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Author: Gilbert Parker

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THE MONEY MASTER

By Gilbert Parker

EPOCH THE FIFTH

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER XXII

BELLS OF MEMORY

However far Jean Jacques went, however long the day since leaving the Manor Cartier, he could not escape the signals from his past. He heard more than once the bells of memory ringing at the touch of the invisible hand of Destiny which accepts no philosophy save its own. At Montreal, for one hallowed instant, he had regained his lost Carmen, but he had turned from her grave--the only mourners being himself, Mme. Glozel and Mme. Popincourt, together with a barber who had coiffed her wonderful hair once a week--with a strange burning at his heart. That iceberg which most mourners carry in their breasts was not his, as he walked down the mountainside from Carmen's grave. Behind him trotted Mme. Glozel and Mme. Popincourt, like little magpies, attendants on this eagle of sorrow whose life-love had been laid to rest, her heart-troubles over. Passion or ennui would no more vex her.

She had had a soul, had Carmen Dolores, though she had never known it till her days closed in on her, and from the dusk she looked out of the casements of life to such a glowing as Jean Jacques had seen when his burning mill beatified the evening sky. She had known passion and vivid life in the days when she went hand-in-hand with Carvillho Gonzales through the gardens of Granada; she had known the smothering home-sickness which does not alone mean being sick for a distant home, but a sickness of the home that is; and she had known what George Masson gave her for one thrilling hour, and then--then the man who left her in her death-year, taking not only the last thread of hope which held her to life. This vulture had taken also little things dear to her daily life, such as the ring Carvillho Gonzales had given her long ago in Cadiz, also another ring, a gift of Jean Jacques, and things less valuable to her, such as money, for which she knew surely she would have no long use.

As she lay waiting for the day when she must go from the garish scene, she unconsciously took stock of life in her own way. There intruded on

her sight the stages of the theatres where she had played and danced, and she heard again the music of the paloma and those other Spanish airs which had made the world dance under her girl's feet long ago. At first she kept seeing the faces of thousands looking up at her from the stalls, down at her from the gallery, over at her from the boxes; and the hot breath of that excitement smote her face with a drunken odour that sent her mad. Then, alas! somehow, as disease took hold of her, there were the colder lights, the colder breath from the few who applauded so little. And always the man who had left her in her day of direst need; who had had the last warm fires of her life, the last brief outrush of her soul, eager as it was for a joy which would prove she had not lost all when she fled from the Manor Cartier--a joy which would make her forget!

What she really did feel in this last adventure of passion only made her remember the more when she was alone now, her life at the Manor Cartier. She was wont to wake up suddenly in the morning--the very early morning --with the imagined sound of the gold Cock of Beaugard crowing in her ears. Memory, memory, memory--yet never a word, and never a hearsay of what had happened at the Manor Cartier since she had left it! Then there came a time when she longed intensely to see Jean Jacques before she died, though she could not bring herself to send word to him. She dreaded what the answer might be-not Jean Jacques' answer, but the answer of Life. Jean Jacques and her child, her Zoe--more his than hers in years gone by--one or both might be dead! She dared not write, but she cherished a desire long denied. Then one day she saw everything in her life more clearly than she had ever done. She found an old book of French verse, once belonging to Mme. Popincourt's husband, who had been a professor. Some lines therein opened up a chamber of her being never before unlocked. At first only the feeling of the thing came, then slowly the spiritual meaning possessed her. She learnt it by heart and let it sing to her as she lay half-sleeping and half-waking, half-living and half-dying:

"There is a World; men compass it through tears,
Dare doom for joy of it; it called me o'er the foam;
I found it down the track of sundering years,
Beyond the long island where the sea steals home.

"A land that triumphs over shame and pain,
Penitence and passion and the parting breath,
Over the former and the latter rain,
The birth-morn fire and the frost of death.

"From its safe shores the white boats ride away,
Salving the wreckage of the portless ships
The light desires of the amorous day,
The wayward, wanton wastage of the lips.

"Star-mist and music and the pensive moon
These when I harboured at that perfumed shore;
And then, how soon! the radiance of noon,
And faces of dear children at the door.

"Land of the Greater Love--men call it this;
No light-o'-love sets here an ambuscade;
No tender torture of the secret kiss
Makes sick the spirit and the soul afraid.

"Bright bowers and the anthems of the free,
The lovers absolute--ah, hear the call!
Beyond the long island and the sheltering sea,
That World I found which holds my world in thrall.

"There is a World; men compass it through tears,
Dare doom for joy of it; it called me o'er the foam;
I found it down the track of sundering years,
Beyond the long island where the sea steals home."

At last the inner thought of it got into her heart, and then it was in reply to Mme. Glozel, who asked her where her home was, she said: "In Heaven, but I did not know it!" And thus it was, too, that at the very last, when Jean Jacques followed the singing bird into her death-chamber, she cried out, "Ah, my beautiful Jean Jacques!"

And because Jean Jacques knew that, at the last, she had been his, soul and body, he went down from the mountain-side, the two black magpies fluttering mournfully and yet hopefully behind him, with more warmth at his heart than he had known for years. It never occurred to him that the two elderly magpies would jointly or severally have given the rest of their lives and their scant fortunes to have him with them either as husband, or as one who honourably hires a home at so much a day.

Though Jean Jacques did not know this last fact, when he fared forth again he left behind his canary with Mme. Glozel; also all Carmen's clothes, except the dress she died in, he gave to Mme. Popincourt, on condition that she did not wear them till he had gone. The dress in which Carmen died he wrapped up carefully, with her few jewels and her wedding-ring, and gave the parcel to Mme. Glozel to care for till he should send for it or come again.

"The bird--take him on my birthday to sing at her grave," he said to Mme. Glozel just before he went West. "It is in summer, my birthday, and you shall hear how he will sing there," he added in a low voice at the very door. Then he took out a ten-dollar bill, and would have given it to her to do this thing for him; but she would have none of his money. She only wiped her eyes and deplored his going, and said that if ever he wanted a home, and she was alive, he would know where to find it. It sounded and looked sentimental, yet Jean Jacques was never less sentimental in a very sentimental life. This particular morning he was very quiet and grave, and not in the least agitated; he spoke like one from a friendly, sun-bright distance to Mme. Glozel, and also to Mme. Popincourt as he passed her at the door of her house.

Jean Jacques had no elation as he took the Western trail; there was not

much hope in his voice; but there was purpose and there was a little stream of peace flowing through his being--and also, mark, a stream of anger tumbling over rough places. He had read two letters addressed to Carmen by the man--Hugo Stolphe--who had left her to her fate; and there was a grim devouring thing in him which would break loose, if ever the man crossed his path. He would not go hunting him, but if he passed him or met him on the way--! Still he would go hunting--to find his Carmencita, his little Carmen, his Zoe whom he had unwittingly, God knew! driven forth into the far world of the millions of acres--a wide, wide hunting-ground in good sooth.

So he left his beloved province where he no longer had a home, and though no letters came to him from St. Saviour's, from Vilray or the Manor Cartier, yet he heard the bells of memory when the Hand Invisible arrested his footsteps. One day these bells rang so loud that he would have heard them were he sunk in the world's deepest well of shame; but, as it was, he now marched on hills far higher than the passes through the mountains which his patchwork philosophy had ever provided.

It was in the town of Shilah on the Watloon River that the bells boomed out--not because he had encountered one he had ever known far down by the Beau Cheval, or in his glorious province, not because he had found his Zoe, but because a man, the man--not George Masson, but the other--met him in the way.

Shilah was a place to which, almost unconsciously, he had deviated his course, because once Virginie Poucette had read him a letter from there. That was in the office of the little Clerk of the Court at Vilray. The letter was from Virginie's sister at Shilah, and told him that Zoe and her husband had gone away into farther fields of homelessness. Thus it was that Shilah ever seemed to him, as he worked West, a goal in his quest--not the last goal perhaps, but a goal.

He had been far past it by another route, up, up and out into the more scattered settlements, and now at last he had come to it again, having completed a kind of circle. As he entered it, the past crowded on to him with a hundred pictures. Shilah--it was where Virginie Poucette's sister lived; and Virginie had been a part of the great revelation of his life at St. Saviour's.

