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Title: When Valmond Came to Pontiac, Volume 2.

Author: Gilbert Parker

Release Date: August, 2004 [EBook #6203]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on September 23, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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WHEN VALMOND CAME TO PONTIAC

The Story of a Lost Napoleon

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VI

Prince or plebeian, Valmond played his part with equal aplomb at the simple home of Elise Malboir and at the Manoir Hilaire, where Madame Chalice received him. His dress had nothing of the bizarre on this occasion. He was in black-long coat, silk stockings, the collar of his waistcoat faced with white, his neckerchief white and full, his enamelled shoes adorned with silver buckles. His present repose and decorum contrasted strangely with the fanciful display at his first introduction. Madame Chalice approved instantly, for though the costume was, in itself, an affectation, previous to the time by a generation, it was in the picture, was sedately refined. She welcomed him in the salon where many another distinguished man had been entertained--from Frontenac, and Vaudreuil, down to Sir Guy Carleton. The Manor had belonged to her husband's people seventy-five years before, and though, as a banker in New York, Monsieur Chalice had become an American of the Americans, at her request he had bought back from a kinsman the old place, unchanged, furniture and all. Bringing the antique plate, china, and bric-a-brac, made in France when Henri Quatre was king, she fared away to Quebec, set the rude mansion in order, and was happy for a whole summer, as was her husband, the best of fishermen and sportsmen. The Manor House stood on a knoll, behind which, steppe on steppe, climbed the hills, till they ended in Dalgrothe Mountain. Beyond the mountain were unexplored regions, hill and valley floating into hill and valley, lost in a miasmic haze, ruddy, silent, untenanted, save, mayhap, by the strange people known as the Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills.

The house had been built in the seventeenth century, and the walls were very thick, to keep out both cold and attack. Beneath the high-pointed roof were big dormer windows, and huge chimneys flanked each side of the house. The great roof gave a sense of crouching or hovering, for warmth or in menace. As Valmond entered the garden, Madame Chalice was leaning over the lower half of the entrance door, which opened latitudinally, and was hung on large iron hinges of quaint design, made by some seventeenth-century forgeron. Behind her deepened hospitably the spacious hall, studded and heavy beamed, with its unpainted pine ceiling toned to a good brown by smoke and time. Caribou and moose antlers hung along the wall, with arquebuses, powder-horns, big shot-bags, swords, and even pieces of

armour, such as Cartier brought with him from St. Malo.

Madame Chalice looked out of this ancient avenue, a contrast, yet a harmony; for, though her dress was modern, her person had a rare touch of the archaic, and fitted into the picture like a piece of beautiful porcelain, coloured long before the art of making fadeless colours was lost.

There was an amused, meditative smiling at her lips, a kind of wonder, the tender flush of a new experience. She turned, and, stepping softly into the salon, seated herself near the immense chimney, in a heavily carved chair, her feet lost in rich furs on the polished floor. A quaint table at her hand was dotted with rare old books and miniatures, and behind her ticked an ancient clock in a tall mahogany case.

Valmond came forward, hat in hand, and raised to his lips the fingers she gave him. He did it with the vagueness of one in a dream, she thought, and she neither understood nor relished his uncomplimentary abstraction; so she straightway determined to give him some troublesome moments.

"I have waited to drink my coffee with you," she said, motioning him to a seat; "and you may smoke a cigarette, if you wish."

Her eyes wandered over his costume with critical satisfaction.

He waved his hand slightly, declining the permission, and looked at her with an intent seriousness, which took no account of the immediate charm of her presence.

"I'd like to ask you a question," he said, without preamble. She was amused, interested. Here was an unusual man, who ignored the conventional preliminary nothings, beating down the grass before the play, as it were.

"I was never good at catechism," she answered. "But I will be as hospitable as I can."

"I've felt," he said, "that you can--can see through things; that you can balance them, that you get at all sides, and--"

She had been reading Napoleon's letters this very afternoon.

"Full squared?" she interrupted quizzically.

"As the Great Emperor said," he answered. "A woman sees farther than a man, and if she has judgment as well, she is the best prophet in the world."

"It sounds distinctly like a compliment," she answered. "You are trying to break that square!"

She was mystified; he was different from any man she had ever entertained. She was not half sure she liked it. Yet, if he were in

very truth a prince--she thought of his debut in flowered waistcoat, panama hat, and enamelled boots!--she should take this confidence as a compliment; if he were a barber, she could not resent it; she could not waste wit or time; she could not even, in extremity, call the servant to show the barber out; and in any case she was too comfortably interested to worry herself with speculation.

He was very much in earnest. "I want to ask you," he said, "what is the thing most needed to make a great idea succeed."

"I have never had a great idea," she replied.

He looked at her eagerly, with youthful, questioning eyes.

"How simple, and yet how astute he is!" she thought, remembering the event of yesterday.

"I thought you had--I was sure you had," he said in a troubled sort of way. He did not see that she was eluding him.

"I mean, I never had a fixed and definite idea that I proceeded to apply, as you have done," she explained tentatively. "But--well, I suppose that the first requisite for success is absolute belief in the idea; that it be part of one's life; to suffer for, to fight for, to die for, if need be--though that sounds like a handbook of moral mottoes, doesn't it?"

"That's it, that's it," he said. "The thing must be in your bones --hein?"

"Also in--your blood--hein?" she rejoined slowly and meaningly, looking over the top of her coffee-cup at him. Somehow again the plebeian quality in that hein grated on her, and she could not resist the retort.

"What!" said he confusedly, plunging into another pitfall. She had challenged him, and he knew it. "Nothing what-ever," she answered, with an urbanity that defied the suggestion of malice. Yet, now that she remembered, she had sweetly challenged one of a royal house for the like lapse into the vulgar tongue. A man should not be beheaded because of a what. So she continued more seriously: "The idea must be himself, all of him, born with him, the rightful output of his own nature, the thing he must inevitably do, or waste his life."

She looked him honestly in the eyes. She had spoken with the soft irony of truth, the blind tyranny of the just. She had meant to test him here and there by throwing little darts of satire, and yet he made her serious and candid in spite of herself. He was of kin to her in some part of his nature. He did not concern her as a man of personal or social possibilities--merely as an active originality. Leaning back languidly, she was eyeing him closely from under drooping lids, smiling, too, in an unimportant sort of way, as if what she had said was a trifle.

Consummate liar and comedian, or true man and no pretender, his eyes did not falter. They were absorbed, as if in eager study of a theme.

"Yes, yes, that's it; and if he has it, what next?" said he meaningly.

"Well, then, opportunity, joined to coolness, knowledge of men, power of combination, strategy, and"--she paused, and a purely feminine curiosity impelled her to add suggestively--"and a woman."

He nodded. "And a woman," he repeated after her musingly, and not turning it to account cavalierly, as he might have done. He was taking himself with a simple seriousness that appealed to her.

"You may put strategy out of the definition, leaving in the woman," she continued ironically.

He felt the point, and her demure dart struck home. But he saw what an ally she might make. Tremendous possibilities moved before him. His heart beat faster than it did yesterday when the old sergeant faced him. Here was beauty--he admired that; power--he wished for that. What might he not accomplish, no matter how wild his move, with this wonderful creature as his friend, his ally, his---He paused, for this house had a master as well as a mistress.

"We will leave in the woman," he said quietly, yet with a sort of trouble in his face.

"In your idea?" was the negligent question.

"Yes."

"Where is the woman?" insinuated the soft, bewildering voice.

"Here!" he answered emotionally, and he believed it was the truth. She stood looking meditatively out of the window, not at him.

"In Pontiac?" she asked presently, turning with a child-like surprise.

"Ah, yes, yes! I know--one of the people; suitable for Pontiac; but is it wise? She is pretty--but is it wise?"

She was adroitly suggesting Elise Malboir, whose little romance she had discovered.

"She is the prettiest and wisest lady I ever knew, or ever hoped to know," he said earnestly, laying his hand upon his heart.

"How far will your idea take you?" she asked evasively, her small fingers tightening a gold hair-pin. "To Paris--to the Tuileries!" he answered, rising to his feet.

"And you start--from Pontiac?"

"What difference, Pontiac or Cannes, like the Great Master after Elba," he said. "The principle is the same."

"The money?"

"It will come," he answered. "I have friends--and hopes."

She almost laughed. She was suddenly struck by the grotesqueness of the situation. But she saw how she had hurt him, and she said instantly:

"Of course, with those one may go far. Sit down and tell me all your plans."

He was about to comply, when, glancing out of the window, she saw the old sergeant, now "General Lagroin," and Parpon hastening up the walk. Parpon ambled comfortably beside the old man, who seemed ten years younger than he had done the day before.

"Your army and cabinet, monseigneur!" she said with a pretty, mocking gesture of salutation.

He glanced at her reprovingly. "My General and my Minister; as brave a soldier and as able a counsellor as ever prince had. Madame," he added, "they only are farceurs who do not dare, and have not wisdom. My General has scars from Auerstadt, Austerlitz, and Waterloo; my Minister is feared--in Pontiac. Was he not the trusted friend of the Grand Seigneur, as he was called here, the father of your Monseieur De la Riviere? Has he yet erred in advising me? Have we yet failed? Madame," he added, a little rhetorically, "as we have begun, so will we end, true to our principles, and--"

"And gentlemen of the king," she said provokingly, urging him on.

"Pardon, gentlemen of the Empire, madame, as time and our lives will prove. . . . Madame, I thank you for your violets of Sunday last."

She admired the acumen that had seized the perfect opportunity to thank her for the violets, the badge of the Great Emperor.

"My hives shall not be empty of bees--or honey," she said, alluding to the imperial bees, and she touched his arm in a pretty, gracious fashion.

"Madame--ah, madame!" he replied, and his eyes grew moist.

She bade the servant admit Lagroin and Parpon. They bowed profoundly, first to Valmond, and afterwards to Madame Chalice. She saw the point, and it amused her. She read in the old man's eye the soldier's contempt for women, together with his new-born reverence and love for Valmond. Lagroin was still dressed in the uniform of the Old Guard, and wore on his breast the sacred ribbon which Valmond had given him the day before.

"Well, General?" said Valmond.

"Sire," said the old man, "they mock us in the streets. Come to the window, sire."

The "sire," fell on the ears of Madame Chalice like a mot in a play; but Valmond, living up to his part, was grave and solicitous. He walked to the window, and the old man said:

"Sire, do you not hear a drum?"

A faint rat-tat came up the road. Valmond bowed. "Sire," the old man continued, "I would not act till I had your orders."

"Whence comes the mockery?" Valmond asked quietly.

The other shook his head. "Sire, I do not know. But I remember of such a thing happening to the Emperor. It was in the garden of the Tuileries, and twenty-four battalions of the Old Guard filed past our great chief. Some fool sent out a gamin dressed in regimentals in front of one of the bands, and then--"

"Enough, General," said Valmond; "I understand. I will go down into the village--eh, monsieur?" he added, turning to Parpon with impressive consideration.

