half-dozen leaps more and they were across, even as the bridge began to turn; for Baby had not recognised the little black notary, and supposed him to be one of Nic's pursuers; the others he saw further back in the road. It was only when Shangois was a third of the way across, that he knew the mare's rider. There was no time to turn the bridge back, and there was no time for Shangois to stop the headlong pace of the mare. She gave a wild whinny of fright, and jumped cornerwise, clear out across the chasm, towards the moving bridge. Her front feet struck the timbers, and then, without a cry, mare and rider dropped headlong down to the river beneath, swollen by the autumn rains.

Baby looked down and saw the mare's head thrust above the water, once, twice; then there was a flash of a sabre and nothing more.

Shangois, with his dreams of malice and fighting, and the secrets of a half-dozen parishes strapped to his back, had dropped out of Bonaventure, as a stone crumbles from a bank into a stream, and many waters pass over it, and no one inquires whither it has gone, and no one mourns for it.

CHAPTER XVII

ON Sunday morning Ferrol lay resting on a sofa in a little room off the saloon. He had suffered somewhat from the bruise on his head, and while the Lavillettes, including Christine, were at mass, he remained behind, alone in the house, save for two servants in the kitchen. From where he lay he could look down into the village. He was thinking of the tangle into which things had got. Feeling was bitter against him, and against the Lavillettes also, now that the patriots were defeated. It had gone about that he had warned the Governor. The habitants, in their blind way, blamed him for the consequences of their own misdoing. They blamed Nicolas Lavillette. They blamed the Lavillettes for their friendship with Ferrol. They talked and blustered, yet they did not interfere with the two soldiers who kept guard at the home of the Regimental Surgeon. It was expected that the Cure would speak of the Rebellion from the altar this morning. It was also rumoured that he would have something to say about the Lavillettes; and Christine had insisted upon going. He laughed to think of her fury when he suggested that the Cure would probably have something unpleasant to say about himself. She would go and see to that herself, she said. He was amused, and yet he was not in high spirits, for he had coughed a great deal since the incident of the day before, and his strength was much weakened.

Presently he heard a footstep in the room, and turned over so that he might see. It was Sophie Farcinelle.

Before he had time to speak or to sit up, she had dropped a hand on his shoulder. Her face was aflame.

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"You have been badly hurt, and I'm very sorry," she said. "Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you. I looked every day, and you didn't come, and and I thought you had forgotten. Have you? Have you, Mr. Ferrol?"

He had raised himself on his elbow, and his face was near hers. It was not in him to resist the appealing of a pretty woman, and he had scarcely grasped the fact that he was a married man, his clandestine meetings with his wife having had, to this point, rather an air of adventure and irresponsibility. It is hard to say what he might have done or left undone; but, as Sophie's face was within an inch of his own, the door of the room suddenly opened, and Christine appeared. The indignation that had sent her back from mass to Ferrol was turned into another indignation now.

Sophie, frightened, turned round and met her infuriated look. She did not move, however.

"Leave this room at once. What do you want here?" Christine said, between gasps of anger.

"The room is as much mine as yours," answered Sophie, sullenly.

"The man isn't," retorted Christine, with a vicious snap of her teeth.

"Come, come," said Ferrol, in a soothing tone, rising from the sofa and advancing.

"What's he to you?" said Sophie, scornfully.

"My husband: that's all!" answered Christine. "And now, if you please, will you go to yours? You'll find him at mass. He'll have plenty of praying to do if he prays for you both voila!"

"Your husband!" said Sophie, in a husky voice, dumfounded and miserable. "Is that so?" she added to Ferrol. "Is she—your wife?"

"That's the case," he answered, "and, of course," he added in a mollifying tone, "being my sister as well as Christine's, there's no reason why you shouldn't be alone with me in the room a few moments. Is there now?" he added to Christine.

The acting was clever enough, but not quite convincing, and Christine was too excited to respond to his blarney.

"He can't be your real husband," said Sophie, hardly above a whisper. "The Cure didn't marry you, did he?" She looked at Ferrol doubtfully.

"Well, no," he said; "we were married over in Upper Canada."

"By a Protestant?" asked Sophie.

Christine interrupted. "What's that to you? I hope I'll never see your face again while I live. I want to be alone with my husband, and your husband wants to be alone with his wife: won't you oblige us and him Hein?"