As he was walking by the riverside at Shilah, a woman spoke to him, touching his arm as she did so. He was in a deep dream as she spoke, but there certainly was a look in her face that reminded him of someone belonging to the old life. For an instant he could not remember. For a moment he did not even realize that he was at Shilah. His meditation had almost been a trance, and it took him time to adjust himself to the knowledge of the conscious mind. His subconsciousness was very powerfully alive in these days. There was not the same ceaselessly active eye, nor the vibration of the impatient body which belonged to the money-master and miller of the Manor Cartier. Yet the eye had more depth and force, and the body was more powerful and vigorous than it had ever been. The long tramping, the everlasting trail on false scents, the mental battling with troubles past and present, had given a fortitude and

vigour to the body beyond what it had ever known. In spite of his homelessness and pilgrim equipment he looked as though he had a home--far off. The eyes did not smile; but the lips showed the goodness of his heart--and its hardness too. Hardness had never been there in the old days. It was, however, the hardness of resentment, and not of cruelty. It was not his wife's or his daughter's flight that he resented, nor yet the loss of all he had, nor the injury done him by Sebastian Dolores. No, his resentment was against one he had never seen, but was now soon to see. As his mind came back from the far places where it had been, and his eyes returned to the concrete world, he saw what the woman recalled to him. It was--yes, it was Virginie Poucette--the kind and beautiful Virginie--for her goodness had made him remember her as beautiful, though indeed she was but comely, like this woman who stayed him as he walked by the river.

"You are M'sieu' Jean Jacques Barbille?" she said questioningly.

"How did you know?" he asked. . . . "Is Virginie Poucette here?"

"Ah, you knew me from her?" she asked.

"There was something about her--and you have it also--and the look in the eyes, and then the lips!" he replied.

Certainly they were quite wonderful, luxurious lips, and so shapely too --like those of Virginie.

"But how did you know I was Jean Jacques Barbille?" he repeated.

"Well, then it is quite easy," she replied with a laugh almost like a giggle, for she was quite as simple and primitive as her sister. "There is a photographer at Vilray, and Virginie got one of your pictures there, and sent, it to me. 'He may come your way,' said Virginie to me, 'and if he does, do not forget that he is my friend.'"

"That she is my friend," corrected Jean Jacques. "And what a friend--merci, what a friend!" Suddenly he caught the woman's arm. "You once wrote to your sister about my Zoe, my daughter, that married and ran away--"

"That ran away and got married," she interrupted.

"Is there any more news--tell me, do you know-?"

But Virginie's sister shook her head. "Only once since I wrote Virginie have I heard, and then the two poor children--but how helpless they were, clinging to each other so! Well, then, once I heard from Faragay, but that was much more than a year ago. Nothing since, and they were going on--on to Fort Providence to spend the winter--for his health--his lungs."

"What to do--on what to live?" moaned Jean Jacques.

"His grandmother sent him a thousand dollars, so your Madame Zoe wrote me."

Jean Jacques raised a hand with a gesture of emotion. "Ah, the blessed woman! May there be no purgatory for her, but Heaven at once and always!"

"Come home with me--where are your things?" she asked.

"I have only a knapsack," he replied. "It is not far from here. But I cannot stay with you. I have no claim. No, I will not, for--"

"As to that, we keep a tavern," she returned. "You can come the same as the rest of the world. The company is mixed, but there it is. You needn't eat off the same plate, as they say in Quebec."

Quebec! He looked at her with the face of one who saw a vision. How like Virginie Poucette--the brave, generous Virginie--how like she was!

In silence now he went with her, and seeing his mood she did not talk to him. People stared as they walked along, for his dress was curious and his head was bare, and his hair like the coat of a young lion. Besides, this woman was, in her way, as brave and as generous as Virginie Poucette. In the very doorway of the tavern by the river a man jostled them. He did not apologize. He only leered. It made his foreign-looking, coarsely handsome face detestable.

"Pig!" exclaimed Virginie Poucette's sister. "That's a man--well, look out! There's trouble brewing for him. If he only knew! If suspicion comes out right and it's proved--well, there, he'll jostle the door-jamb of a jail."

Jean Jacques stared after the man, and somehow every nerve in his body became angry. He had all at once a sense of hatred. He shook the shoulder against which the man had collided. He remembered the leer on the insolent, handsome face.

"I'd like to see him thrown into the river," said Virginie Poucette's sister. "We have a nice girl here--come from Ireland--as good as can be. Well, last night--but there, she oughtn't to have let him speak to her. 'A kiss is nothing,' he said. Well, if he kissed me I would kill him--if I didn't vomit myself to death first. He's a mongrel--a South American mongrel with nigger blood."

Jean Jacques kept looking after the man. "Why don't you turn him out?" he asked sharply.

"He's going away to-morrow anyhow," she replied. "Besides, the girl, she's so ashamed--and she doesn't want anyone to know. 'Who'd want to kiss me after him' she said, and so he stays till to-morrow. He's not in the tavern itself, but in the little annex next door-there, where he's going now. He's only had his meals here, though the annex belongs to us as well. He's alone there on his dung-hill."

She brought Jean Jacques into a room that overlooked the river--which, indeed, hung on its very brink. From the steps at its river-door, a little ferry-boat took people to the other side of the Watloon, and very near--just a few hand-breadths away--was the annex where was the man who had jostled Jean Jacques.

CHAPTER XXIII

JEAN JACQUES HAS WORK TO DO

A single lighted lamp, turned low, was suspended from the ceiling of the raftered room, and through the open doorway which gave on to a little wooden piazza with a slight railing and small, shaky gate came the swish of the Watloon River. No moon was visible, but the stars were radiant and alive--trembling with life. There was something soothing, something endlessly soothing in the sound of the river. It suggested the ceaseless movement of life to the final fulness thereof.

So still was the room that it might have seemed to be without life, were it not for a faint sound of breathing. The bed, however, was empty, and no chair was occupied; but on a settle in a corner beside an unused fireplace sat a man, now with hands clasped between his knees, again with arms folded across his breast; but with his head always in a listening attitude. The whole figure suggested suspense, vigilance and preparedness. The man had taken off his boots and stockings, and his bare feet seemed to grip the floor; also the sleeves of his jacket were rolled up a little. It was not a figure you would wish to see in your room at midnight unasked. Once or twice he sighed heavily, as he listened to the river slishing past and looked out to the sparkle of the skies. It was as though the infinite had drawn near to the man, or else that the man had drawn near to the infinite. Now and again he brought his fists down on his knees with a savage, though noiseless, force. The peace of the river and the night could not contend successfully against a dark spirit working in him. When, during his vigil, he shook his shaggy head and his lips opened on his set teeth, he seemed like one who would take toll at a gateway of forbidden things.

He started to his feet at last, hearing footsteps outside upon the stairs. Then he settled back again, drawing near to the chimney-wall, so that he should not be easily seen by anyone entering. Presently there was the click of a latch, then the door opened and shut, and cigar-smoke invaded the room. An instant later a hand went up to the suspended oil-lamp and twisted the wick into brighter flame. As it did so, there was a slight noise, then the click of a lock. Turning sharply, the man under the lamp saw at the door the man who had been sitting in the corner. The man had a key in his hand. Exit now could only be had through the door opening on to the river.

"Who are you? What the hell do you want here?" asked the fellow under

the lamp, his swarthy face drawn with fear and yet frowning with anger.

"Me--I am Jean Jacques Barbille," said the other in French, putting the key of the door in his pocket. The other replied in French, with a Spanish-English accent. "Barbille--Carmen's husband! Well, who would have thought--!"

He ended with a laugh not pleasant to hear, for it was coarse with sardonic mirth; yet it had also an unreasonable apprehension; for why should he fear the husband of the woman who had done that husband such an injury!

"She treated you pretty bad, didn't she--not much heart, had Carmen!" he added.

"Sit down. I want to talk to you," said Jean Jacques, motioning to two chairs by a table at the side of the room. This table was in the middle of the room when the man under the lamp-Hugo Stolphe was his name--had left it last. Why had the table been moved?