"Sire, there is one behind these mockers," answered the little man in a low voice.

Valmond turned towards Madame Chalice. "I know my enemy, madame," he said.

"Your enemy is not here," she rejoined kindly.

He stooped over her hand, and bowed Lagroin and Parpon to the door.

"Madame," he said, "I thank you. Will you accept a souvenir of him whom we both love, martyr and friend of France?"

He drew from his breast a small painting of Napoleon, on ivory, and handed it to her.

"It was the work of David," he continued. "You will find it well authenticated. Look upon the back of it."

She looked, and her heart beat a little faster. "This was done when he was alive?" she said.

"For the King of Rome," he answered. "Adieu, madame. Again I thank you, for our cause as for myself."

He turned away. She let him get as far as the door. "Wait, wait!" she said suddenly, a warm light in her face, for her imagination had been touched. "Tell me, tell me the truth. Who are you? Are you really a Napoleon? I can be a constant ally, but, I charge you, speak the truth to me. Are you--" She stopped abruptly. "No, no; do not tell me," she added quickly. "If you are not, you will be your own executioner. I will ask for no further proof than did Sergeant Lagroin. It is in a

small way yet, but you are playing a terrible game. Do you realise what may happen?"

"In the hour that you ask a last proof I will give it," he said almost fiercely. "I go now to meet an enemy."

"If I should change that enemy into a friend--" she hinted.

"Then I should have no need of stratagem or force."

"Force?" she asked suggestively. The drollery of it set her smiling.

"In a week I shall have five hundred men."

"Dreamer!" she thought, and shook her head dubiously; but, glancing again at the ivory portrait, her mood changed.

"Au revoir," she said. "Come and tell me about the mockers. Success go with you--sire."

Yet she did not know whether she thought him sire or sinner, gentleman or comedian, as she watched him go down the hill with Lagroin and Parpon. But she had the portrait. How did he get it? No matter, it was hers now.

Curious to know more of the episode in the village below, she ordered her carriage, and came driving slowly past the Louis Quinze at an exciting moment. A crowd had gathered, and boys, and even women, were laughing and singing in ridicule snatches of, "Vive Napoleon!" For, in derision of yesterday's event, a small boy, tricked out with a paper cocked-hat and incongruous regimentals, with a hobby-horse between his legs, was marching up and down, preceded by another lad, who played a toy drum in derision of Lagroin. The children had been well rehearsed, for even as Valmond arrived upon the scene, Lagroin and Parpon on either side of him, the mock Valmond was bidding the drummer: "Play up the feet of the army!"

The crowd parted on either side, silenced and awed by the look of potential purpose in the face of this yesterday's hero. The old sergeant's glance was full of fury, Parpon's of a devilish sort of glee.

Valmond approached the lads.

"My children," he said kindly, "you have not learned your lesson well enough. You shall be taught." He took the paper caps from their heads. "I will give you better caps than these." He took the hobby-horse, the drum, and the tin swords. "I will give you better things than these." He put the caps on the ground, added the toys to the heap, and Parpon, stooping, lighted the paper. Scattering money among the crowd, and giving some silver to the lads, Valmond stood looking at the bonfire for a moment, and then, pointing to it dramatically, said:

"My friends, my brothers, Frenchmen, we will light larger fires than these. Your young Seigneur sought to do me honour this afternoon.

I thank him, and he shall have proof of my affection in due time. And now our good landlord's wine is free to you, for one goblet each. My children," he added, turning to the little mockers, "come to me to-morrow and I will show you how to be soldiers. My General shall teach you what to do, and I will teach you what to say."

Almost instantly there arose the old admiring cries of, "Vive Napoleon!" and he knew that he had regained his ground. Amid the pleasant tumult the three entered the hotel together, like people in a play.

As they were going up the stairs, Parpon whispered to the old soldier, who laid his hand fiercely upon the fine sword at his side, given him that morning by Valmond; for, looking down, Lagroin saw the young Seigneur maliciously laughing at them, as if in delight at the mischief he had caused.

That night, at nine o'clock, the old sergeant went to the Seigneury, knocked, and was admitted to a room where were seated the young Seigneur, Medallion, and the avocat.

"Well, General," said De la Riviere, rising with great formality, "what may I do to serve you? Will you join our party?" He motioned to a chair.

The old man's lips were set and stern, and he vouchsafed no reply to the hospitable request.

"Monsieur," he said, "to-day you threw dirt at my great master. He is of royal blood, and he may not fight you. But I, monsieur, his General, demand satisfaction--swords or pistols!"

De la Riviere sat down, leaned back in his chair, and laughed. Without a word the old man stepped forward, and struck him across the mouth with his red cotton handkerchief.

"Then take that, monsieur," said he, "from one who fought for the First Napoleon, and will fight for this Napoleon against the tongue of slander and the acts of fools. I killed two Prussians once for saying that the Great Emperor's shirt stuck out below his waistcoat. You'll find me at the Louis Quinze," he added, before De la Riviere, choking with wrath, could do more than get to his feet; and, wheeling, he left the room.

The young Seigneur would have followed him, but the avocat laid a restraining hand upon his arm, and Medallion said: "Dear Seigneur, see, you can't fight him. The parish would only laugh."

De la Riviere took the advice, and on Sunday, over the coffee, unburdened the tale to Madame Chalice.

Contrary to his expectations, she laughed a great deal, then soothed his wounded feelings and advised him as Medallion had done. And because Valmond commanded the old sergeant to silence, the matter ended for the moment. But it would have its hour yet, and Valmond knew this as well

as did the young Seigneur.

CHAPTER VII

It was no jest of Valmond's that he would, or could, have five hundred followers in two weeks. Lagroin and Parpon were busy, each in his own way--Lagroin, open, bluff, imperative; Parpon, silent, acute, shrewd. Two days before the feast of St. John the Baptist, the two made a special tour through the parish for certain recruits. If these could be enlisted, a great many men of this and other parishes would follow. They were, by name, Muroc the charcoalman, Duclosse the mealman, Lajeunesse the blacksmith, and Garotte the limeburner, all men of note, after their kind, with influence and individuality.

Lagroin chafed that he must play recruiting-sergeant and general also. But it gave him comfort to remember that the Great Emperor had not at times disdained to be his own recruiting-sergeant; that, after Friedland, he himself had been taken into the Old Guard by the Emperor; that Davoust had called him brother; that Ney had shared his supper and slept with him under the same blanket. Parpon would gladly have done this work alone, but he knew that Lagroin in his regimentals would be useful.

The sought-for comrades were often to be found together about the noon hour in the shop of Jose Lajeunesse. They formed the coterie of the humble, even as the Cure's coterie represented the aristocracy of Pontiac --with Medallion as a connecting link.

Arches and poles were being put up, to be decorated against the feast-day, and piles of wood for bonfires were arranged at points on the hills round the village. Cheer and goodwill were everywhere, for a fine harvest was in view, and this feast-day always brought gladness and simple revelling. Parish interchanged with parish; but, because it was so remote, Pontiac was its own goal of pleasure, and few fared forth, though others came from Ville Bambord and elsewhere to join the fete. As Lagroin and the dwarf came to the door of the smithy, they heard the loud laugh of Lajeunesse.

"Good!" said Parpon. "Hear how he tears his throat!"

"If he has sense, I'll make a captain of him," remarked Lagroin consequentially.

"You shall beat him into a captain on his own anvil," rejoined the little man.

They entered the shop. Lajeunesse was leaning on his bellows, laughing, and holding an iron in the spitting fire; Muroc was seated on the edge of the cooling tub; and Duclosse was resting on a bag of his excellent meal. Garotte was the only missing member of the quartette.

A better weapon than his waspish tongue was Parpon's voice, for it, before all, was persuasive. A few years before, none of them had ever heard him sing. An accident discovered it to them, and afterwards he sang for them but little, and never when it was expected of him. He might be the minister of a dauphin or a fool, but he was now only the mysterious Parpon who thrilled them. All the soul cramped in the small body was showing in his eyes, as on that day when he had sung before the Louis Quinze.

A face suddenly appeared at a little door just opposite him. No one but Parpon saw it. It belonged to Madelinette, the daughter of Lajeunesse, who had a voice of merit. More than once the dwarf had stopped to hear her singing as he passed the smithy. She sang only the old chansons and the songs of the voyageurs, with a far greater sweetness and richness, however, than any in the parish; and the Cure could detect her among all others at mass. She had been taught her notes, but that had only opened up possibilities, and fretted her till she was unhappy. What she felt she could not put into her singing, for the machinery, unknown and tyrannical, was not hers. Twice before she had heard Parpon sing-- at mass when the miller's wife was buried, and he, forgetting the world, had poured forth all his beautiful voice; and on that notable night before the Louis Quinze. If he would but teach her those songs of his, give her that sound of an organ in her throat! Parpon guessed what she thought. Well, he would see what could be done, if the blacksmith joined Valmond's standard.

He stopped singing.

"That's as good as dear Caron, the vivandiere of the Third Corps. Blood o' my body, I believe it's better--almost!" said Lagroin, nodding his head patronisingly. "She dragged me from under the mare of a damned Russian that cut me down, before he got my bayonet in his liver. Caron! Caron! ah yes, brave Caron! my dear Caron!" said the old man, smiling through the alluring light that the song had made for him, as he looked behind the curtain of the years.

Parpon's pleasant ridicule was not lost on the charcoalman and the mealman; but neither was the singing wasted; and their faces were touched with admiration, while the blacksmith, with a sigh, turned to his fire and blew the bellows softly.

"Blacksmith," said Parpon, "you have a bird that sings."

"I've no bird that sings like that, though she has pretty notes, my bird." He sighed again. "'Come, blacksmith,' said the Count Lassone, when he came here a-fishing, 'that's a voice for a palace,' said he. 'Take it out of the woods and teach it,' said he, 'and it will have all Paris following it.' That to me, a poor blacksmith, with only my bread and sour milk, and a hundred dollars a year or so, and a sup of brandy when I can get it."

The charcoalman spoke up. "You'll not forget the indulgences folks give

you more than the pay for setting the dropped shoe--true gifts of God, bought with good butter and eggs at the holy auction, blacksmith. I gave you two myself. You have your blessings, Lajeunesse."

"So; and no one to use the indulgences but you and Madelinette, giant," said the fat mealman.

"Ay, thank the Lord, we've done well that way!" said the blacksmith, drawing himself up--for he loved nothing better than to be called the giant, though he was known to many as petit enfant, in irony of his size.

Lagroin was now impatient. He could not see the drift of this, and he was about to whisper to Parpon, when the little man sent him a look, commanding silence, and he fretted on dumbly.