Sophie gave Ferrol a look which haunted him while he lived. One idle afternoon he had sowed the seeds of a little storm in the heart of a woman, and a whirlwind was driving through her life to parch and make desolate the green fields of her youth and womanhood. He had loitered and dallied without motive; but the idle and unmeaning sinner is the most dangerous to others and to himself, and he realised it at that moment, so far as it was in him to realise anything of the kind.

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Sophie's figure as it left the room had that drooping, beaten look which only comes to the stricken and the incurably humiliated.

"What have you said to her?" asked Christine of Ferrol, "what have you done to her?"

"I didn't do a thing, upon my soul. I didn't say a thing. She'd only just come in."

"What did she say to you?"

"As near as I can remember, she said: 'You have been hurt, and I'm very sorry. Why haven't you been to see me? I looked for you; but you didn't come, and I thought you had forgotten me.'"

"What did she mean by that? How dared she!"

"See here, Christine," he said, laying his hand on her quivering shoulder, "I didn't say much to her. I was over there one afternoon, the afternoon I asked you to marry me. I drank a lot of liqueur; she looked very pretty, and before she had a chance to say yes or no about it I kissed her. Now that's a fact. I've never spent five minutes with her alone since; I haven't even seen her since, until this morning. Now that's the honest truth. I know it was scampish; but I never pretended to be good. It is nothing for you to make a fuss about, because, whatever I am and it isn't much one way or another I am all yours, straight as a die, Christine. I suppose, if we lived together fifty years, I'd probably kiss fifty women once a year isn't a high average; but those kisses wouldn't mean anything; and you, you, my girl!" he bent his head down to her "why, you mean everything to me, and I wouldn't give one kiss of yours for a hundred thousand of any other woman's in the world! What you've done for me, and what you'd do for me "

There was a strange pathos in his voice, an uncommon thing, because his usual eloquence was, as a rule, more pleasing than touching. A quick change of feeling passed over her, and her eyes filled with tears. He ran his arm round her shoulder.

"Ah, come, come!" he said, with a touch of insinuating brogue, and kissed her. "Come, it's all right. I didn't mean anything, and she didn't mean anything; and let's start fresh again."

She looked up at him with quick intelligence. "That's just what we'll have to do," she said. "The Cure this morning at mass scolded the people about the Rebellion, and said that Nic and you had brought all this trouble upon Bonaventure; and everybody looked at our pew and snickered. Oh, how I hate them all! Then I jumped up "

"Well?" asked Ferrol, "and what then?"

"I told them that my brother wasn't a coward, and that you were my husband."

"And then then what happened?"

"Oh, then there was a great fuss in the church, and the Cure said ugly things, and I left and came home quick. And now "

"Well, and now?" Ferrol interrupted.

"Well, now we'll have to do something."

"You mean, to go away?" he asked, with a little shrug of his shoulder. She nodded her head.

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He was depressed: he had had a hemorrhage that morning, and the road seemed to close in on him on all sides.

"How are we to live?" he asked, with a pitiful sort of smile.

She looked up at him steadily for a moment, without speaking. He did not understand the look in her eyes, until she said:

"You have that five thousand dollars!"

He drew back a step from her, and met her unwavering look a little fearfully. She knew that she ! "When did you find it out?" he asked.

"The morning we were married," she replied.

"And you you, Christine, you married me, a thief!" She nodded again.

"What difference could it make?" she asked. "I wouldn't have been happy if I hadn't married you. And I loved you!"

"Look here, Christine," he said, "that five thousand dollars is not for you or for me. You will be safe enough if anything should happen to me; your people would look after you, and you have some money in your own right. But I've a sister, and she's lame. She never had to do a stroke of work in her life, and she can't do it now. I have shared with her anything I have had since times went wrong with us and our family. I needed money badly enough, but I didn't care very much whether I got it for myself or not only for her. I wanted that five thousand dollars for her, and to her it shall go; not one penny to you, or to me, or to any other human being. The Rebellion is over: that money wouldn't have altered things one way or another. It's mine, and if anything happens to me "

He suddenly stooped down and caught her hands, looking her in the eyes steadily.

"Christine," he said, "I want you never to ask me to spend a penny of that money; and I want you to promise me, by the name of the Virgin Mary, that you'll see my sister gets it, and that you'll never let her or any one else know where it came from. Come, Christine, will you do it for me? I know it's very little indeed I give you, and you're giving me everything; but some people are born to be debtors in this world, and some to be creditors, and some give all and get little, because "

She interrupted him.