"Why should I sit down, and what are you doing here?--I want to know that," Stolphe demanded. Jean Jacques' hands were opening and shutting. "Because I want to talk to you. If you don't sit down, I'll give you no chance at all. . . . Sit down!" Jean Jacques was smaller than Stolphe, but he was all whipcord and leather; the other was sleek and soft, but powerful too; and he had one of those savage natures which go blind with hatred, and which fight like beasts. He glanced swiftly round the room.

"There is no weapon here," said Jean Jacques, nodding. "I have put everything away--so you could not hurt me if you wanted. . . . Sit down!"

To gain time Stolphe sat down, for he had a fear that Jean Jacques was armed, and might be a madman armed--there were his feet bare on the brown painted boards. They looked so strange, so uncanny. He surely must be a madman if he wanted to do harm to Hugo Stolphe; for Hugo Stolphe had only "kept" the woman who had left her husband, not because of himself, but because of another man altogether--one George Masson. Had not Carmen herself told him that before she and he lived together? What grudge could Carmen's husband have against Hugo Stolphe?

Jean Jacques sat down also, and, leaning on the table said: "Once I was a fool and let the other man escape-George Masson it was. Because of what he did, my wife left me."

His voice became husky, but he shook his throat, as it were, cleared it, and went on. "I won't let you go. I was going to kill George Masson--I had him like that!" He opened and shut his hand with a gesture of fierce possession. "But I did not kill him. I let him go. He was so clever--cleverer than you will know how to be. She said to me--my wife said to me, when she thought I had killed him, 'Why did you not fight him? Any man would have fought him.' That was her view. She was right--not to

kill without fighting. That is why I did not kill you at once when I knew."

"When you knew what?" Stolphe was staring at the madman.

"When I knew you were you. First I saw that ring--that ring on your hand. It was my wife's. I gave it to her the first New Year after we married. I saw it on your hand when you were drinking at the bar next door. Then I asked them your name. I knew it. I had read your letters to my wife--"

"Your wife once on a time!"

Jean Jacques' eyes swam red. "My wife always and always--and at the last there in my arms." Stolphe temporized. "I never knew you. She did not leave you because of me. She came to me because--because I was there for her to come to, and you weren't there. Why do you want to do me any harm?" He still must be careful, for undoubtedly the man was mad--his eyes were too bright.

"You were the death of her," answered Jean Jacques, leaning forward. "She was most ill-ah, who would not have been sorry for her! She was poor. She had been to you--but to live with a woman day by day, but to be by her side when the days are done, and then one morning to say, 'Au revoir till supper' and then go and never come back, and to take money and rings that belonged to her! . . . That was her death--that was the end of Carmen Barbille; and it was your fault."

"You would do me harm and not hurt her! Look how she treated you--and others."

Jean Jacques half rose from his seat in sudden rage, but he restrained himself, and sat down again. "She had one husband--only one. It was Jean Jacques Barbille. She could only treat one as she treated me--me, her husband. But you, what had you to do with that! You used her--so!" He made a motion as though to stamp out an insect with his foot. "Beautiful, a genius, sick and alone--no husband, no child, and you used her so! That is why I shall kill you to-night. We will fight for it."

Yes, but surely the man was mad, and the thing to do was to humour him, to gain time. To humour a madman--that is what one always advised, therefore Stolphe would make the pourparler, as the French say.

"Well, that's all right," he rejoined, "but how is it going to be done? Have you got a pistol?" He thought he was very clever, and that he would now see whether Jean Jacques Barbille was armed. If he was not armed, well, then, there would be the chances in his favour; it wasn't easy to kill with hands alone.

Jean Jacques ignored the question, however. He waved a hand impatiently, as though to dismiss it. "She was beautiful and splendid; she had been a queen down there in Quebec. You lied to her, and she was blind at first --I can see it all. She believed so easily--but yes, always! There

she was what she was, and you were what you are, not a Frenchman, not Catholic, and an American--no, not an American--a South American. But no, not quite a South American, for there was the Portuguese nigger in you--Sit down!"

Jean Jacques was on his feet bending over the enraged mongrel. He had spoken the truth, and Carmen's last lover had been stung as though a serpent's tooth was in his flesh. Of all things that could be said about him, that which Jean Jacques said was the worst--that he was not all white, that he had nigger blood! Yet it was true; and he realized that Jean Jacques must have got his information in Shilah itself where he had been charged with it. Yet, raging as he was, and ready to take the Johnny Crapaud--that is the name by which he had always called Carmen's husband--by the throat, he was not yet sure that Jean Jacques was unarmed. He sat still under an anger greater than his own, for there was in it that fanaticism which only the love or hate of a woman could breed in a man's mind.

Suddenly Stolphe laughed outright, a crackling, mirthless, ironical laugh; for it really was absurdity made sublime that this man, who had been abandoned by his wife, should now want to kill one who had abandoned her! This outdid Don Quixote over and over.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to fight," said Jean Jacques. "That is the way. That was Carmen's view. You shall have your chance to live, but I shall throw you in the river, and you can then fight the river. The current is swift, the banks are steep and high as a house down below there. Now, I am ready. . . . !"

He had need to be, for Stolphe was quick, kicking the chair from beneath him, and throwing himself heavily on Jean Jacques. He had had his day at that in South America, and as Jean Jacques Barbille had said, the water was swift and deep, and the banks of the Watloon high and steep!

But Jean Jacques was unconscious of everything save a debt to be collected for a woman he had loved, a compensation which must be taken in flesh and blood. Perhaps at the moment, as Stolphe had said to himself, he was a little mad, for all his past, all his plundered, squandered, spoiled life was crying out at him like a hundred ghosts, and he was fighting with beasts at Ephesus. An exaltation possessed him. Not since the day when his hand was on the lever of the flume with George Masson below; not since the day he had turned his back for ever on the Manor Cartier had he been so young and so much his old self-an egotist, with all the blind confidence of his kind; a dreamer inflamed into action with all a mad dreamer's wild power. He was not fifty-two years of age, but thirty-two at this moment, and all the knowledge got of the wrestling river-drivers of his boyhood, when he had spent hours by the river struggling with river-champions, came back to him. It was a relief to his sick soul to wrench and strain, and propel and twist and force onward, step by step, to the door opening on the river, this creature who had left his Carmen to die alone.

"No, you don't--not yet. The jail before the river!" called a cool, sharp, sour voice; and on the edge of the trembling platform overhanging the river, Hugo Stolphe was dragged back from the plunge downward he was about to take, with Jean Jacques' hand at his throat.

Stolphe had heard the door of the bedroom forced, but Jean Jacques had not heard it; he was only conscious of hands dragging him back just at the moment of Stolphe's deadly peril.

"What is it?" asked Jean Jacques, seeing Stolphe in the hands of two men, and hearing the snap of steel. "Wanted for firing a house for insurance--wanted for falsifying the accounts of a Land Company--wanted for his own good, Mr. Hugo Stolphe, C.O.D.--collect on delivery!" said the officer of the law. "And collected just in time!"

"We didn't mean to take him till to-morrow," the officer added, "but out on the river one of us saw this gladiator business here in the red-light zone, and there wasn't any time to lose. . . . I don't know what your business with him was," the long-moustached detective said to Jean Jacques, "but whatever the grudge is, if you don't want to appear in court in the morning, the walking's good out of town night or day--so long!"

He hustled his prisoner out.

Jean Jacques did not want to appear in court, and as the walking was officially good at dawn, he said good-bye to Virginie Poucette's sister through the crack of a door, and was gone before she could restrain him.

"Well, things happen that way," he said, as he turned back to look at Shilah before it disappeared from view.

"Ah, the poor, handsome vaurien!" the woman at the tavern kept saying to her husband all that day; and she could not rest till she had written to Virginie how Jean Jacques came to Shilah in the evening, and went with the dawn.

CHAPTER XXIV

JEAN JACQUES ENCAMPED

The Young Doctor of Askatoon had a good heart, and he was exercising it honourably one winter's day near three years after Jean Jacques had left St. Saviour's.

"There are many French Canadians working on the railway now, and a good many habitant farmers live hereabouts, and they have plenty of children --why not stay here and teach school? You are a Catholic, of course, monsieur?"