"See, my blacksmith," said Parpon, "your bird shall be taught to sing, and to Paris she shall go by and by."

"Such foolery!" said Duclosse.

"What's in your noddle, Parpon?" cried the charcoalman.

The blacksmith looked at Parpon, his face all puzzled eagerness. But another face at the door grew pale with suspense. Parpon quickly turned towards it. "See here, Madelinette," he said, in a low voice. The girl stepped inside and came to her father. Lajeunesse's arm ran round her shoulder. There was no corner of his heart into which she had not crept. "Out with it, Parpon!" called the blacksmith hoarsely, for the daughter's voice had followed herself into those farthest corners of his rugged nature.

"I will teach her to sing first; then she shall go to Quebec, and afterwards to Paris, my friend," he answered.

The girl's eyes were dilating with a great joy. "Ah, Parpon--good Parpon!" she whispered.

"But Paris! Paris! There's gossip for you, thick as mortar," cried the charcoalman, and the mealman's fingers beat a tattoo on his stomach.

Parpon waved his hand. "'Look to the weevil in your meal, Duclosse; and you, smutty-face, leave true things to your betters. See, blacksmith," he added, "she shall go to Quebec, and after that to Paris."

Here he got off the wheels, and stepped out into the centre of the shop. "Our master will do that for you. I swear for him, and who can say that Parpon was ever a liar?"

The blacksmith's hand tightened on his daughter's shoulder. He was trembling with excitement.

"Is it true? is it true?" he asked, and the sweat stood out on his forehead.

"He sends this for Madelinette," answered the dwarf, handing over a little bag of gold to the girl, who drew back. But Parpon went close to her, and gently forced it into her hands.

"Open it," he said. She did so, and the blacksmith's eyes gloated on the gold. Muroc and Duclosse drew near, and peered in also. And so they stood there for a little while, all looking and exclaiming.

Presently Lajeunesse scratched his head. "Nobody does nothing for nothing," said he. "What horse do I shoe for this?"

"La, la!" said the charcoalman, sticking a thumb in the blacksmith's side; "you only give him the happy hand--like that!"

Duclosse was more serious. "It is the will of God that you become a marshal or a duke," he said wheezingly to the blacksmith. "You can't say no; it is the will of God, and you must bear it like a man."

The child saw further; perhaps the artistic strain in her gave her keener reasoning.

"Father," she said, "Monsieur Valmond wants you for a soldier."

"Wants me?" he roared in astonishment. "Who's to shoe the horses a week days, and throw the weight o' Sundays after mass? Who's to handle a stick for the Cure when there's fighting among the river-men?"

"But there, la, la! many a time my wife, my good Florienne, said to me, 'Jose--Jose Lajeunesse, with a chest like yours, you ought to be a corporal at least.'"

Parpon beckoned to Lagroin, and nodded. "Corporal! corporal!" cried Lagroin; "in a week you shall be a lieutenant and a month shall make you a captain, and maybe better than that!"

"Better than that--bagosh!" cried the charcoalman in surprise, proudly using the innocuous English oath. "Better than that--sutler, maybe?" said the mealman, smacking his lips.

"Better than that," replied Lagroin, swelling with importance. "Ay, ay, my dears, great things are for you. I command the army, and I have free hand from my master. Ah, what joy to serve a Napoleon once again! What joy! Lord, how I remember--"

"Better than that-eh?" persisted Duclosse, perspiring, the meal on his face making a sort of paste.

"A general or a governor, my children," said Lagroin. "First in, first served. Best men, best pickings. But every man must love his chief, and serve him with blood and bayonet; and march o' nights if need, and limber up the guns if need, and shoe a horse if need, and draw a cork if need, and cook a potato if need; and be a hussar, or a tirailleur, or a

trencher, or a general, if need. But yes, that's it; no pride but the love of France and the cause, and--"

"And Monsieur Valmond," said the charcoalman slyly.

"And Monsieur the Emperor!" cried Lagroin almost savagely.

He caught Parpon's eye, and instantly his hand went to his pocket.

"Ah, he is a comrade, that! Nothing is too good for his friends, for his soldiers. See!" he added.

He took from his pocket ten gold pieces. "'These are bagatelles,' said His Excellency to me; 'but tell my friends, Monsieur Muroc and Monsieur Duclosse and Monsieur Garotte, that they are buttons for the coats of my sergeants, and that my captains' coats have ten times as many buttons. Tell them,' said he, 'that my friends shall share my fortunes; that France needs us; that Pontiac shall be called the nest of heroes. Tell them that I will come to them at nine o'clock tonight, and we will swear fidelity.'"

"And a damned good speech too--bagosh!" cried the mealman, his fingers hungering for the gold pieces. "We're to be captains pretty soon--eh?" asked Muroc.

"As quick as I've taught you to handle a company," answered Lagroin, with importance.

"I was a patriot in '37," said Muroc. "I went against the English; I held abridge for two hours. I have my musket yet."

"I am a patriot now," urged Duclosse. "Why the devil not the English first, then go to France, and lick the Orleans!"

"They're a skittish lot, the Orleans; they might take it in their heads to fight," suggested Muroc, with a little grin.

"What the devil do you expect?" roared the blacksmith, blowing the bellows hard in his excitement, one arm still round his daughter's shoulder. "D'you think we're going to play leap-frog into the Tuileries? There's blood to let, and we're to let it!"

"Good, my leeches!" said Parpon; "you shall have blood to suck. But we'll leave the English be. France first, then our dogs will take a snap at the flag on the citadel yonder." He nodded in the direction of Quebec.

Lagroin then put five gold pieces each into the hands of Muroc and Duclosse, and said:

"I take you into the service of Prince Valmond Napoleon, and you do hereby swear to serve him loyally, even to the shedding of your blood, for his honour and the honour of France; and you do also vow to require a

like loyalty and obedience of all men under your command. Swear."

There was a slight pause, for the old man's voice had the ring of a fatal earnestness. It was no farce, but a real thing.

"Swear," he said again. "Raise your right hand."

"Done!" said Muroc. "To the devil with the charcoal! I'll go wash my face."

"There's my hand on it," added Duclosse; "but that rascal Petrie will get my trade, and I'd rather be strung by the Orleans than that."

"Till I've no more wind in my bellows!" responded Lajeunesse, raising his hand, "if he keeps faith with my Madelinette."

"On the honour of a soldier," said Lagroin, and he crossed himself.

"God save us all!" said Parpon. Obeying a motion of the dwarf's hand, Lagroin drew from his pocket a flask of cognac, with four little tin cups fitting into each other. Handing one to each, he poured them brimming full. Then, filling his own, he spilled a little in the steely dust of the smithy floor. All did the same, though they knew not why.

"What's that for?" asked the mealman.

"To show the Little Corporal, dear Corporal Violet, and my comrades of the Old Guard, that we don't forget them," cried Lagroin.

He drank slowly, holding his head far back, and as he brought it straight again, he swung on his heel, for two tears were racing down his cheeks.

The mealman wiped his eyes in sympathy; the charcoalman shook his head at the blacksmith, as though to say, "Poor devil!" and Parpon straightway filled their glasses again. Madelinette took the flask to the old sergeant. He looked at her kindly, and patted her shoulder. Then he raised his glass.

"Ah, the brave Caron, the dear Lucette Caron! Ah, the time she dragged me from under the Russian's mare!" He smiled into the distance. "Who can tell? Perhaps, perhaps--again!" he added.

Then, all at once, as if conscious of the pitiful humour of his meditations, he came to his feet, straightened his shoulders, and cried:

"To her we love best!"

The charcoalman drank, and smacked his lips. "Yes, yes," he said, looking into the cup admiringly; "like mother's milk that. White of my eye, but I do love her!"

The mealman cocked his glance towards the open door. "Elise!" he said sentimentally, and drank. The blacksmith kissed his daughter, and his

hand rested on her head as he lifted the cup, but he said never a word.

Parpon took one sip, then poured his liquor upon the ground, as though down there was what he loved best; but his eyes were turned to Dalgrothe Mountain, which he could see through the open door.

"France!" cried the old soldier stoutly, and tossed off the liquor.

CHAPTER VIII

That night Valmond and his three new recruits, to whom Garotte the limeburner had been added, met in the smithy and swore fealty to the great cause. Lajeunesse, by virtue of his position in the parish, and his former military experience, was made a captain, and the others sergeants of companies yet unnamed and unformed. The limeburner was a dry, thin man of no particular stature, who coughed a little between his sentences, and had a habit, when not talking, of humming to himself, as if in apology for his silence. This humming had no sort of tune or purpose, and was but a vague musical sputtering. He almost perilled the gravity of the oath they all took to Valmond by this idiosyncrasy. His occupation gave him a lean, arid look; his hair was crisp and straight, shooting out at all points, and it flew to meet his cap as if it were alive. He was a genius after a fashion, too, and at all the feasts and on national holidays he invented some new feature in the entertainments. With an eye for the grotesque, he had formed a company of jovial blades, called Kalathumpians, after the manner of the mimes of old times in his beloved Dauphiny.

"All right, all right," he said, when Lagroin, in the half-lighted blacksmith shop, asked him to swear allegiance and service. "Brigadier, vous avez raison," he added, quoting a well-known song. Then he hummed a little and coughed. "We must have a show"--he hummed again--"we must tickle 'em up a bit--touch 'em where they're silly with a fiddle and fife-raddy dee dee, ra dee, ra dee, ra dee!" Then, to Valmond: "We gave the fools who fought the Little Corporal sour apples in Dauphiny, my dear!"

He followed this extraordinary speech with a plan for making an ingenious coup for Valmond, when his Kalathumpians should parade the streets on the evening of St. John the Baptist's Day.

With hands clasped the new recruits sang:

"When from the war we come,
Allons gai!
Oh, when we ride back home,
If we be spared that day,
Ma luronne lurette,
We'll laugh our scars away,
Ma luronne lure,

We'll lift the latch and stay,
Ma luronne lure."

The huge frame of the blacksmith, his love for his daughter, his simple faith in this new creed of patriotism, his tenderness of heart, joined to his irascible disposition, spasmodic humour, and strong arm, roused in Valmond an immediate liking, as keen, after its kind, as that he had for the Cure; and the avocat. With both of these he had had long talks of late, on everything but purely personal matters. They would have thought it a gross breach of etiquette to question him on that which he avoided. His admiration of them was complete, although he sometimes laughed half sadly, half whimsically, as he thought of their simple faith in him.

At dusk on the eve of St. John the Baptist's Day, after a long conference with Lagroin and Parpon, Valmond went through the village, and came to the smithy to talk with Lajeunesse. Those who recognised him in passing took off their bonnets rouges, some saying, "Good-night, your Highness;" some, "How are you, monseigneur?" some, "God bless your Excellency;" and a batch of bacchanalian river-men, who had been drinking, called him "General," and insisted on embracing him, offering him cognac from their tin flasks.