"Because they love as I love you," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "Show me where the money is, and I'll do all you say, if "

"Yes, if anything happens to me," he said, and dropped his hand caressingly upon her head. He loved her in that moment.

She raised her eyes to his. He stooped and kissed her. She was still in his arms as the door opened and Monsieur and Madame Lavilette entered, pale and angry.

CHAPTER XVIII

That night the British soldiers camped in the village. All over the country the rebels had been scattered and beaten, and Bonaventure had been humbled and injured. After the blind injustice of the fearful and the beaten,

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Nicolas Lavilette and his family were blamed for the miseries which had come upon the place. They had emerged from their isolation to tempt popular favour, had contrived many designs and ambitions, and in the midst of their largest hopes were humiliated, and were followed by resentment. The position was intolerable. In happy circumstances, Christine's marriage with Ferrol might have been a completion of their glory, but in reality it was the last blow to their progress.

In the dusk, Ferrol and Christine sat in his room: she, defiant, indignant, courageous; he hiding his real feelings, and knowing that all she now planned and arranged would come to naught. Three times that day he had had violent paroxysms of coughing; and at last had thrown himself on his bed, exhausted, helplessly wishing that something would end it all. Illusion had passed for ever. He no longer had a cold, but a mortal trouble that was killing him inch by inch. He remembered how a brother officer of his, dying of an incurable disease, and abhorring suicide, had gone into a cafe and slapped an unoffending bully and duellist in the face, inviting a combat. The end was sure, easy and honourable. For himself he looked at Christine. Not all her abounding vitality, her warm, healthy body, or her overwhelming love, could give him one extra day of life, not one day. What a fool he had been to think that she could do so! And she must sit and watch him she, with her primitive fierceness of love, must watch him sinking, fading helplessly out of life, sight and being.

A bottle of whiskey was beside him. During the two hours just gone he had drunk a whole pint of it. He poured out another half-glass, filled it up with milk, and drank it off slowly. At that moment a knock came to the door. Christine opened it, and admitted one of the fugitives of Nicolas's company of rebels. He saw Ferrol, and came straight to him.

"A letter for M'sieu' the Honourable," said he "from M'sieu' le Capitaine Lavilette."

Ferrol opened the paper. It contained only a few lines. Nicolas was hiding in the store-room of the vacant farmhouse, and Ferrol must assist him to escape to the State of New York.

He had stolen into the village from the north, and, afraid to trust any one except this faithful member of his company, had taken refuge in a place where, if the worst came to the worst, he could defend himself, for a time at least. Twenty rifles of the rebels had been stored in the farmhouse, and they were all loaded! Ferrol, of course, could go where he liked, being a Britisher, and nobody would notice him. Would he not try to get him away?

While Christine questioned the fugitive, Ferrol thought the matter over. One thing he knew: the solution of the great problem had come; and the means to the solution ran through his head like lightning. He rose to his feet, drank off a few mouthfuls of undiluted whiskey, filled a flask and put it in his pocket. Then he found his pistols, and put on his greatcoat, muffler and cap, before he spoke a word.

Christine stood watching him intently.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" she said quietly. "I am going to save your brother, if I can," was his reply, as he handed her Nic's letter.

CHAPTER XIX

Half an hour later, as Ferrol was passing from Louis Lavilette's stables into the road leading to the Seigneury he met Sophie Farcinelle, face to face. In a vague sort of way he was conscious that a look of despair and misery had suddenly wasted the bloom upon her cheek, and given to the large, cow-like eyes an expression of child-like hopelessness. An apathy had settled upon his nerves. He saw things as in a dream. His brain worked swiftly, but everything that passed before his eyes was, as it were, in a kaleidoscope, vivid and glowing, but yet intangible. His brain told him that here before him was a woman into whose life he had brought its first ordeal and

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humiliation. But his heart only felt a reflective sort of pity: it was not a personal or immediate realisation, that is, not at first.

He was scarcely conscious that he stood and looked at her for quite two minutes, without motion or speech on the part of either; but the dumb, desolate look in her eyes a look of appeal, astonishment, horror and shame combined, presently clarified his senses, and he slowly grew to look at her as at his punishment, the punishment of his life. Before always before Sophie had been vague and indistinct: seen to-day, forgotten tomorrow; and previous to meeting her scores had affected his senses, affected them not at all deeply.