This is what the Young Doctor said to one who had been under his anxious care for a few, vivid days. The little brown-bearded man with the grey-brown hair nodded in reply, but his gaze was on the billowing waste of snow, which stretched as far as eye could see to the pine-hills in the far distance. He nodded assent, but it was plain to be seen that the Young Doctor's suggestion was not in tune with his thought. His nod only acknowledged the reasonableness of the proposal. In his eyes, however, was the wanderlust which had possessed him for three long years, in which he had been searching for what to him was more than Eldorado, for it was hope and home. Hope was all he had left of the assets which had made him so great a figure--as he once thought--in his native parish of St. Saviour's. It was his fixed idea--une idee fixe, as he himself said. Lands, mills, manor, lime-kilns, factories, store, all were gone, and his wife Carmen also was gone. He had buried her with simple magnificence in Montreal--Mme. Glozel had said to her neighbours afterwards that the funeral cost over seventy-five dollars--and had set up a stone to her memory on which was carved, "Chez nous autrefois, et chez Dieu maintenant"--which was to say, "Our home once, and God's Home now."

That done, with a sorrow which still had the peace of finality in his mind, he had turned his face to the West. His long, long sojourning had brought him to Shilah where a new chapter of his life was closed, and at last to Askatoon, where another chapter still closed an epoch in his life, and gave finality to all. There he had been taken down with congestion of the lungs, and, fainting at the door of a drug-store, had been taken possession of by the Young Doctor, who would not send him to the hospital. He would not send him there because he found inside the waistcoat of this cleanest tramp--if he was a tramp--that he had ever seen, a book of philosophy, the daguerreotype photo of a beautiful foreign-looking woman, and some verses in a child's handwriting. The book of philosophy was underlined and interlined on every page, and every margin had comment which showed a mind of the most singular simplicity, searching wisdom, and hopeless confusion, all in one.

The Young Doctor was a man of decision, and he had whisked the little brown-grey sufferer to his own home, and tended him there like a brother till the danger disappeared; and behold he was rewarded for his humanity by as quaint an experience as he had ever known. He had not succeeded--though he tried hard--in getting at the history of his patient's life; but he did succeed in reading the fascinating story of a mind; for Jean Jacques, if not so voluble as of yore, had still moments when he seemed to hypnotize himself, and his thoughts were alive in an atmosphere of intellectual passion ill in accord with his condition.

Presently the little brown man withdrew his eyes from the window of the Young Doctor's office and the snowy waste beyond. They had a curious red underglow which had first come to them an evening long ago, when they caught from the sky the reflection of a burning mill. There was distance and the far thing in that underglow of his eyes. It had to do with the horizon, not with the place where his feet were. It said, "Out there, beyond, is what I go to seek, what I must find, what will be home to me."

"Well, I must be getting on," he said in a low voice to the Young Doctor, ignoring the question which had been asked.

"If you want work, there's work to be had here, as I said," responded the Young Doctor. "You are a man of education--"

"How do you know that?" asked Jean Jacques.

"I hear you speak," answered the other, and then Jean Jacques drew himself up and threw back his head. He had ever loved appreciation, not to say flattery, and he had had very little of it lately.

"I was at Laval," he remarked with a flash of pride. "No degree, but a year there, and travel abroad--the Grand Tour, and in good style, with plenty to do it with. Oh, certainly, no thought for sous, hardly for francs! It was gold louis abroad and silver dollars at home--that was the standard."

"The dollars are much scarcer now, eh?" asked the Young Doctor quizzically.

"I should think I had just enough to pay you," said the other, bridling up suddenly; for it seemed to him the Young Doctor had become ironical and mocking; and though he had been mocked much in his day, there were times when it was not easy to endure it.

The truth is the Young Doctor was somewhat of an expert in human nature, and he deeply wanted to know the history of this wandering habitant, because he had a great compassionate liking for him. If he could get the little man excited, he might be able to find out what he wanted. During the days in which the wanderer had been in his house, he had been far from silent, for he joked at his own suffering and kept the housekeeper laughing at his whimsical remarks; while he won her heart by the extraordinary cleanliness of his threadbare clothes, and the perfect order of his scantily-furnished knapsack. It had the exactness of one who was set upon a far course and would carry it out on scientific calculation. He had been full of mocking quips and sallies at himself, but from first to last he never talked. The things he said were nothing more than surface sounds, as it were--the ejaculations of a mind, not its language or its meanings.

"He's had some strange history, this queer little man," said the housekeeper to the Young Doctor; "and I'd like to know what it is. Why, we don't even know his name."

"So would I," rejoined the Young Doctor, "and I'll have a good try for it."

He had had his try more than once, but it had not succeeded. Perhaps a little torture would do it, he thought; and so he had made the rather tactless remark about the scarcity of dollars. Also his look was incredulous when Jean Jacques protested that he had enough to pay the fee.

"When you searched me you forgot to look in the right place," continued Jean Jacques; and he drew from the lining of the hat he held in his hand a little bundle of ten-dollar bills. "Here--take your pay from them," he said, and held out the roll of bills. "I suppose it won't be more than four dollars a day; and there's enough, I think. I can't pay you for your kindness to me, and I don't want to. I'd like to owe you that; and it's a good thing for a man himself to be owed kindness. He remembers it when he gets older. It helps him to forgive himself more or less for what he's sorry for in life. I've enough in this bunch to pay for board and professional attendance, or else the price has gone up since I had a doctor before."

He laughed now, and the laugh was half-ironical, half-protesting. It seemed to come from the well of a hidden past; and no past that is hidden has ever been a happy past.

The Young Doctor took the bills, looked at them as though they were curios, and then returned them with the remark that they were of a kind and denomination of no use to him. There was a twinkle in his eye as he said it. Then he added:

"I agree with you that it's a good thing for a man to lay up a little credit of kindness here and there for his old age. Well, anything I did for you was meant for kindness and nothing else. You weren't a bit of trouble, and it was simply your good constitution and a warm room and a few fly-blisters that pulled you through. It wasn't any skill of mine. Go and thank my housekeeper if you like. She did it all."

"I did my best to thank her," answered Jean Jacques. "I said she reminded me of Virginie Palass Poucette, and I could say nothing better than that, except one thing; and I'm not saying that to anybody."

The Young Doctor had a thrill. Here was a very unusual man, with mystery and tragedy, and yet something above both, in his eyes.

"Who was Virginie Palass Poucette?" he asked. Jean Jacques threw out a hand as though to say, "Attend--here is a great thing," and he began, "Virginie Poucette--ah, there . . . !"

Then he paused, for suddenly there spread out before him that past, now so far away, in which he had lived--and died. Strange that when he had mentioned Virginie's name to the housekeeper he had no such feeling as possessed him now. It had been on the surface, and he had used her name without any deep stir of the waters far down in his soul. But the Young Doctor was fingering the doors of his inner life--all at once this conviction came to him--and the past rushed upon him with all its disarray and ignominy, its sorrow, joy, elation and loss. Not since he had left the scene of his defeat, not since the farewell to his dead Carmen, that sweet summer day when he had put the lovely, ruined being away with her words, "Jean Jacques--ah, my beautiful Jean Jacques," ringing in his ears, had he ever told anyone his story. He had had a feeling that, as Carmen had been restored to him without his crying out,

or vexing others with his sad history, so would Zoe also come back to him. Patience and silence was his motto.

Yet how was it that here and now there came an overpowering feeling, that he must tell this healer of sick bodies the story of an invalid soul? This man with the piercing dark-blue eyes before him, who looked so resolute, who had the air of one who could say,

"This is the way to go," because he knew and was sure; he was not to be denied.

"Who was Virginie Poucette?" repeated the Young Doctor insistently, yet ever so gently. "Was she such a prize among women? What did she do?"

A flood of feeling passed over Jean Jacques' face. He looked at his hat and his knapsack lying in a chair, with a desire to seize them and fly from the inquisitor; then a sense of fatalism came upon him. As though he had received an order from within his soul, he said helplessly:

"Well, if it must be, it must."

Then he swept the knapsack and his hat from the chair to the floor, and sat down.