The appearance among them of old Madame Degardy shifted the good-natured attack. For many a year, winter and summer, she had come and gone in the parish, all rags and tatters, wearing men's kneeboots and cap, her grey hair hanging down in straggling curls, her lower lip thrust out fiercely, her quick eyes wandering to and fro, and her sharp tongue, like Parpon's, clearing a path before her whichever way she turned. On her arm she carried a little basket of cakes and confitures, and these she dreamed she sold, for they were few who bought of Crazy Joan. The stout stick she carried was as compelling as her tongue, so that when the river-men surrounded her in amiable derision, it was used freely and with a heart all kindness: "For the good of their souls," she said, "since the Cure was too mild, Mary in heaven bless him high and low!"

She was the Cure's champion everywhere, and he in turn was tender towards the homeless body, whose history even to him was obscure, save in the few particulars that he had given to Valmond the last time they had met.

In her youth Madame Degardy was pretty and much admired. Her lover had deserted her, and in a fit of mad indignation and despair she had fled from the village, and vanished no one knew where, though it had been declared by a wandering hunter that she had been seen in the far-off hills that march into the south, and that she lived there with a barbarous mountaineer, who had himself long been an outlaw from his kind.

But this had been mere gossip, and after twenty-five years she came back to Pontiac, a half-mad creature, and took up the thread of her life alone; and Parpon and the Cure saw that she suffered nothing in the hard winters.

Valmond left the river-men to the tyranny of her tongue and stick, and came on to where the red light of the forge showed through the smithy

window. As he neared the door, he heard a voice singularly sweet, and another of commoner calibre was joining in the refrain of a song:

"'Oh, traveller, see where the red sparks rise,'
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
But dark is the mist in the traveller's eyes.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
'Oh, traveller, see far down the gorge,
The crimson light from my father's forge.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)

"'Oh, traveller, hear how the anvils ring.'
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
But the traveller heard, ah, never a thing.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
'Oh, traveller, loud do the bellows roar,
And my father waits by the smithy door.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)

"'Oh, traveller, see you thy true love's grace.'
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
And now there is joy in the traveller's face.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)
Oh, wild does he ride through the rain and mire,
To greet his love by the smithy fire.
(Fly away, my heart, fly away!)"

In accompaniment, some one was beating softly on the anvil, and the bellows were blowing rhythmically.

He lingered for a moment, loath to interrupt the song, and then softly opened the upper half of the door, for it was divided horizontally, and leaned over the lower part.

Beside the bellows, her sleeves rolled up, her glowing face cowed in her black hair, comely and strong, stood Elise Malboir, pushing a rod of steel into the sputtering coals. Over the anvil, with a small bar caught in a pair of tongs, hovered Madelinette Lajeunesse, beating, almost tenderly, the red-hot point of the steel. The sound of the iron hammer on the malleable metal was like muffled silver, and the sparks flew out like jocund fireflies. She was making two hooks for her kitchen wall, for she was clever at the forge, and could shoe a horse if she were let to do so. She was but half-turned to Valmond, but he caught the pure outlines of her face and neck, her extreme delicacy of expression, which had a pathetic, subtle refinement, in acute contrast to the quick, abundant health, the warm energy, the half defiant look of Elise. It was a picture of labour and life.

A dozen thoughts ran through Valmond's mind. He was responsible, to an extent, for the happiness of these two young creatures. He had promised to make a songstress of the one, to send her to Paris; had roused in her wild, ambitious hopes of fame and fortune--dreams that, in any case, could be little like the real thing: fanciful visions of conquest and

golden living, where never the breath of her hawthorn and wild violets entered; only sickly perfumes, as from an odalisque's fan, amid the enervating splendour of voluptuous boudoirs--for she had read of these things.

Valmond had, in a vague, graceless sort of way, worked upon the quick emotions of Elise. Every little touch of courtesy had been returned to him in half-shy, half-ardent glances; in flushes, which the kiss he had given her the first day of their meeting had made the signs of an intermittent fever; in modest yet alluring waylayings; in restless nights, in half-tuneful, half-silent days; in a sweet sort of petulance. She had kept in mind everything he had said to her; the playfully emotional pressure of her hand, his eloquent talks with her uncle, the old sergeant's rhapsodies on his greatness; and there was no place in the room where he had sat or stood, which she had not made sacred--she, the mad cap, who had lovers by the dozen. Importuned by the Cure and her mother to marry, she had threatened, if they worried her further, to wed fat Duclosse, the mealman, who had courted her in a ponderous way for at least three years. The fire that corrodes, when it does not make glorious without and within, was in her veins, and when Valmond should call she was ready to come. She could not, at first, see that if he were, in truth, a Napoleon, she was not for him. Seized of that wilful, daring spirit called Love, her sight was bounded by the little field where she strayed.

Elise's arm paused upon the lever of the bellows, when she saw Valmond watching them from the door. He took off his hat to them, as Madelinette turned towards him, the hammer pausing in the stroke.

"Ah, monseigneur!" she said impulsively, and then paused, confused. Elise did not move, but stood looking at him, her eyes all flame, her cheeks going a little pale, and flushing again. With a quick motion she pushed her hair back, and as he stepped inside and closed the door behind him, she blew the bellows, as if to give a brighter light to the place. The fire flared up, but there were corners in deep shadow. Valmond doffed his hat again and said ceremoniously: "Mademoiselle Madelinette, Mademoiselle Elise, pray do not stop your work. Let me sit here and watch you."

Taking from his pocket a cigarette, he came over to the forge and was about to light it with the red steel from the fire, when Elise, snatching up a tiny piece of wood, thrust it in the coals, and, drawing it out, held it towards the cigarette, saying:

"Ah, no, your Excellency--this!"

As Valmond reached to take it from her, he heard a sound, as of a hoarse breathing, and turned quickly; but his outstretched hand touched Elise's fingers, and it involuntarily closed on them, all her impulsive temperament and warm life thrilling through him. The shock of feeling brought his eyes to hers with a sudden burning mastery. For an instant their looks fused and were lost in a passionate affiance. Then, as if pulling himself out of a dream, he released her fingers with a "Pardon--

my child!"

As he did so, a cry ran through the smithy. Madelinette was standing, tense and set with terror, her eyes riveted on something that crouched beside a pile of cart-wheels a few feet away; something with shaggy head, flaring eyes, and a devilish face. The thing raised itself and sprang towards hers with a devouring cry. With desperate swiftness leaping forward, Valmond caught the half man, half beast--it seemed that--by the throat. Madelinette fell fainting against the anvil, and, dazed and trembling, Elise hurried to her.

Valmond was in the grasp of a giant, and, struggle as he might, he could not withstand the powerful arms of his assailant. They came to their knees on the ground, where they clutched and strained for a wild minute,

Valmond desperately fighting to keep the huge bony fingers from his neck. Suddenly the giant's knee touched the red-hot steel that Madelinette had dropped, and with a snarl he flung Valmond back against the anvil, his head striking the iron with a sickening thud. Then, seizing the steel, he raised it to plunge the still glowing point into Valmond's eyes.

Centuries of doom seemed crowded into that instant of time. Valmond caught the giant's wrist with both hands, and with a mighty effort wrenched himself aside. His heart seemed to strain and burst, and just as he felt the end was come, he heard something crash on the murderer's skull, and the great creature fell with a gurgling sound, and lay like a parcel of loose bones across his knees. Valmond raised himself, a strange, dull wonder on him, for as the weapon smote this lifeless creature, he had seen another hurl by and strike the opposite wall. A moment afterwards the dead man was pulled away by Parpon. Trying to rise he felt blood trickling down his neck, and he turned sick and blind. As the world slipped away from him, a soft shoulder caught his head, and out of a vast distance there came to him the wailing cry: "He is dying! my love! my love!"

Peril and horror had brought to Elise's breast the one being in the world for her, the face which was etched like a picture upon her eyes and heart.

Parpon groaned with a strange horror as he dragged the body from Valmond. For a moment he knelt gasping beside the shapeless being, his great hands spasmodically feeling the pulseless breast.

Soon afterwards in the blacksmith's house the two girls nestled in each other's arms, and Valmond, shaken and weak, returned to the smithy.

In the dull glare of the forge fire knelt Parpon, rocking back and forth beside the body. Hearing Valmond, he got to his feet.

"You have killed him," he said, pointing.

"No, no, not I," answered Valmond. "Some one threw a hammer."

"There were two hammers."

"It was Elise?" asked Valmond, with a shudder. "No, not Elise; it was you," said the dwarf, with a strange insistence.

"I tell you no," said Valmond. "It was you, Parpon."

"By God, it is a lie!" cried the dwarf, with a groan. Then he came close to Valmond. "He was--my brother! Do you not see?" he demanded fiercely, his eyes full of misery. "Do you not see that it was you? Yes, yes, it was you."

Stooping, Valmond caught the little man in an embrace. "It was I that killed him, Parpon. It was I, comrade. You saved my life," he added significantly. "The girl threw, but missed," said Parpon. "She does not know but that she struck him."

"She must be told."

"I will tell her that you killed him. Leave it to me--all to me, my grand seigneur."

A half-hour afterwards the avocat, the Cure, and the Little Chemist, had heard the story as the dwarf told it, and Valmond returned to the Louis Quinze a hero. For hours the habitants gathered under his window and cheered him.

Parpon sat long in gloomy silence by his side, but, raising his voice, he began to sing softly a lament for the gross-figured body, lying alone in a shed near the deserted smithy:

"Children, the house is empty,
The house behind the tall hill;
Lonely and still is the empty house.
There is no face in the doorway,
There is no fire in the chimney.
Come and gather beside the gate,
Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills.

"Where has the wild dog vanished?
Where has the swift foot gone?
Where is the hand that found the good fruit,
That made a garret of wholesome herbs?
Where is the voice that awoke the morn,
The tongue that defied the terrible beasts?
Come and listen beside the door,
Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills."

The pathos of the chant almost made his listener shrink, so immediate and searching was it. When the lament ceased, there was a long silence, broken by Valmond.

"He was your brother, Parpon--how? Tell me about it."

The dwarf's eyes looked into the distance.

"It was in the far-off country," he said, "in the hills where the Little Good Folk come. My mother married an outlaw. Ah, he was cruel, and an animal! My brother Gabriel was born--he was a giant, his brain all fumbling and wild. Then I was born, so small, a head as a tub, and long arms like a gorilla. We burrowed in the hills, Gabriel and I. One day my mother, because my father struck her, went mad, left us and came to--" He broke off, pausing an instant. "Then Gabriel struck the man, and he died, and we buried him, and my brother also left me, and I was alone. By and by I travelled to Pontiac. Once Gabriel came down from the hills, and Lajeunesse burnt him with a hot iron, for cutting his bellows in the night, to make himself a bed inside them. To-day he came again to do some terrible thing to the blacksmith or the girl, and you have seen--ah, the poor Gabriel, and I killed him!"