She was like a date in history to a boy who remembers that it meant something, but what, is not quite sure. But the meaning and definiteness were his own. Out of the irresponsibility of his nature, out of the moral ineptitude to which he had been born, moral knowledge came to him at last. Love had not done it; neither the love of Christine, as strong as death, nor the love of his sister, the deepest thing he ever knew but the look of a woman wronged. He had inflicted on her the deepest wrong that may be done a woman. A woman can forgive passion and ruin, and worse, if the man loves her, and she can forgive herself, remembering that to her who loved much, much was forgiven. But out of wilful idleness, the mere flattery of the senses, a vampire feeding upon the spirits and souls of others, for nothing save emotion for emotion's sake that was shameless, it was the last humiliation of a woman. As it were, to lose joy, and glow, and fervour of young, sincere and healthy life, to whip up the dying vitality and morbid brain of a consumptive!

All in a flash he saw it, realised it, and hated himself for it. He knew that as long as he lived, an hour or ten years, he never could redeem himself; never could forgive himself, and never buy back the life that he had injured. Many a time in his life he had kissed and ridden away, and had been unannoyed by conscience. But in proportion as conscience had neglected him before, it ground him now between the stones, and he saw himself as he was. Come of a gentleman's family, he knew he was no gentleman. Having learned the forms and courtesies of life, having infused his whole career with a spirit of gay bonhomie, he knew that in truth he was a swaggerer; that bad taste, infamous bad taste, had marked almost everything that he had done in his life. He had passed as one of the nobility, but he knew that all true men, all he had ever met, must have read him through and through. He had understood this before to a certain point, had read himself to a certain mark of gauge, but he had never been honestly and truly a man until this moment. His soul was naked before his eyes. It had been naked before, but he had laughed. Born without real remorse, he felt it at last. The true thing started within him. God, the avenger, the revealer and the healer, had held up this woman as a glass to him that he might see himself.

He saw her as she had been, a docile, soft-eyed girl, untouched by anything that defames or shames, and all in a moment the man that had never been in him until now, from the time he laughed first into his mother's eyes as a babe, spoke out as simply as a child would have spoken, and told the truth. There were no ameliorating phrases to soften it to her ears; there was no tact, there was no blarney, there was no suave suggestion now, no cheap gaiety, no cynicism of the social vampire only the direct statement of a self-reproachful, dying man.

"I didn't fully know what I was doing," he said to her. "If I had understood then as I do now, I would never have come near you. It was the worst wickedness I ever did."

The new note in his voice, the new fashion of his words, the new look of his eyes, startled her, confused her. She could scarcely believe he was the same man. The dumb desolation lifted a little, and a look of understanding seemed to pierce her tragic apathy. As if a current of thought had been suddenly sent through her, she drew herself up with a little shiver, and looked at him as if she were about to speak; but instead of doing so, a strange, unhappy smile passed across her lips.

He saw that all the goodness of her nature was trying to arouse itself and assure him of forgiveness. It did not deceive him in the least.

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"I won't be so mean now as to say I was weak," he added. "I was not weak; I was bad. I always felt I was born a liar and a thief. I've lied to myself all my life; and I've lied to other people because I never was a true man."

"A thief!" she said at last, scarcely above a whisper, and looking at him with a flash of horror in her eyes. "A thief!"

It was no use; he could not allow her to think he meant a thief in the vulgar, common sense, though that was what he was: just a common criminal.

"I have stolen the kind thoughts and love of people to whom I gave nothing in return," he said steadily. "There is nothing good in me. I used to think I was good-natured; but I was not, or I wouldn't have brought misery to a girl like you."

His truth broke down the barriers of her anger and despair. Something welled up in her heart: it may have been love, it may have been inherent womanliness.

"Why did you marry Christine?" she asked.

All at once he saw that she never could quite understand. Her stand-point would still, in the end, be the stand-point of a woman. He saw that she would have forgiven him, even had he not loved her, if he had not married Christine. For the first time he knew something, the real something, of a woman's heart. He had never known it before, because he had been so false himself. He might have been evil and had a conscience too; then he would have been wise. But he had been evil, and had had no conscience or moral mentor from the beginning; so he had never known anything real in his life. He thought he had known Christine, but now he saw her in a new light, through the eyes of her sister from whose heart he had gathered a harvest of passion and affection, and had burnt the stubble and seared the soil forever. Sophie could never justify herself in the eyes of her husband, or in her own eyes, because this man did not love her. Even as he stood before her there, declaring himself to her as wilfully wicked in all that he had said and done, she still longed passionately for the thing that was denied her: not her lost truth back, but the love that would have compensated for her suffering, and in some poor sense have justified her in years to come. She did not put it into words, but the thought was bluntly in her mind. She looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears, which dropped down her cheek to the ground.