"I will begin at the beginning," he said with his eyes fixed on those of the Young Doctor, yet looking beyond him to far-off things. "I will start from the time when I used to watch the gold Cock of Beaugard turning on the mill, when I sat in the doorway of the Manor Cartier in my pinafore. I don't know why I tell you, but maybe it was meant I should. I obey conviction. While you are able to keep logic and conviction hand in hand then everything is all right. I have found that out. Logic, philosophy are the props of life, but still you must obey the impulse of the soul--oh, absolutely! You must--"

He stopped short. "But it will seem strange to you," he added after a moment, in which the Young Doctor gestured to him to proceed, "to hear me talk like this--a wayfarer--a vagabond you may think. But in other days I was in places--"

The Young Doctor interjected with abrupt friendliness that there was no need to say he had been in high places. It would still be apparent, if he were in rags.

"Then, there, I will speak freely," rejoined Jean Jacques, and he took the cherry-brandy which the other offered him, and drank it off with gusto.

"Ah, that--that," he said, "is like the cordials Mere Langlois used to sell at Vilray. She and Virginie Poucette had a place together on the market--none better than Mere Langlois except Virginie Poucette, and she was like a drink of water in the desert. . . . Well, there, I will begin. Now my father was--"

It was lucky there were no calls for the Young Doctor that particular early morning, else the course of Jean Jacques' life might have been greatly different from what it became. He was able to tell his story from the very first to the last. Had it been interrupted or unfinished one name might not have been mentioned. When Jean Jacques used it, the Young Doctor sat up and leaned forward eagerly, while a light came into his face-a light of surprise, of revelation and understanding.

When Jean Jacques came to that portion of his life when manifest tragedy began--it began of course on the Antoine, but then it was not manifest--when his Carmen left him after the terrible scene with George Masson, he paused and said: "I don't know why I tell you this, for it is not easy to tell; but you saved my life, and you have a right to know what it is you have saved, no matter how hard it is to put it all before you."

It was at this point that he mentioned Zoe's name--he had hitherto only spoken of her as "my daughter"; and here it was the Young Doctor showed startled interest, and repeated the name after Jean Jacques. "Zoe! Zoe! --ah!" he said, and became silent again.

Jean Jacques had not noticed the Young Doctor's pregnant interruption, he was so busy with his own memories of the past; and he brought the tale to the day when he turned his face to the West to look for Zoe. Then he paused.

"And then?" the Young Doctor asked. "There is more--there is the search for Zoe ever since."

"What is there to say?" continued Jean Jacques. "I have searched till now, and have not found."

"How have you lived?" asked the other.

"Keeping books in shops and factories, collecting accounts for storekeepers, when they saw they could trust me, working at threshings and harvests, teaching school here and there. Once I made fifty dollars at a railway camp telling French Canadian tales and singing chansons Canadiennes. I have been insurance agent, sold lightning-rods, and been foreman of a gang building a mill--but I could not bear that. Every time I looked up I could see the Cock of Beaugard where the roof should be. And so on, so on, first one thing and then another till now--till I came to Askatoon and fell down by the drug-store, and you played the good Samaritan. So it goes, and I step on from here again, looking--looking."

"Wait till spring," said the Young Doctor. "What is the good of going on now! You can only tramp to the next town, and--"

"And the next," interposed Jean Jacques. "But so it is my orders." He put his hand on his heart, and gathered up his hat and knapsack.

"But you haven't searched here at Askatoon." "Ah? . . . Ah-well, surely that is so," answered Jean Jacques wistfully. "I had forgotten that. Perhaps you can tell me, you who know all. Have you any news

about my Zoe for me? Do you know--was she ever here? Madame Gerard Fynes would be her name. My name is Jean Jacques Barbille."

"Madame Zoe was here, but she has gone," quietly answered the Young Doctor.

Jean Jacques dropped the hat and the knapsack. His eyes had a glad, yet staring and frightened look, for the Young Doctor's face was not the bearer of good tidings.

"Zoe--my Zoe! You are sure? . . . When was she here?" he added huskily.

"A month ago."

"When did she go?" Jean Jacques' voice was almost a whisper.

"A month ago."

"Where did she go?" asked Jean Jacques, holding himself steady, for he had a strange dreadful premonition.

"Out of all care at last," answered the Young Doctor, and took a step towards the little man, who staggered, then recovered himself.

"She--my Zoe is dead! How?" questioned Jean Jacques in a ghostly sort of voice, but there was a steadiness and control unlike what he had shown in other tragic moments.

"It was a blizzard. She was bringing her husband's body in a sleigh to the railway here. He had died of consumption. She and the driver of the sleigh went down in the blizzard. Her body covered the child and saved it. The driver was lost also."

"Her child--Zoe's child?" quavered Jean Jacques. "A little girl--Zoe. The name was on her clothes. There were letters. One to her father--to you. Your name is Jean Jacques Barbille, is it not? I have that letter to you. We buried her and her husband in the graveyard yonder." He pointed. "Everybody was there--even when they knew it was to be a Catholic funeral."

"Ah! she was buried a Catholic?" Jean Jacques' voice was not quite so blurred now.

"Yes. Her husband had become Catholic too. A priest who had met them in the Peace River Country was here at the time."

At that, with a moan, Jean Jacques collapsed. He shed no tears, but he sat with his hands between his knees, whispering his child's name.

The Young Doctor laid a hand on his shoulder gently, but presently went out, shutting the door after him. As he left the room, however, he turned and said, "Courage, Monsieur Jean Jacques! Courage!"

When the Young Doctor came back a half-hour later he had in his hand the letters found in Zoe's pocket. "Monsieur Jean Jacques," he said gently to the bowed figure still sitting as he left him.

Jean Jacques got up slowly and looked at him as though scarce understanding where he was.

"The child--the child--where is my Zoe's child? Where is Zoe's Zoe?" he asked in agitation. His whole body seemed to palpitate. His eyes were all red fire.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

The Young Doctor did not answer Jean Jacques at once. As he looked at this wayworn fugitive he knew that another, and perhaps the final crisis of his life, was come to Jean Jacques Barbille, and the human pity in him shrank from the possible end to it all. It was an old-world figure this, with the face of a peasant troubadour and the carriage of an aboriginal--or an aristocrat. Indeed, the ruin, the lonely wandering which had been Jean Jacques' portion, had given him that dignity which often comes to those who defy destiny and the blows of angry fate. Once there had been in his carriage something jaunty. This was merely life and energy and a little vain confidence; now there was the look of courage which awaits the worst the world can do. The life which, according to the world's logic, should have made Jean Jacques a miserable figure, an ill-nourished vagabond, had given him a physical grace never before possessed by him. The face, however, showed the ravages which loss and sorrow had made. It was lined and shadowed with dark reflection, yet the forehead had a strange smoothness and serenity little in accord with the rest of the countenance. It was like the snow-summit of a mountain below which are the ragged escarpments of trees and rocks, making a look of storm and warfare.

"Where is she--the child of my Zoe?" Jean Jacques repeated with an almost angry emphasis; as though the Young Doctor were hiding her from him.

"She is with the wife of Nolan Doyle, my partner in horse-breeding, not very far from here. Norah Doyle was married five years, and she had no child. This was a grief to her, even more than to Nolan, who, like her, came of a stock that was prolific. It was Nolan who found your daughter on the prairie--the driver dead, but she just alive when found. To give her ease of mind, Nolan said he would make the child his own. When he said that, she smiled and tried to speak, but it was too late, and she was gone."

In sudden agony Jean Jacques threw up his hands. "So young and so soon

to be gone!" he exclaimed. "But a child she was and had scarce tasted the world. The mercy of God--what is it!"

"You can't take time as the measure of life," rejoined the Young Doctor with a compassionate gesture. "Perhaps she had her share of happiness--as much as most of us get, maybe, in a longer course."

"Share! She was worth a hundred years of happiness!" bitterly retorted Jean Jacques.

"Perhaps she knew her child would have it?" gently remarked the Young Doctor.

"Ah, that--that ! . . . Do you think that possible, m'sieu'? Tell me, do you think that was in her mind--to have loved, and been a mother, and given her life for the child, and then the bosom of God. Answer that to me, m'sieu'?"