"I killed him," said Valmond--"I, Parpon, my friend."

"My poor fool, my wild dog!" wailed the dwarf mournfully.

"Parpon," asked Valmond suddenly, "where is your mother?"

"It is no matter. She has forgotten--she is safe."

"If she should see him!" said Valmond tentatively, for a sudden thought had come to him that the mother of these misfits of God was Madame Degardy.

Parpon sprang to his-feet. "She shall not see him. Ah, you know! You have guessed?" he cried. "She is all safe with me."

"She shall not see him. She shall not know," repeated the dwarf, his eyes huddling back in his head with anguish.

"Does she not remember you?"

"She does not remember the living, but she would remember the dead. She shall not know," he said again.

Then, seizing Valmond's hand, he kissed it, and, without a word, trotted from the room--a ludicrously pathetic figure.

CHAPTER IX

Now and again the moon showed through the cloudy night, and the air was soft and kind. Parpon left behind him the village street, and, after a half mile or more of travel, came to a spot where a crimson light showed beyond a little hill. He halted a moment, as if to think and listen, then crawled up the bank and looked down. Beside a still smoking lime-

kiln an abandoned fire was burning down into red coals. The little hut of the lime-burner was beyond in a hollow, and behind that again was a lean-to, like a small shed or stable. Hither stole the dwarf, first pausing to listen a moment at the door of the hut.

Leaning into the darkness of the shed, he gave a soft, crooning call. Low growls of dogs came in quick reply. He stepped inside, and spoke to them:

"Good dogs! good dogs! good Musket, Coffee, Filthy, Jo-Jo--steady, steady, idiots!" for the huge brutes were nosing him, throwing themselves against him, and whining gratefully. Feeling the wall, he took down some harness, and, in the dark, put a set on each dog--mere straps for the shoulders, halters, and traces; called to them sharply to be quiet, and, keeping hold of their collars, led them out into the night. He paused to listen again. Presently he drove the dogs across the road, and attached them to a flat vehicle, without wheels or runners, used by Garotte for the drawing of lime and stones. It was not so heavy as many machines of the kind, and at a quick word from the dwarf the dogs darted away. Unseen, a mysterious figure hurried on after them, keeping well in the shadow of the trees fringing the side of the road.

The dwarf drove the dogs down a lonely side lane to the village, and came to the shed where lay the uncomely thing he had called brother. He felt for a spot where there was a loose board, forced it and another with his strong fingers, and crawled in. Reappearing with the dead body, he bore it in his huge arms to the stoneboat: a midget carrying a giant. He covered up the face, and, returning to the shed, placed his coat against the boards to deaden the sound, and hammered them tight again with a stone, after having straightened the grass about. Returning, he found the dogs cowering with fear, for one of them had pushed the cloth off the dead man's face with his nose, and death exercised its weird dominion over them. They crouched together, whining and tugging at the traces. With a persuasive word he started them away.

The pursuing, watchful figure followed at a distance, on up the road, on over the little hills, on into the high hills, the dogs carrying along steadily the grisly load. And once their driver halted them, and sat in the grey gloom and dust beside the dead body.

"Where do you go, dwarf?" he said.

"I go to the Ancient House," he made answer to himself.

"What do you get?"

"I do not go to get; I go to give."

"What do you go to give?"

"I go to leave an empty basket at the door, and the lantern that the Shopkeeper set in the hand of the pedlar."

"Who is the pedlar, hunchback?"

"The pedlar is he that carries the pack on his back."

"What carries he in the pack?"

"He carries what the Shopkeeper gave him--for he had no money and no choice."

"Who is the Shopkeeper, dwarf?"

"The Shopkeeper--the Shopkeeper is the father of dwarfs and angels and children--and fools."

"What does he sell, poor man?"

"He sells harness for men and cattle, and you give your lives for the harness."

"What is this you carry, dwarf?"

"I carry home the harness of a soul."

"Is it worth carrying home?"

"The eyes grow sick at sight of the old harness in the way."

The watching figure, hearing, pitied.

It was Valmond. Excited by Parpon's last words at the hotel, he had followed, and was keen to chase this strange journeying to the end, though suffering from the wound in his head, and shaken by the awful accident of the evening. But, as he said to himself; some things were to be seen but once in the great game, and it was worth while seeing them, even if life were the shorter for it.

On up the heights filed the strange procession until at last it came to Dalgrothe Mountain. On one of the foot-hills stood the Rock of Red Pigeons. This was the dwarf's secret resort, where no one ever disturbed him; for the Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills (of whom it was rumoured, he had come) held revel there, and people did not venture rashly. The land about it, and a hut farther down the hill, belonged to Parpon; a legacy from the father of the young Seigneur.

It was all hills, gorges, rivers, and idle, murmuring pines. Of a morning, mist floated into mist as far as eye could see, blue and grey and amethyst, a glamour of tints and velvety radiance. The great hills waved into each other like a vast violet sea, and, in turn, the tiny earth-waves on each separate hill swelled into the larger harmony. At the foot of a steep precipice was the whirlpool from which Parpon, at great risk, had rescued the father of De la Riviere, and had received this lonely region as his reward. To the dwarf it was his other world, his real home; for here he lived his own life, and it was here he had

brought his ungainly dead, to give it housing.

The dogs drew up the grim cargo to a plateau near the Rock of Red Pigeons, and, gathering sticks, Parpon lit a sweet-smelling fire of cedar. Then he went to the hut, and came back with a spade and a shovel. At the foot of a great pine he began to dig. As the work went on, he broke into a sort of dirge, painfully sweet. Leaning against a rock not far away, Valmond watched the tiny man with the long arms throw up the soft, good-smelling earth, enriched by centuries of dead leaves and flowers. The trees waved and bent and murmured, as though they gossiped with each other over this odd gravedigger. The light of the fire showed across the gorge, touching off the far wall of pines with burnished crimson, and huge flickering shadows looked like elusive spirits, attendant on the lonely obsequies. Now and then a bird, aroused by the flame or the snap of a burning stick, rose from its nest and flew away; and wild-fowl flitted darkly down the pass, like the souls of heroes faring to Walhalla. When an owl hooted, a wolf howled far off, or a loon cried from the water below; the solemn fantasy took on the aspect of the unreal.

Valmond watched like one in a dream, and twice or thrice he turned faint, and drew his cloak about him as if he were cold; for a sickly air, passing by, seemed to fill his lungs with poison.

At last the grave was dug, and, sprinkling its depth with leaves and soft branches of spruce, the dwarf drew the body over, and lowered it slowly, awkwardly, into the grave. Then he covered all but the huge, unlovely face, and, kneeling, peered down at it pitifully.

"Gabriel, Gabriel," he cried, "surely thy soul is better without its harness! I killed thee, and thou didst kill, and those we love die by our own hands. But no, I lie; I did not love thee, thou wert so ugly and wild and cruel. Poor boy! Thou wast a fool, and thou wast a murderer. Thou wouldst have slain my prince, and so I slew thee--I slew thee."

He rocked to and fro in abject sorrow, and cried again: "Hast thou no one in all the world to mourn thee, save him who killed thee? Is there no one to wish thee speed to the Ancient House? Art thou tossed away like an old shoe, and no one to say, The Shoemaker that made thee must see to it if thou wast ill-shapen, and walked crookedly, and did evil things? Ah, is there no one to mourn thee, save him that killed thee?"

He leaned back, and cried out into the high hills like a remorseful, tortured soul.

Valmond, no longer able to watch this grief in silence, stepped quickly forward. The dogs, seeing him, barked, and then were still; and the dwarf looked up as he heard footsteps.

"Another has come to mourn him, Parpon," said Valmond.

A look of bewilderment and joy swam into Parpon's eyes. Then he gave a laugh of singular wildness, his face twitched, tears rushed down his

cheeks, and he threw himself at Valmond's feet, and clasped his knees, crying:

"Ah-ah, my prince, great brother, thou hast come also! Ah, thou didst know the way up the long hill Thou hast come to the burial of a fool. But he had a mother--yes, yes, a mother! All fools have mothers, and they should be buried well. Come, ah, come, and speak softly the Act of Contrition, and I will cover him up."

He went to throw in the earth, but Valmond pushed him aside gently.

"No, no," he said, "this is for me." And he began filling the grave.

When they left the place of burial, the fire was burning low, for they had talked long. At the foot of the hills they looked back. Day was beginning to break over Dalgrothe Mountain.

CHAPTER X

When, next day, in the bright sunlight, the Little Chemist, the Cure, and others, opened the door of the shed, taking off their hats in the presence of the Master Workman, they saw that his seat was empty. The dead Caliban was gone--who should say how, or where? The lock was still on the doors, the walls were intact, there was no window for entrance or escape. He had vanished as weirdly as he came.

All day the people sought the place, viewing with awe and superstition the shed of death, and the spot in the smithy where, it was said, Valmond had killed the giant.

The day following was the feast of St. John the Baptist. Mass was said in the church, all the parish attending; and Valmond was present, with Lagroin in full regimentals.

Plates of blessed bread were passed round at the close of mass, as was the custom on this feast-day; and with a curious feeling that came to him often afterwards, Valmond listened to his General saying solemnly:

"Holy bread, I take thee;
If I die suddenly,
Serve me as a sacrament."

With many eyes watching him curiously, he also ate the bread, repeating the holy words.

All day there were sports and processions, the habitants gay in rosettes and ribbons, flowers and maple leaves, as they idled or filed along the streets, under arches of evergreens, where the Tricolor and Union Jack mingled and fluttered amiably together. Anvils, with powder placed between, were touched off with a bar of red-hot iron, making a vast noise

and drawing applausive crowds to the smithy. On the hill beside the Cure's house was a little old cannon brought from the battle-field of Ticonderoga, and its boisterous salutations were replied to from the Seigneury, by a still more ancient piece of ordnance. Sixty of Valmond's recruits, under Lajeunesse the blacksmith, marched up and down the streets, firing salutes with a happy, casual intrepidity, and setting themselves off before the crowds with a good many airs and nods and simple vanities.

In the early evening the good Cure blessed and lighted the great bonfire before the church; and immediately, at this signal, an answering fire sprang up on a hill at the other side of the village. Then fire on fire glittered and multiplied, till all the village was in a glow. This was a custom set in memory of the old days when fires flashed intelligence, after a fixed code, across the great rivers and lakes, and from hill to hill.