He was about to answer her question, when, all at once, her honest eyes looked into his mournfully, and she said with an incredible pathos and simplicity:

"I don't know how I am going to live on with Magon. I suppose I'll have to keep pretending till I die!"

The bell in the church was ringing for vespers. It sounded peaceful and quiet, as though no war, or rebellion, or misery and shame, were anywhere within the radius of its travel.

Just where they stood there was a tall calvary. Behind it was some shrubbery. Ferrol was going to answer her, when he saw, coming along the road, the Cure in his robes, bearing the host. In front of him trotted an acolyte, swinging the censer.

Ferrol quickly drew Sophie aside behind the bushes, where they should not be seen; for he was no longer reckless. He wished to be careful for the woman's sake.

The Cure did not turn his head to the right or left, but came along chanting something slowly. The smell of the incense floated past them. When the priest and the lad reached the calvary they turned towards it, bowed, crossed themselves, and the lad rang a little silver bell. Then the two passed on, the lad still ringing. When they were out of sight the sound of the bell came softly, softly up the road, while the bell in the church tower still called to

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prayer.

The words the priest chanted seemed to ring through the air after he had gone.

"God have mercy upon the passing soul!
God have mercy upon the passing soul!
Hear the prayer of the sinner, O Lord;
Listen to the voice of those that mourn;
Have mercy upon the sinner, O Lord!"

When Ferrol turned to Sophie again, both her hands were clasping the calvary, and she had dropped her head upon them.

"I must go," he said. She did not move.

Again he spoke to her; but she did not lift her head. Presently, however, as he stood watching her, she moved away from the calvary, and, with her back still turned to him, stepped out into the road and hurried on towards her home, never once turning her head.

He stood looking after her for a moment, then turned and, sitting on a log behind the shrubbery, he tore a few pieces of paper out of a note–book and began writing. He wrote swiftly for about twenty minutes or more, then, arising, he moved on towards the village, where crowds had gathered excited, fearful, tumultuous; for the British soldiers had just entered the place.

Ferrol seemed almost oblivious of the threatening crowd, which once or twice jostled him more than was accidental. He came into the post–office, got an envelope, put his letter inside it, stamped it, addressed it to Christine, and dropped it into the letter–box.

CHAPTER XX

An hour later he stood among a few companies of British soldiers in front of the massive stone store–house of the Lavillettes' abandoned farmhouse, with its thick shuttered windows and its solid oak doors. It was too late to attempt the fugitive's escape, save by strategy. Over half an hour Nic had kept them at bay. He had made loopholes in the shutters and the door, and from these he fired upon his assailants. Already he had wounded five and killed two.

Men had been sent for timber to batter down the door and windows. Meanwhile, the troops stood at a respectful distance, out of the range of Nic's firing, awaiting developments.

Ferrol consulted with the officers, advising a truce and parley, offering himself as mediator to induce Nic to surrender. To this the officers assented, but warned him that his life might pay the price of his temerity. He laughed at this. He had been talking, with his head and throat well muffled, and the collar of his greatcoat drawn about his ears. Once or twice he coughed, a hacking, wrenching cough, which struck the ears of more than one of the officers painfully; for they had known him in his best and gayest days at Quebec.

It was arranged that he should advance, holding out a flag of truce. Before he went he drew aside one of the younger lieutenants, in whose home at Quebec his sister had always been a welcome visitor, and told him briefly the story of his marriage, of his wife and of Nicolas. He sent Christine a message, that she should not forget to carry his last token to his sister! Then turning, he muffled up his face against the crisp, harsh air (there was design in this also), and, waving a white handkerchief, advanced to the door of the store–room.

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The soldiers waited anxiously, fearing that Nic would fire, in spite of all; but presently a spot of white appeared at one of the loopholes; then the door was slowly opened. Ferrol entered, and it was closed again.

Nicolas Lavilette grasped his hand.

"I knew you wouldn't go back on me," said he. "I knew you were my friend. What the devil do they want out there?"