There was intense, poignant inquiry in Jean Jacques' face, and a light seemed to play over it. The Young Doctor heeded the look and all that was in the face. It was his mission to heal, and he knew that to heal the mind was often more necessary than to heal the body. Here he would try to heal the mind, if only in a little.

"That might well have been in her thought," he answered. "I saw her face. It had a wonderful look of peace, and a smile that would reconcile anyone she loved to her going. I thought of that when I looked at her. I recall it now. It was the smile of understanding."

He had said the only thing which could have comforted Jean Jacques at that moment. Perhaps it was meant to be that Zoe's child should represent to him all that he had lost--home, fortune, place, Carmen and Zoe. Perhaps she would be home again for him and all that home should mean--be the promise of a day when home would again include that fled from Carmen, and himself, and Carmen's child. Maybe it was sentiment in him, maybe it was sentimentality--and maybe it was not.

"Come, m'sieu'," Jean Jacques said impatiently: "let us go to the house of that M'sieu' Doyle. But first, mark this: I have in the West here some land--three hundred and twenty acres. It may yet be to me a home, where I shall begin once more with my Zoe's child--with my Zoe of Zoe--the home-life I lost down by the Beau Cheval. . . . Let us go at once."

"Yes, at once," answered the Young Doctor. Yet his feet were laggard, for he was not so sure that there would be another home for Jean Jacques with his grandchild as its star. He was thinking of Norah, to whom a waif of the prairie had made home what home should be for herself and Nolan Doyle.

"Read these letters first," he said, and he put the letters found on Zoe in Jean Jacques' eager hands.

A half-hour later, at the horse-breeding ranch, the Young Doctor introduced Jean Jacques to Norah Doyle, and instantly left the house. He had no wish to hear the interview which must take place between the two. Nolan Doyle was not at home, but in the room where they were shown to Norah was a cradle. Norah was rocking it with one foot while, standing by the table, she busied herself with sewing.

The introduction was of the briefest. "Monsieur Barbille wishes a word with you, Mrs. Doyle," said the Young Doctor. "It's a matter that doesn't need me. Monsieur has been in my care, as you know. . . . Well, there, I hope Nolan is all right. Tell him I'd like to see him to-morrow about the bay stallion and the roans. I've had an offer for them. Good-bye--good-bye, Mrs. Doyle"--he was at the door--"I hope you and Monsieur Barbille will decide what's best for the child without difficulty."

The door opened quickly and shut again, and Jean Jacques was alone with the woman and the child. "What's best for the child!"

That was what the Young Doctor had said. Norah stopped rocking the cradle and stared at the closed door. What had this man before her, this tramp habitant of whom she had heard, of course, to do with little Zoe in the cradle--her little Zoe who had come just when she was most needed; who had brought her man and herself close together again after an estrangement which neither had seemed able to prevent.

"What's best for the child!" How did the child in the cradle concern this man? Then suddenly his name almost shrieked in her brain. Barbille--that was the name on the letter found on the body of the woman who died and left Zoe behind--M. Jean Jacques Barbille.

Yes, that was the name. What was going to happen? Did the man intend to try and take Zoe from her?

"What is your name--all of it?" she asked sharply. She had a very fine set of teeth, as Jean Jacques saw mechanically; and subconsciously he said to himself that they seemed cruel, they were so white and regular--and cruel. The cruelty was evident to him as she bit in two the thread for the waistcoat she was mending, and then plied her needle again. Also the needle in her fingers might have been intended to sew up his shroud, so angry did it appear at the moment. But her teeth had something almost savage about them. If he had seen them when she was smiling, he would have thought them merely beautiful and rare, atoning for her plain face and flat breast--not so flat as it had been; for since the child had come into her life, her figure, strangely enough, had rounded out, and lines never before seen in her contour appeared.

He braced himself for the contest he knew was at hand, and replied to her. "My name is Jean Jacques Barbille. I was of the Manor Cartier, in St. Saviour's parish, Quebec. The mother of the child Zoe, there, was born at the Manor Cartier. I was her father. I am the grandfather of this Zoe." He motioned towards the cradle.

Then, with an impulse he could not check and did not seek to check--why should he? was not the child his own by every right?--he went to the cradle and looked down at the tiny face on its white pillow. There could be no mistake about it; here was the face of his lost Zoe, with something, too, of Carmen, and also the forehead of the Barbilles. As though the child knew, it opened its eyes wide-big, brown eyes like those of Carmen Dolores.

"Ah, the beautiful, beloved thing!" he exclaimed in a low-voice, ere Norah stepped between and almost pushed him back. An outstretched arm in front of her prevented him from stooping to kiss the child. "Stand back. The child must not be waked," she said. "It must sleep another hour. It has its milk at twelve o'clock. Stand aside. I won't have my child disturbed."

"Have my child disturbed"--that was what she had said, and Jean Jacques realized what he had to overbear. Here was the thing which must be fought out at once.

"The child is not yours, but mine," he declared. "Here is proof--the letter found on my Zoe when she died--addressed to me. The doctor knew. There is no mistake."

He held out the letter for her to see. "As you can read here, my daughter was on her way back to the Manor Cartier, to her old home at St. Saviour's. She was on her way back when she died. If she had lived I should have had them both; but one is left, according to the will of God. And so I will take her--this flower of the prairie--and begin life again."

The face Norah turned on him had that look which is in the face of an animal, when its young is being forced from it--fierce, hungering, furtive, vicious.

"The child is mine," she exclaimed--"mine and no other's. The prairie gave it to me. It came to me out of the storm. 'Tis mine-mine only. I was barren and wantin', and my man was slippin' from me, because there was only two of us in our home. I was older than him, and yonder was a girl with hair like a sheaf of wheat in the sun, and she kept lookin' at him, and he kept goin' to her. 'Twas a man she wanted, 'twas a child he wanted, and there they were wantin', and me atin' my heart out with passion and pride and shame and sorrow. There was he wantin' a child, and the girl wantin' a man, and I only wantin' what God should grant all women that give themselves to a man's arms after the priest has blessed them. And whin all was at the worst, and it looked as if he was away with her--the girl yonder--then two things happened. A man--he was me own brother and a millionaire if I do say it--he took her and married her; and then, too, Heaven's will sent this child's mother to her last end and the child itself to my Nolan's arms. To my husband's arms first it came, you understand; and he give the child to me, as it should be, and said he, 'We'll make believe it is our own.' But I said to him, 'There's no make-believe. 'Tis mine. 'Tis mine. It came to me out of the storm from the hand of God.' And so it was and is; and all's well

here in the home, praise be to God. And listen to me: you'll not come here to take the child away from me. It can't be done. I'll not have it. Yes, you can let that sink down into you--I'll not have it."

During her passionate and defiant appeal Jean Jacques was restless with the old unrest of years ago, and his face twitched with emotion; but before she had finished he had himself in some sort of control.

"You--madame, you are only thinking of yourself in this. You are only thinking what you want, what you and your man need. But it's not to be looked at that way only, and--"

"Well, then it isn't to be looked at that way only," she interrupted. "As you say, it isn't Nolan and me alone to be considered. There's--"

"There's me," he interrupted sharply. "The child is bone of my bone. It is bone of all the Barbilles back to the time of Louis XI."--he had said that long ago to Zoe first, and it was now becoming a fact in his mind. "It is linked up in the chain of the history of the Barbilles. It is one with the generations of noblesse and honour and virtue. It is--"

"It's one with Abel the son of Adam, if it comes to that, and so am I," Norah bitingly interjected, while her eyes flashed fire, and she rocked the cradle more swiftly than was good for the child's sleep.

Jean Jacques flared up. "There were sons and daughters of the family of Adam that had names, but there were plenty others you whistled to as you would to a four-footer, and they'd come. The Barbilles had names--always names of their own back to Adam. The child is a Barbille--Don't rock the cradle so fast," he suddenly added with an irritable gesture, breaking off from his argument. "Don't you know better than that when a child's asleep? Do you want it to wake up and cry?"

She flushed to the roots of her hair, for he had said something for which she had no reply. She had undoubtedly disturbed the child. It stirred in its sleep, then opened its eyes, and at once began to cry.

"There," said Jean Jacques, "what did I tell you? Any one that had ever had children would know better than that."