Far up against Dalgrothe Mountain appeared a sumptuous star, mystical and red. Valmond saw it from his window, and knew it to be Parpon's watchfire, by the grave of his brother Gabriel. The chief procession started with the lighting of the bonfires: Singing softly, choristers and acolytes in robes preceded the devout Cure, and pious believers and youths on horseback, with ribbons flying, carried banners and shrines. Marshals kept the lines steady, and four were in constant attendance on a gorgeous carriage, all gilt and carving (the heirloom of the parish), in which reclined the figure of a handsome lad, impersonating John the Baptist, with long golden hair, dressed in rich robes and skins-- a sceptre in his hand, a snowy lamb at his feet. The rude symbolism was softened and toned to an almost poetical refinement, and gave to the harmless revels a touch of Arcady.

After this semi-religious procession, evening brought the march of Garotte's Kalathumpians. They were carried on three long drays, each drawn by four horses, half of them white, half black. They were an outlandish crew of comedians, dressed after no pattern, save the absurd-clowns, satyrs, kings, soldiers, imps, barbarians. Many had hideous false-faces, and a few horribly tall skeletons had heads of pumpkins containing lighted candles. The marshals were pierrots and clowns on long stilts, who towered in a ghostly way above the crowd. They were cheerful, fantastic revellers, singing the maddest and silliest of songs, with singular refrains and repetitions. The last line of one verse was the beginning of another:

"A Saint Malo, beau port de mer,
Trois gros navir' sont arrives.

Trois gros navir' sont arrives
Charges d'avoin', charges de ble."

For an hour and more their fantastic songs delighted the simple folk. They stopped at last in front of the Louis Quinze. The windows of Valmond's chambers were alight, and to one a staff was fastened. Suddenly the Kalathumpians quieted where they stood, for the voice of

their leader, a sort of fat King of Yvetot, cried out:

"See there, my noisy children!" It was the inventive lime-burner who spoke. "What come you here for, my rollicking blades?"

"We are a long way from home; we are looking for our brother, your Majesty," they cried in chorus.

"Ha, ha! What is your brother like, jolly dogs?"

"He has a face of ivory, and eyes like torches, and he carries a silver sword."

"But what the devil is his face like ivory for, my fanfarons?"

"So that he shall not blush for us. He is a grand seigneur," they shouted back.

"Why are his eyes like torches, my ragamuffins?"

"To show us the way home."

Valmond appeared upon the balcony.

"What is it you wish, my children?" he asked. "Brother," said the fantastic leader, "we've lost our way. Will you lead us home again?"

"It is a long travel," he answered, after the fashion of their own symbols. "There are high hills to climb; there may be wild beasts in the way; and storms come down the mountains."

"We have strong hearts, and you have a silver sword, brother."

"I cannot see your faces, to know if you are true, my children," he answered.

Instantly the clothes flew off, masks fell, pumpkins came crashing to the ground, the stilts of the marshals dropped, and thirty men stood upon the drays in crude military order, with muskets in their hands and cockades in their caps. At that moment also, a flag--the Tricolor--fluttered upon the staff at Valmond's window. The roll of a drum came out of the street somewhere, and presently the people fell back before sixty armed men, marching in columns, under Lagroin, while from the opposite direction came Lajeunesse with sixty others, silent all, till they reached the drays and formed round them slowly.

Valmond stood watching intently, and the people were very still, for this seemed like real life, and no burlesque. Some of the soldiery had military clothes, old militia uniforms, or the rebel trappings of '37; others, less fortunate, wore their trousers in long boots, their coats buttoned lightly over their chests, and belted in; and the Napoleonic cockade was in every cap.

"My children," said Valmond at last, "I see that your hearts are strong, and that you have the bodies of true men. We have sworn fealty to each other, and the badge of our love is in your caps. Let us begin our journey home. I will come down among you: I will come down among you, and I will lead you from Pontiac to the sea, gathering comrades as we go; then across the sea, to France; then to Paris and the Tuileries, where an Orleans usurps the place of a Napoleon."

He descended and mounted his waiting horse. At that moment De la Riviere appeared on the balcony, and, stepping forward, said:

"My friends, do you know what you are doing? This is folly. This man--"

He got no further, for Valmond raised his hand to Lagroin, and the drums began to beat. Then he rode down in front of Lajeunesse's men, the others sprang from the drays and fell into place, and soon the little army was marching, four deep, through the village.

This was the official beginning of Valmond's fanciful quest for empire. The people had a phrase, and they had a man; and they saw no further than the hour.

As they filed past the house of Elise Malboir, the girl stood in the glow of a bonfire, beside the oven where Valmond had first seen her. All around her was the wide awe of night, enriched by the sweet perfume of a coming harvest. He doffed his hat to her, then to the Tricolor, which Lagroin had fastened on a tall staff before the house. Elise did not stir, did not courtesy or bow, but stood silent--entranced. She was in a dream. This man, riding at the head of the simple villagers, was part of her vision; and, at the moment, she did not rouse from the ecstasy of reverie where her new-born love had led her.

For Valmond the scene had a moving power. He heard again her voice crying in the smithy: "He is dying! Oh, my love! my love!"

He was now in the heart of a fantastical adventure. Filled with its spirit, he would carry it bravely to the end, enjoying every step in it, comedy or tragedy. Yet all day, since he had eaten the sacred bread, there had been ringing in his ears the words:

"Holy bread, I take thee;
If I die suddenly,
Serve me as a sacrament."

It came home to him, at the instant, what a toss-up it all was. What was he doing? No matter: it was a game, in which nothing was sure--nothing save this girl. She would, he knew, with the abandon of an absorbing passion, throw all things away for him.

Such as Madame Chalice--ah, she was a part of this brave fantasy, this dream of empire, this inspiring play! But Elise Malboir was life itself, absolute, true, abiding. His nature swam gloriously in his daring exploit; he believed in it, he sank himself in it with a joyous

recklessness; it was his victory or his doom. But it was a shake of the dice--had Fate loaded them against him?

He looked up the hill towards the Manor. Life was there in its essence; beauty, talent, the genius of the dreamer, like his own. But it was not for him; dauphin or fool, it was not for him! Madame Chalice was his friendly inquisitor, not his enemy; she endured him for some talent he had shown, for the apparent sincerity of his love for the cause; but that was all. Yet she was ever in this dream of his, and he felt that she would always be; the unattainable, the undeserved, more splendid than his cause itself--the cause for which he would give--what would he give? Time would show.

But Elise Malboir, abundant, true, fine, in the healthy vigour of her nature, with no dream in her heart but love fulfilled--she was no part of his adventure, but of that vital spirit which can bring to the humblest as to the highest the good reality of life.

CHAPTER XI

It was the poignancy of these feelings which, later, drew Valmond to the ashes of the fire in whose glow Elise had stood. The village was quieting down, the excited habitants had scattered to their homes. But in one or two houses there was dancing, and, as he passed, Valmond heard the chansons of the humble games they played--primitive games, primitive chansons:

"In my right hand I hold a rose-bush,
Which will bloom, Manon Ion la!
Which will bloom in the month of May.
Come into our dance, pretty rose-bush,
Come and kiss, Manon Ion la!
Come and kiss whom you love best!"

The ardour, the delight, the careless joy of youth, were in the song and in the dance. These simple folk would marry, beget children, labour hard, obey Mother Church, and yield up the ghost peacefully in the end, after their kind; but now and then there was born among them one not after their kind: even such as Madelinette, with the stirring of talent in her veins, and the visions of the artistic temperament--delight and curse all at once--lifting her out of the life, lonely, and yet sorrowfully happy.

Valmond looked around. How still it was, the home of Elise standing apart in the quiet fields! But involuntarily his eyes were drawn to the hill beyond, where showed a light in a window of the Manor. To-morrow he would go there: he had much to say to Madame Chalice. The moon was lying off above the edge of hills, looking out on the world complacently, like an indulgent janitor scanning the sleepy street from his doorway.

He was abruptly drawn from his reverie by the entrance of Lagroin into the little garden; and he followed the old man through the open doorway. All was dark, but as they stepped within they heard some one move. Presently a match was struck, and Elise came forward with a candle raised level with her dusky head. Lagroin looked at her in indignant astonishment.

"Do you not see who is here, girl?" he demanded. "Your Excellency!" she said confusedly to Valmond, and, bowing, offered him a chair.

"You must pardon her, sire," said the old sergeant. "She has never been taught, and she's a wayward wench."

Valmond waved his hand. "Nonsense, we are friends. You are my General; she is your niece." His eyes followed Elise as she set out for them some cider, a small flask of cognac, and some seed-cakes; luxuries which were served but once a year in this house, as in most homes of Pontiac.

For a long time Valmond and his General talked, devised, planned, schemed, till the old man grew husky and pale. The sight of his senile weariness flashed the irony of the whole wild dream into Valmond's mind. He rose, and, giving his arm, led Lagroin to his bedroom, and bade him good-night. When he returned to the room, it was empty.

He looked around, and, seeing an open door, moved to it quickly. It led into a little stairway.

He remembered then that there was a room which had been, apparently, tacked on, like an after-thought, to the end of the house. Seeing the glimmer of a light beyond, he went up a few steps, and came face to face with Elise, who, candle in hand, was about to descend the stairs again.

For a moment she stood quite still, then placed the candle on the rude little dressing-table, built of drygoods boxes, and draped with fresh muslin. Valmond took in every detail of the chamber at a single glance. It was very simple and neat, with the small wooden bedstead corded with rope, the poor hickory rocking-chair, the flaunting chromo of the Holy Family, the sprig of blessed palm, the shrine of the Virgin, the print skirts hanging on the wall, the stockings lying across a chair, the bits of ribbon on the bed. The quietness, the alluring simplicity, the whole room filled with the rich presence of the girl, sent a flood of colour to Valmond's face, and his heart beat hard. Curiosity only had led him into the room, something more radical held him there.

Elise seemed to read his thoughts, and, taking up her candle, she came on to the doorway. Neither had spoken. As she was about to pass him, he suddenly took her arm. But, glancing towards the window, he noticed that the blind was not down. He turned and blew out the candle in her hand.

"Ah, your Excellency!" she cried in tremulous affright.

"We could have been seen from outside," he explained. She turned and saw the moonlight streaming in at the window, and lying like a silver

coverlet upon the floor. As if with a blind, involuntary instinct for protection, she stepped forward into the moonlight, and stood there motionless. The sight thrilled him, and he moved towards her. The mind of the girl reasserted itself, and she hastened to the door. Again, as she was about to pass him, he put his hand upon her shoulder.

"Elise--Elise!" he said. The voice was persuasive, eloquent, going to every far retreat of emotion in her. There was a sudden riot in his veins, and he took her passionately in his arms, and kissed her on the lips, on the eyes, on the hair, on the neck. At that moment the outer door opened below, and the murmur of voices came to them.

"Oh, monsieur--oh, your Excellency, let me go!" she whispered fearfully. "It is my mother and Duclosse the mealman."