"I am more than your friend: I'm your brother," answered Ferrol, meaningly. Then, quickly taking off his greatcoat, cap, muffler and boots: "Quick, on with these!" he said. "There's no time to lose!"

"What's all this?" asked Nic.

"Never mind; do exactly as I say, and there's a chance for you."

Nic put on the overcoat. Ferrol placed the cap on his head, and muffled him up exactly as he himself had been, then made him put on his own top— boots.

"Now, see," he said, "everything depends upon how you do this thing. You are about my height. Pass yourself off for me. Walk loose and long as I do, and cough like me as you go."

There was no difficulty in showing him what the cough was like: he involuntarily offered an illustration as he spoke.

"As soon as I shut the door and you start forward, I'll fire on them. That'll divert their attention from you. They'll take you for me, and think I've failed in persuading you to give yourself up. Go straight on— don't hurry coughing all the time; and if you can make the dark, just beyond the soldiers, by the garden bench, you'll find two men. They'll help you. Make for the big tree on the Seigneurie road you know: where you were robbed. There you'll find the fastest horse from your father's stables. Then ride, my boy, ride for your life to the State of New York!"

"And you you?" asked Nicolas. Ferrol laughed.

"You needn't worry about me, Nic. I'll get out of this all right; as right as rain! Are you ready? Steady now, steady. Let me hear you cough." Nic coughed.

"No, that isn't it. Listen and watch." Ferrol coughed. "Here," he said, taking something from his pocket, "open your mouth." He threw some pepper down the other's throat. "Now try it."

Nic coughed almost convulsively.

"Yes, that's it, that's it! Just keep that up. Come along now. Quick— not a moment to lose! Steady! You're all right, my boy; you've got nerve, and that's the thing. Good—bye, Nic, good luck to you!"

They grasped hands: the door opened swiftly, and Nic stepped outside. In an instant Ferrol was at the loophole. Raising a rifle, he fired, then again and again. Through the loophole he could see a half—dozen men lift a log to advance on the door as Nic passed a couple of officers, coughing hard, and making spasmodic motions with his hand, as though exhausted and unable to speak.

He fired again, and a soldier fell. The lust of fighting was on him now. It was not a question of country or of race, but only a man crowding the power of old instincts into the last moments of his life. The vigour and valour of a reconquered youth seemed to inspire him; he felt as he did when a mere boy fighting on the Danube. His blood

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rioted in his veins; his eyes flashed. He lifted the flask of whiskey and gulped down great mouthfuls of it, and fired again and again, laughing madly.

"Let them come on, let them come on," he cried. "By God, I'll settle them!" The frenzy of war possessed him. He heard the timber crash against the door once, twice, thrice, and then give away. He swung round and saw men's faces glowing in the light of the fire, and then another face shot in before the others that of Vanne Castine.

With a cry of fury he ran forward into the doorway. Castine saw him at the same moment. With a similar instinct each sprang for the other's throat, Castine with a knife in his hand.

A cry of astonishment went up from the officers and the men without. They had expected to see Nic; but Nic was on his way to the horse beneath the great elm tree, and from the elm tree to the State of New York and safety.

The men and the officers fell back as Castine and Ferrol clinched in a death struggle. Ferrol knew that his end had come. He had expected it, hoped for it. But, before the end, he wanted to kill this man, if he could. He caught Castine's head in his hands, and, with a last effort, twisted it back with a sudden jerk.

All at once, with the effort, blood spurted from his mouth into the other's face. He shivered, tottered and fell back, as Castine struck blindly into space. For a moment Ferrol swayed back and forth, stretched out his hands convulsively and gasped, trying to speak, the blood welling from his lips. His eyes were wild, anxious and yearning, his face deadly pale and covered with a cold sweat. Presently he collapsed, like a loosened bundle, upon the steps.

Castine, blinded with blood, turned round, and the light of the fire upon his open mouth made him appear to grin painfully an involuntary grimace of terror.

At that instant a rifle shot rang out from the shrubbery, and Castine sprang from the ground and fell at Ferrol's feet. Then, with a contortive shudder, he rolled over and over the steps, and lay face downward upon the ground—dead.

A girl ran forward from the trees, with a cry, pushing her way through to Ferrol's body. Lifting up his head, she called to him in an agony of entreaty. But he made no answer.

"That's the woman who fired the shot!" said a subaltern officer excitedly. "I saw her!"

"Shut up, you fool it was his wife!" exclaimed the young captain to whom Ferrol had given his last message for Christine.