Norah paid no attention to his mocking words, to the undoubted-truth of his complaint. Stooping over, she gently lifted the child up. With hungry tenderness she laid it against her breast and pressed its cheek to her own, murmuring and crooning to it.

"Acushla! Acushla! Ah, the pretty bird--mother's sweet--mother's angel!" she said softly.

She rocked backwards and forwards. Her eyes, though looking at Jean Jacques as she crooned and coaxed and made lullaby, apparently did not see him. She was as concentrated as though it were a matter of life and death. She was like some ancient nurse of a sovereign-child, plainly

dressed, while the dainty white clothes of the babe in her arms--ah, hadn't she raided the hoard she had begun when first married, in the hope of a child of her own, to provide this orphan with clothes good enough for a royal princess!

The flow of the long, white dress of the waif on the dark blue of Norah's gown, which so matched the deep sapphire of her eyes, caught Jean Jacques' glance, allured his mind. It was the symbol of youth and innocence and home. Suddenly he had a vision of the day when his own Zoe had been given to the cradle for the first time, and he had done exactly what Norah had done--rocked too fast and too hard, and waked his little one; and Carmen had taken her up in her long white draperies, and had rocked to and fro, just like this, singing a lullaby. That lullaby he had himself sung often afterwards; and now, with his grandchild in Norah's arms there before him--with this other Zoe--the refrain of it kept lilting in his brain. In the pause ensuing, when Norah stooped to put the pacified child again in its nest, he also stooped over the cradle and began to hum the words of the lullaby:

"Sing, little bird, of the whispering leaves,
Sing a song of the harvest sheaves;
Sing a song to my Fanchonette,
Sing a song to my Fanchonette!
Over her eyes, over her eyes, over her eyes of violet,
See the web that the weaver weaves,
The web of sleep that the weaver weaves--
Weaves, weaves, weaves!
Over those eyes of violet,
Over those eyes of my Fanchonette,
Weaves, weaves, weaves--
See the web that the weaver weaves!"

For quite two minutes Jean Jacques and Norah Doyle stooped over the cradle, looking at Zoe's rosy, healthy, pretty face, as though unconscious of each other, and only conscious of the child. When Jean Jacques had finished the long first verse of the chanson, and would have begun another, Norah made a protesting gesture.

"She's asleep, and there's no more need," she said. "Wasn't it a good lullaby, madame?" Jean Jacques asked.

"So, so," she replied, on her defence again.

"It was good enough for her mother," he replied, pointing to the cradle.

"It's French and fanciful," she retorted--"both music and words."

"The child's French--what would you have?" asked Jean Jacques indignantly.

"The child's father was English, and she's goin' to be English, the darlin', from now on and on and on. That's settled. There's manny an English and Irish lullaby that'll be sung to her hence and onward; and

there’s manny an English song she’ll sing when she’s got her voice, and is big enough. Well, I think she’ll sing like a canary."

"Do the birds sing in English?" exclaimed Jean Jacques, with anger in his face now. Was there ever any vanity like the vanity of these people who had made the conquest of Quebec, when sixteen Barbilles lost their lives, one of them being aide-de-camp to M. Vaudreuil, the governor!

"All the canaries I ever heard sung in English," she returned stubbornly.

"How do Frenchmen understand their singing, then?" irritably questioned Jean Jacques.

"Well, in translation only," she retorted, and with her sharp white teeth she again bit the black thread of her needle, tied the end into a little knot, and began to mend the waistcoat which she had laid down in the first moments of the interview.

"I want the child," Jean Jacques insisted abruptly. "I’ll wait till she wakes, and then I’ll wrap her up and take her away."

"Didn’t you hear me say she was to be brought up English?" asked Norah, with a slowness which clothed her fiercest impulses.

"Name of God, do you think I’ll let you have her!" returned Jean Jacques with asperity and decision. "You say you are alone, you and your M’sieu’ Nolan. Well, I am alone--all alone in the world, and I need her--Mother of God, I need her more than I ever needed anything in my life! You have each other, but I have only myself, and it is not good company. Besides, the child is mine, a Barbille of Barbilles, une legitime--a rightful child of marriage. But if it was a love-child only it would still be mine, being my daughter’s child. Look you, it is no such thing. It is of those who can claim inheritance back to Louis XI. She will be to me the gift of God in return for the robbery of death."

He leaned over the cradle, and his look was like that of one who had found a treasure in the earth.

Now she struck hard. Yet very subtly too did she attack him. "You--you are thinking of yourself, m’sieu’, only of yourself. Aren’t you going to think of the child at all? It isn’t yourself that counts so much. You’ve had your day, or the part of it that matters most. But her time is not yet even begun. It’s all--all--before her. You say you’ll take her away--well, to what? To what will you take her? What have you got to give her? What--"

"I have the three hundred and twenty acres out there"--he pointed westward--"and I will make a home and begin again with her."

"Three hundred and twenty acres--’out there’!" she exclaimed in scorn. "Any one can have a farm here for the askin’. What is that? Is it a home? What have you got to start a home with? Do you deny you are no better than a tramp? Have you got a hundred dollars in the world? Have

you got a roof over your head? Have you got a trade? You'll take her where--to what? Even if you had a home, what then? You would have to get someone to look after her--some old crone, a wench maybe, who'd be as fit to bring up a child as I would be to--" she paused and looked round in helpless quest for a simile, when, in despair, she caught sight of Jean Jacques' watch-chain--"as I would be to make a watch !" she added.

Instinctively Jean Jacques drew out the ancient timepiece he had worn on the Grand Tour; which had gone down with the Antoine and come up with himself. It gave him courage to make the fight for his own.

"The good God would see that--" he began.

"The good God doesn't interfere in bringing up babies," she retorted. "That's the work for the fathers and mothers, or godfathers and godmothers."

"You are neither," exclaimed Jean Jacques. "You have no rights at all."

"I have no rights--eh? I have no rights! Look at the child. Look at the way she's clothed. Look at the cradle in which it lies. It cost fifteen dollars; and the clothes--what they cost would keep a family half a year. I have no rights, is it?--I who stepped in and took the child without question, without bein' asked, and made it my own, and treated it as if it was me own. No, by the love of God, I treated it far, far better than if it had been me own. Because a child was denied me, the hunger of the years made me love the child as a mother would on a desert island with one child at her knees."

"You can get another-one not your own, as this isn't," argued Jean Jacques fiercely.

She was not to be forced to answer his arguments directly. She chose her own course to convince. "Nolan loves this child as if it was his," she declared, her eyes all afire, "but he mightn't love another--men are queer creatures. Then where would I be? and what would the home be but what it was before--as cold, as cold and bitter! It was the hand of God brought the child to the door of two people who had no child and who prayed for one. Do you deny it was the hand of God that brought your daughter here away, that put the child in my arms? Not its mother, am I not? But I love her better than twenty mothers could. It's the hunger--the hunger--the hunger in me. She's made a woman of me. She has a home where everything is hers--everything. To see Nolan play with her, tossin' her up and down in his arms as if he'd done it all his life--as natural as natural! To take her away from that--all the comfort here where she can have annything she wants! With my old mother to care for her, if so be I was away to market or whereabouts--one that brought up six children, a millionaire among them, praise be to God as my mother did--to take this delicate little thing away from here, what a sin and crime 'twould be! She herself 'd never forgive you for it, if ever she grew up--though that's not likely, things bein' as they are with you, and you bein' what you are. Ah, there--there she is awake and smilin', and

kickin' up her pretty toes this minute! There she is, the lovely little Zoe, with eyes like black pearls. . . . See now--see now which she'll come to--to you or me, m'sieu'. There, put out your arms to her, and I'll put out mine, and see which she'll take. I'll stand by that--I'll stand by that. Let the child decide. Hold out your arms, and so will I"

With an impassioned word Jean Jacques reached down his arms to the child, which lay laughing up at them and kicking its pink toes into the air, and Norah Doyle did the same, murmuring an Irish love-name for a child. Jean Jacques was silent, but in his face was the longing of a soul sick for home, of one who desires the end of a toilsome road.