Valmond recognised the fat, wheezy tones of Duclosse--Sergeant Duclosse. He released her, and she caught up the candle.

"What can you do?" she whispered.

"I will wait here. I must not go down," he replied. "It would mean ruin."

Ruin! ruin! Was she face to face with ruin already, she who, two minutes ago, was as safe and happy as a young bird in its nest? He felt instantly that he had made a mistake, had been cruel, though he had not intended it.

"Ruin to me," he said at once. "Duclosse is a stupid fellow: he would not understand; he would desert me; and that would be disastrous at this moment. Go down," he said. "I will wait here, Elise."

Her brows knitted painfully. "Oh, monsieur, I'd rather face death, I believe, than that you should remain here."

But he pushed her gently towards the door, and a moment afterwards he heard her talking to Duclosse and her mother.

He sat down on the couch and listened for a moment. His veins were still glowing from the wild moment just passed. Elise would come back--and then--what? She would be alone with him again in this room, loving him--fearing him. He remembered that once, when a child, he had seen a peasant strike his wife, felling her to the ground; and how afterwards she had clasped him round the neck and kissed him, as he bent over her in merely vulgar fright lest he had killed her. That scene flashed before him.

There came an opposing thought. As Madame Chalice had said, either as prince or barber, he was playing a terrible game. Why shouldn't he get all he could out of it while it lasted--let the world break over him when it must? Why should he stand in an orchard of ripe fruit, and refuse to pick what lay luscious to his hand, what this stupid mealman below would pick, and eat, and yawn over? There was the point. Wouldn't the girl

rather have him, Valmond, at any price, than the priest-blessed love of Duclosse and his kind?

The thought possessed, devoured him for a moment. Then suddenly there again rang in his ears the words which had haunted him all day:

"Holy bread, I take thee;
If I die suddenly,
Serve me as a sacrament."

They passed backwards and forwards in his mind for a little time with no significance. Then they gave birth to another thought. Suppose he stayed; suppose he took advantage of the love of this girl? He looked around the little room, showing so peacefully in the moonlight--the religious symbols, the purity, the cleanliness, the calm poverty. He had known the inside of the boudoirs and the bed-chambers of women of fashion --he had seen them, at least. In them the voluptuous, the indulgent, seemed part of the picture. But he was not a beast, that he could fail to see what this tiny bedroom would be, if he followed his wild will. Some terrible fate might overtake his gay pilgrimage to empire, and leave him lost, abandoned, in a desert of ruin.

Why not give up the adventure, and come to this quiet, and this good peace, so shutting out the stir and violence of the world?

All at once Madame Chalice came into his thoughts, swam in his sight, and he knew that what he felt for this peasant girl was of one side of his nature only. All of him worth the having--was any worth the having? responded to that diffusing charm which brought so many men to the feet of that lady of the Manor, who had lovers by the score: from such as the Cure and the avocat, gentle and noble, and requited, to the young Seigneur, selfish and ulterior, and unrequited.

He got to his feet quietly. No, he would make a decent exit, in triumph or defeat, to honour the woman who was standing his friend. Let them, the British Government at Quebec, proceed against him; he would have only one trouble to meet, one to leave behind. He would not load this girl with shame as well as sorrow. Her love itself was affliction enough to her. This adventure was serious; a bullet might drop him; the law might remove him: so he would leave here at once.

He was about to open the window, when he heard a door shut below, and the thud of heavy steps outside the house. Drawing back, he waited until he heard the foot of Elise upon the stair. She came in without a light, and at first did not see him. He heard her gasp. Stepping forward a little, he said:

"I am here, Elise. Come."

She trembled as she came. "Oh, monsieur--your Excellency!" she whispered; "oh, you cannot go down, for my mother sits ill by the fire. You cannot go out that way."

He took both her hands. "No matter. Poor child, you are trembling! Come."

He drew her towards the couch. She shrank back. "Oh no, monsieur, oh-- I die of shame!"

"There is no need, Elise," he answered gently, and he sat on the edge of the couch, and drew her to his side. "Let us say good-night."

She grew very still, and he felt her move towards him, as she divined his purpose, and knew that this room of hers would have no shadow in it tomorrow, and her soul no unpardonable sin. A warm peace passed through her veins, and she drew nearer still. She did not know that this new ardent confidence came near to wrecking her. For Valmond had an instant's madness, and only saved himself from the tumult in his blood by getting to his feet, with strenuous resolution. Taking both her hands, he kissed her on the cheeks, and said:

"Adieu, Elise. May your sorrow never be more, and my happiness never less. I am going now."

He felt her hand grasp his arm, as if with a desire that he should not leave her. Then she rose quickly, and came with him to the window. Raising the sash, she held it, and he looked out. There seemed to be no one in the road, no one in the yard. So, half turning, he swung himself down by his hands, and dropped to the ground. From the window above a sob came to him, and Elise's face, all tears, showed for an instant in the moonlight.

He did not seek the road directly, but, climbing a fence near by, crossed a hay-field, going unseen, as he thought, to the village.

But a lady, walking in the road with an old gentleman, had seen and recognised him. Her fingers clinched with anger at the sight, and her spirit filled with disgust.

"What are you looking at?" said her companion, who was short-sighted.

"At the tricks moonlight plays. Shadows frighten me sometimes, my dear avocat." She shuddered. "My dear madame!" he said in warm sympathy.

CHAPTER XII

The sun was going down behind the hills, like a drowsy boy to his bed, radiant and weary from his day's sport. The villagers were up at Dalgrothe Mountain, soldiering for Valmond. Every evening, when the haymakers put up their scythes, the mill-wheel stopped turning, and the Angelus ceased, the men marched away into the hills, where the ardent soldier of fortune had pitched his camp.

Tents, muskets, ammunition came out of dark places, as they are ever sure to come when the war-trumpet sounds. All seems peace, but suddenly, at the wild call, the latent barbarian in human nature springs up and is ready; and the cruder the arms, the fiercer the temper that wields.

Recruits now arrived from other parishes, and besides those who came every night to drill, there were others who stayed always in camp. The lime-burner left his kiln, and sojourned with his dogs at Dalgrothe Mountain; the mealman neglected his trade; and Lajeunesse was no longer at his blacksmith shop, save after dark, when the red glow of his forge could be seen till midnight. He was captain of a company in the daytime, forgeron at night.

Valmond, no longer fantastic in dress, speech, or manner, was happy, busy, buoyed up and cast down by turn, troubled, exhilarated. He could not understand these variations of health and mood. He had not felt equably well since the night of Gabriel's burial in the miasmatic air of the mountain. At times he felt a wonderful lightness of head and heart, with entrancing hopes; again a heaviness and an aching, accompanied by a feeling of doom. He fought the depression, and appeared before his men cheerful and alert always. He was neither looking back nor looking forward, but living in his dramatic theme from day to day, and wondering if, after all, this movement, by some joyful, extravagant chance, might not carry him on even to the chambers of the Tuileries.

From the first day that he had gathered these peasants about him, had convinced, almost against their will, the wise men of the village, this fanciful exploit had been growing a deep reality to him. He had convinced himself; he felt that he could, in a larger sphere, gather thousands about him where he now gathered scores--with a good cause. Well, was his cause not good, he asked himself?

There were others to whom this growing reality was painful. The young Seigneur was serious enough about it, and more than once, irritated and perturbed, he sought Madame Chalice; but she gave him no encouragement, remarking coldly that Monsieur Valmond probably knew very well what he was doing, and was weighing all consequences.

She had become interested in a passing drama, and De la Riviere's attentions produced no impression on her, and gave her no pleasure. They were, however, not obtrusive. She had seen much of him two years before; he had been a good friend of her husband. She was amused at his attentions then; she had little to occupy her, and she felt herself superior to any man's emotions: not such as this young Seigneur could win her away from her passive but certain fealty. She had played with fire, from the very spirit of adventure in her, but she had not been burnt.

"You say he is an impostor, dear monsieur," she said languidly: "do pray exert yourself, and prove him one. What is your evidence?"

She leaned back in the very chair where she had sat looking at Valmond a few weeks before, her fingers idly smoothing out the folds of her dress.

"Oh, the thing is impossible," he answered, blowing the smoke of a cigarette; "we've had no real proof of his birth, and life--and so on."

"But there are relics--and so on!" she said suggestively, and she picked up the miniature of the Emperor.

"Owning a skeleton doesn't make it your ancestor," he replied.

He laughed, for he was pleased at his own cleverness, and he also wished to remain good-tempered.

"I am so glad to see you at last take the true attitude towards this," she responded brightly. "If it's a comedy, enjoy it. If it's a tragedy"--she drew herself up with a little shudder, for she was thinking of that figure dropping from Elise's window--"you cannot stop it. Tragedy is inevitable; but comedy is within the gift and governance of mortals."

For a moment again she was lost in the thought of Elise, of Valmond's vulgarity and commonness; and he had dared to speak words of love almost to her! She flushed to the hair, as she had done fifty times since she had seen him that moonlit night. Ah, she had thought him the dreamer, the enthusiast--maybe, in kind, credulous moments, the great man he claimed to be; and he had only been the sensualist after all! That he did not love Elise, she knew well enough: he had been coldblooded; in this, at least, he was Napoleonic.

She had not spoken with him since that night; but she had had two long letters superscribed: "In Camp, Headquarters, Dalgrothe Mountain," and these had breathed only patriotism, the love of a cause, the warmth of a strong, virile temperament, almost a poetical abandon of unnamed ambitions and achievements. She had read the letters again and again, for she had found it hard to reconcile them with her later knowledge of this man. He wrote to her as to an ally, frankly, warmly. She felt the genuine thing in him somewhere; and, in spite of all, she felt a sort of kinship for him. Yet that scene--that scene! She flushed with anger again, and, in spite of her smiling lips, the young Seigneur saw the flush, and wondered.

"The thing must end soon," he said, as he rose to go, for a messenger had come for him. "He is injuring the peace, the trade, and the life of the parishes; he is gathering men and arms, drilling, exploiting military designs in one country, to proceed against another. England is at peace with France!"

"An international matter, this?" she asked sarcastically.

"Yes. The Government at Quebec is English; we are French and he is French; and, I repeat, this thing is serious."

She smiled. "I am an American. I have no responsibility."

"They might arrest you for aiding and abetting if--"

"If what, dear and cheerful friend?"

"If I did not make it right for you." He smiled, approving his own kindness.

She touched his arm, and said with ironical sweetness: "How you relieve my mind!" Then with delicate insinuation: "I have a lot of old muskets here, at least two hundred pounds of powder, and plenty of provisions, and I will send them to--Valmond Napoleon."

He instantly became grave. "I warn you--"

She interrupted him. "Nonsense! You warn me!" She laughed mockingly. "I warn you, dear Seigneur, that you will be more sorry than satisfied, if you meddle in this matter."

"You are going to send those things to him?" he asked anxiously.

"Certainly--and food every day." And she kept her word.

De la Riviere, as he went down the hill, thought with irritation of how ill things were going with him and Madame Chalice--so different from two years ago, when their friendship had first begun. He had remembered her with a singular persistency; he had looked forward to her coming back; and when she came, his heart had fluttered like a schoolboy's. But things had changed. Clearly she was interested in this impostor. Was it the man himself or the adventure? He did not know. But the adventure was the man--and who could tell? Once he thought he had detected some warmth for himself in her eye, in the clasp of her hand; there was nothing of that sort now. A black, ungentlemanly spirit seized him.

It possessed him most strongly at the moment he was passing the home of Elise Malboir. The girl was standing by the gate, looking down towards the village. Her brow was a little heavy, so that it gave her eyes at all times a deep look, but now De la Riviere saw that they were brooding as well. There was sadness in the poise of the head. He did not take off his hat to her.

"Oh, grand to the war he goes,
O gai, rive le roi!"

he said teasingly. He thought she might have a lover among the recruits at Dalgrothe Mountain.

She turned to him, startled, for she thought he meant Valmond. She did not speak, but became very still and pale.

"Better tie him up with a garter, Elise, and get the old uncle back to Ville Bambord. Trouble's coming. The game'll soon be up."

"What trouble?" she asked.

"Battle, murder, and sudden death," he answered, and passed on with a sour laugh.

She slowly repeated his words, looked towards the Manor House, with a strange expression, then went up to her little bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, where she had sat with Valmond. Every word, every incident, of that night came back to her; and her heart filled up with worship. It flowed over into her eyes and fell upon her clasped hands. If trouble did come to him?--He had given her a new world, he should have her life and all else.

A half-hour later, De la Riviere came rapping at the Cure's door. The sun was almost gone, the smell of the hay-fields floated over the village, and all was quiet in the streets. Women gossiped in their doorways, but there was no stir anywhere. With the young Seigneur was the member of the Legislature for the county. His mood was different from that of his previous visit to Pontiac; for he had been told that whether the cavalier adventurer was or was not a Napoleon, this campaign was illegal. He had made no move. Being a member of the Legislature, he naturally shirked responsibility, and he had come to see the young Seigneur, who was justice of the peace, and practically mayor of the county. They found the Cure, the avocat, and Medallion, talking together amiably.

The three were greatly distressed by the representations of the member and De la Riviere. The Cure turned to Monsieur Garon, the avocat, inquiringly.

"The law--the law of the case is clear," said the avocat helplessly. "If the peace is disturbed, if there is conspiracy to injure a country not at war with our own, if arms are borne with menace, if His Excellency--"

"His Excellency--my faith!--You're an ass, Garon!" cried the young Seigneur, with an angry sneer.

For once in his life the avocat bridled up. He got to his feet, and stood silent an instant, raising himself up and down on his tiptoes, his lips compressed, his small body suddenly contracting to a firmness, and grown to a height, his eyelids working quickly. To the end of his life the Cure remembered and talked of the moment when the avocat gave battle. To him it was superb--he never could have done it himself.

"I repeat, His Excellency, Monsieur De la Riviere. My information is greater than yours, both by accident and through knowledge. I accept him as a Napoleon, and as a Frenchman I have no cause to blush for my homage or my faith, or for His Excellency. He is a man of loving disposition, of great knowledge, of power to win men, of deep ideas, of large courage. Monsieur, I cannot forget the tragedy he stayed at the smithy, with risk of his own life. I cannot forget--"

The Cure, anticipating, nodded at him encouragingly. Probably the avocat intended to say something quite different, but the look in the Cure's

eyes prompted him, and he continued:

"I cannot forget that he has given to the poor, and liberally to the Church, and has promised benefits to the deserving--ah, no, no, my dear Seigneur!"

He had delivered his speech in a quaint, quick way, as though addressing a jury, and when he had finished, he sat down again, and nodded his head, and tapped a foot on the floor; and the Cure did the same, looking inquiringly at De la Riviere.

This was the first time there had been trouble in the little coterie. They had never differed painfully before. Tall Medallion longed to say something, but he waited for the Cure to speak.

"What is your mind, Monsieur le Cure?" asked De la Riviere testily.

"My dear friend, Monsieur Garon, has answered for us both," replied the Cure quietly.

"Do you mean to say that you will not act with me to stop this thing," he urged--"not even for the safety of the people?"

The reply was calm and resolute:

"My people shall have my prayers and my life, when needed, but I do not feel called upon to act for the State. I have the honour to be a friend of His Excellency."

"By Heaven, the State shall act!" cried De la Riviere, fierce with rancour. "I shall go to this Valmond to-night, with my friend the member here. I shall warn him, and call upon the people to disperse. If he doesn't listen, let him beware! I seem to stand alone in the care of Pontiac!"

The avocat turned to his desk. "No, no; I will write you a legal opinion," he said, with professional honesty. "You shall have my legal help; but for the rest, I am at one with my dear Cure."

"Well, Medallion, you too?" asked De la Riviere. "I'll go with you to the camp," answered the auctioneer. "Fair play is all I care for. Pontiac will come out of this all right. Come along."

But the avocat kept them till he had written his legal opinion and had handed it courteously to the young Seigneur. They were all silent. There had been a discourtesy, and it lay like a cloud on the coterie. De la Riviere opened the door to go out, after bowing to the Cure and the avocat, who stood up with mannered politeness; but presently he turned, came back, was about to speak, when, catching sight of a miniature of Valmond on the avocat's desk, before which was set a bunch of violets, he wheeled and left the room without a word.

The moon had not yet risen, but stars were shining, when the young

Seigneur and the member came to Dalgrothe Mountain. On one side of the Rock of Red Pigeons was a precipice and wild water; on the other was a deep valley like a cup, and in the centre of this was a sort of plateau or gentle slope. Dalgrothe Mountain towered above. Upon this plateau Valmond had pitched his tents. There was water, there was good air, and for purposes of drill--or defence--it was excellent. The approaches were patrolled, so that no outside stragglers could reach either the Rock of Red Pigeons or the valley, or see what was going on below, without permission. Lagroin was everywhere, drilling, commanding, browbeating his recruits one minute, and praising them the next. Lajeunesse, Garotte, and Muroc were invaluable, each after his kind. Duclosse the mealman was sutler.

The young Seigneur and his companions were not challenged, and they passed on up to the Rock of Red Pigeons. Looking down, they had a perfect view of the encampment. The tents had come from lumber-camps, from river-driving gangs, and from private stores; there was some regular uniform, flags were flying everywhere, many fires were burning, the voice of Lagroin in command came up the valley loudly, and Valmond watched the drill and a march past. The fires lit up the sides of the valley and glorified the mountains beyond. In this inspiring air it was impossible to feel an accent of disaster or to hear the stealthy footfall of ruin.

The three journeyed down into the valley, then up onto the plateau, where they were challenged, allowed to pass, and came to where Valmond sat upon his horse. At sight of them, with a suspicion of the truth, he ordered Lagroin to march the men down the long plateau. They made a good figure filing past the three visitors, as the young Seigneur admitted.

Valmond got from his horse, and waited for them. He looked weary, and there were dark circles round his eyes, as though he had had an illness; but he stood erect and quiet. His uniform was that of a general of the Empire. It was rather dingy, yet it was of rich material, and he wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour on his breast. His paleness was not of fear, for when his eyes met Monsieur De la Riviere's, there was in them waiting, inquiry--nothing more. He greeted them all politely, and Medallion warmly, shaking his hand twice; for he knew well that the gaunt auctioneer had only kindness in his heart; and they had exchanged humorous stories more than once--a friendly bond.

He motioned towards his tent near by, but the young Seigneur declined. Valmond looked round, and ordered away a listening soldier.

"It is business and imperative," said De la Riviere. Valmond bowed. "Isn't it time this burlesque was ended?" continued the challenger, waving a hand towards the encampment.

"My presence here is my reply," answered Valmond. "But how does it concern monsieur?"

"All that concerns Pontiac concerns me."

"And me; I am as good a citizen as you."

"You are troubling our people. This is illegal--this bearing arms, these purposes of yours. It is mere filibustering, and you are an--"

Valmond waved his hand, as if to stop the word. "I am Valmond Napoleon, monsieur."

"If you do not promise to forego this, I will arrest you," said De la Riviere sharply.

"You?" Valmond smiled ironically.

"I am a justice of the peace. I have the power."

"I have the power to prevent arrest, and I will prevent it, monsieur. You alone of all this parish, I believe of all this province, turn a sour face, a sour heart, to me. I regret it, but I do not fear it."

"I will have you in custody, or there is no law in Quebec," was the acrid set-out.

Valmond's face was a feverish red now, and he made an impatient gesture. Both men had bitter hearts, for both knew well that the touchstone of this malice was Madame Chalice. Hatred looked out of their eyes. It was, each knew, a fight to the dark end.

"There is not law enough to justify you, monsieur," answered Valmond quickly.

"Be persuaded, monsieur," urged the member to Valmond, with a persuasive, smirking gesture.

"All this country could not persuade me; only France can do that; and first I shall persuade France," he answered, speaking to his old cue stoutly.

"Mummer!" broke out De la Riviere. "By God, I will arrest you now!"

He stepped forward, putting his hand in his breast, as if to draw a weapon, though, in truth, it was a summons.

Like lightning the dwarf shot in between, and a sword flashed up at De la Riviere's breast.

"I saved your father's life, but I will take yours, if you step farther, dear Seigneur," he said coolly.

Valmond had not stirred, but his face was pale again.

"That will do, Parpon," he said quietly. "Monsieur had better go," he added to De la Riviere, "or even his beloved law may not save him!"

"I will put an end to this," cried the other, bursting with anger.

"Come, gentlemen," he said to his companions, and turned away.

Medallion paused, then came to Valmond and said: "Your Excellency, if ever you need me, let me know. I'd do much to prove myself no enemy."

Valmond gave him his hand courteously, bowed, and, beckoning a soldier to take his horse, walked towards his tent. He swayed slightly as he went, then a trembling seized him. He staggered as he entered the door of the tent, and Parpon, seeing, ran forward and caught him in his arms. The little man laid him down, felt his pulse, his heart, saw a little black stain on his lips, and cried out in a great fear:

"My God! The black fever! Ah, my Napoleon!"

Valmond lay in a burning stupor; and word went abroad that he might die; but Parpon insisted that he would be well presently, and at first would let no one but the Little Chemist and the Cure come in or near the tent.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Her sight was bounded by the little field where she strayed
I was never good at catechism
The blind tyranny of the just
Visions of the artistic temperament--delight and curse

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK VALMOND TO PONTIAC, V2, BY PARKER ***

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