The laughing child crooned and spluttered and shook its head, as though it was playing some happy game. It looked first at Norah, then at Jean Jacques, then at Norah again, and then, with a little gurgle of pleasure, stretched out its arms to her and half-raised itself from the pillow. With a glad cry Norah gathered it to her bosom, and triumph shone in her face.

"Ah, there, you see!" she said, as she lifted her face from the blossom at her breast.

"There it is," said Jean Jacques with shaking voice.

"You have nothing to give her--I have everything," she urged. "My rights are that I would die for the child--oh, fifty times! . . . What are you going to do, m'sieu'?"

Jean Jacques slowly turned and picked up his hat. He moved with the dignity of a hero who marches towards a wall to meet the bullets of a firing-squad.

"You are going?" Norah whispered, and in her eyes was a great relief and the light of victory. The golden link binding Nolan and herself was in her arms, over her heart.

Jean Jacques did not speak a word in reply, though his lips moved. She held out the little one to him for a good-bye, but he shook his head. If he did that--if he once held her in his arms--he would not be able to give her up. Gravely and solemnly, however, he stooped over and kissed the lips of the child lying against Norah's breast. As he did so, with a quick, mothering instinct Norah impulsively kissed his shaggy head, and her eyes filled with tears. She smiled too, and Jean Jacques saw how beautiful her teeth were--cruel no longer.

He moved away slowly. At the door he turned, and looked back at the two --a long, lingering look he gave. Then he faced away from them again.

"Moi je suis philosophe," he said gently, and opened the door and stepped out and away into the frozen world.

EPILOGUE

Change might lay its hand on the parish of St. Saviour's, and it did so on the beautiful sentient living thing, as on the thing material and man-made; but there was no change in the sheltering friendship of Mont Violet or the flow of the illustrious Beau Cheval. The autumns also changed not at all. They cast their pensive canopies over the home-scene which Jean Jacques loved so well, before he was exhaled from its bosom.

One autumn when the hillsides were in those colours which none but a rainbow of the moon ever had, so delicately sad, so tenderly assuring, a traveller came back to St. Saviour's after a long journey. He came by boat to the landing at the Manor Cartier, rather than by train to the railway-station, from which there was a drive of several miles to Vilray. At the landing he was met by a woman, as much a miniature of the days of Orleanist France as himself. She wore lace mits which covered the hands but not the fingers, and her gown showed the outline of a meek crinoline.

"Ah, Fille--ah, dear Fille!" said the little fragment of an antique day, as the Clerk of the Court--rather, he that had been for so many years Clerk of the Court--stepped from the boat. "I can scarce believe that you are here once more. Have you good news?"

"It was to come back with good news that I went," her brother answered smiling, his face lighted by an inner exaltation.

"Dear, dear Fille!" She always called him that now, and not by his Christian name, as though he was a peer. She had done so ever since the Government had made him a magistrate, and Laval University had honoured him with the degree of doctor of laws.

She was leading him to the pony-carriage in which she had come to meet him, when he said:

"Do you think you could walk the distance, my dear? . . . It would be like old times," he added gently.

"I could walk twice as far to-day," she answered, and at once gave directions for the young coachman to put "His Honour's" bag into the carriage. In spite of Fille's reproofs she insisted in calling him that to the servants. They had two servants now, thanks to the legacy left them by the late Judge Carcasson. Presently M. Fille took her by the hand. "Before we start--one look yonder," he murmured, pointing towards the mill which had once belonged to Jean Jacques, now rebuilt and looking almost as of old. "I promised Jean Jacques that I would come and salute it in his name, before I did aught else, and so now I do salute it."

He waved a hand and made a bow to the gold Cock of Beaugard, the pride of all the vanished Barbilles. "Jean Jacques Barbille says that his head is up like yours, M. le Coq, and he wishes you many, many winds to come," he recited quite seriously, and as though it was not out of tune with the modern world.

The gold Cock of Beaugard seemed to understand, for it swung to the left, and now a little to the right, and then stood still, as if looking at the little pair of exiles from an ancient world--of which the only vestiges remaining may be found in old Quebec.

This ceremony over, they walked towards Mont Violet, averting their heads as they passed the Manor Cartier, in a kind of tribute to its departed master--as a Stuart Legitimist might pass the big palace at the end of the Mall in London. In the wood-path, Fille took his sister's hand.

"I will tell you what you are so trembling to hear," he said. "There they are at peace, Jean Jacques and Virginie--that best of best women."

"To think--married to Virginie Poucette--to think of that!" His sister's voice fluttered as she spoke. "But entirely. There was nothing in the way--and she meant to have him, the dear soul! I do not blame her, for at bottom he is as good a man as lives. Our Judge called him 'That dear fool, Jean Jacques, a man of men in his way, after all,' and our Judge was always right--but yes, nearly always right."

After a moment of contented meditation he resumed. "Well, when Virginie sold her place here and went to live with her sister out at Shilah in the West, she said, 'If Jean Jacques is alive, he will be on the land which was Zoe's, which he bought for her. If he is alive--then!' So it was, and by one of the strange accidents which chance or women like Virginie, who have plenty of courage in their simpleness, arrange, they met on that three hundred and sixty acres. It was like the genius of Jean Jacques to have done that one right thing which would save him in the end--a thing which came out of his love for his child--the emotion of an hour. Indeed, that three hundred and sixty acres was his salvation after he learned of Zoe's death, and the other little Zoe, his grandchild, was denied to him--to close his heart against what seemed that last hope, was it not courage? And so, and so he has the reward of his own soul--a home at last once more."

"With Virginie Poucette--Fille, Fille, how things come round!" exclaimed the little lady in the tiny bonnet with the mauve strings.

"More than Virginie came round," he replied almost oracularly. "Who, think you, brought him the news that coal was found on his acres--who but the husband of Virginie's sister! Then came Virginie. On the day Jean Jacques saw her again, he said to her, 'What you would have given me at such cost, now let me pay for with the rest of my life. It is the great thought which was in your heart that I will pay for with the days left to me.'"

A flickering smile brightened the sensitive ascetic face, and humour was in the eyes. "What do you think Virginie said to that? Her sister told me. Virginie said to that, 'You will have more days left, Jean Jacques, if you have a better cook. What do you like best for supper?' And Jean Jacques laughed much at that. Years ago he would have made a speech at it!"

"Then he is no more a philosopher?"

"Oh always, always, but in his heart, and not with his tongue. I cried, and so did he, when we met and when we parted. I think I am getting old, for indeed I could not help it: yet there was peace in his eyes--peace."

"His eyes used to rustle so."

"Rustle--that is the word. Now, that is what, he has learned in life--the way to peace. When I left him, it was with Virginie close beside him, and when I said to him, 'Will you come back to us one day, Jean Jacques?' he said, 'But no, Fille, my friend; it is too far. I see it--it is a million miles away--too great a journey to go with the feet, but with the soul I will visit it. The soul is a great traveller. I see it always--the clouds and the burnings and the pitfalls gone--out of sight--in memory as it was when I was a child. Well, there it is, everything has changed, except the child-memory. I have had, and I have had not; and there it is. I am not the same man--but yes, in my love just the same, with all the rest--' He did not go on, so I said, 'If not the same, then what are you, Jean Jacques?'"

"Ah, Fille, in the old days he would have said that he was a philosopher" --said his sister interrupting. "Yes, yes, one knows--he said it often enough and had need enough to say it. Well, said he to me, 'Me, I am a' --then he stopped, shook his head, and so I could scarcely hear him, murmured, 'Me--I am a man who has been a long journey with a pack on his back, and has got home again.' Then he took Virginie's hand in his."

The old man's fingers touched the corner of his eye as though to find something there; then continued. "'Ah, a pedlar!' said I to him, to hear what he would answer. 'Follies to sell for sous of wisdom,' he answered. Then he put his arm around Virginie, and she gave him his pipe."

"I wish M. Carcasson knew," the little grey lady remarked.

"But of course he knows," said the Clerk of the Court, with his face turned to the sunset.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Courage which awaits the worst the world can do
Good thing for a man himself to be owed kindness
I can't pay you for your kindness to me, and I don't want to
No past that is hidden has ever been a happy past
She was not to be forced to answer his arguments directly
That iceberg which most mourners carry in their breasts
The soul is a great traveller
You can't take time as the measure of life

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