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CARNAC'S FOLLY

By Gilbert Parker

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CHAPTER XIII

CARNAC'S RETURN

"Well, what's happened since I've been gone, mother?" asked Carnac. "Is nobody we're interested in married, or going to be married?"

It was spring-time eight months after Carnac had vanished from Montreal, and the sun of late April was melting the snow upon the hills, bringing out the smell of the sprouting verdure and the exultant song of the birds.

His mother replied sorrowfully: "Junia's been away since last fall. Her aunt in the West was taken ill, and she's been with her ever since. Tell me, dearest, is everything all right now? Are you free to do what you want?"

He shook his head morosely. "No, everything's all wrong. I blundered, and I'm paying the price."

"You didn't find Luzanne Larue?"

"Yes, I found her, but it was no good. I said there was divorce, and she replied I'd done it with my eyes open, and had signed our names in the book of the hotel as Mr. and Mrs. Carnac Grier and divorce would not be possible. Also, I'd let things go for a year, and what jury would give me relief! I consulted a lawyer. He said she had the game in her hands, and that a case could be put up that would discredit me with jury or judge, so there it is. . . . Well, bad as she is, she's fond of me in her way. I don't think she's ever gone loose with any man; this is only a craze, I'm sure. She wanted me, and she meant to have me."

His mother protested: "No pure, straight, honest girl would--"

Carnac laughed bitterly, and interrupted. "Don't talk that way, mother. The girl was brought up among exiles and political criminals in the

purlieu of Montmartre. What's possible in one place is impossible in another. Devil as she is, I want to do her justice."

"Did she wear a wedding-ring?"

"No, but she used my name as her own: I saw it on the paper door-plate. She said she would wait awhile longer, but if at the end of six months I didn't do my duty, she'd see the thing through here among my own people."

"Six months--it's overdue now!" she said in agitation.

He nodded helplessly. "I'm in hell as things are. There's only this to be said: She's done naught yet, and she mayn't do aught!"

They were roused by the click of the gate. "That's your father--that's John Grier," she said.

They heard the front door open and shut, a footstep in the hall, then the door opened and John Grier came into the room.

Preoccupation, abstraction, filled his face, as he came forward. It was as though he was looking at something distant that both troubled and pleased him. When he saw Carnac he stopped, his face flushed. For an instant he stood unmoving, and then he held out his hand.

"So you've come back, Carnac. When did you get here?"

As Carnac released his hand from John Grier's cold clasp, he said: "A couple of hours ago."

The old man scrutinized him sharply, carefully. "Getting on--making money?" he asked. "Got your hand in the pocket of the world?"

Carnac shook his head. "I don't care much about the pocket of the world, but they like my work in London and New York. I don't get Royal Academy prices, but I do pretty well."

"Got some pride, eh?"

"I'm always proud when anybody outside Montreal mentions your name! It makes me feel I have a place in the world."

"Guess you've made your own place," said the other, pleasure coming to his cheek. "You've got your own shovel and pick to make wealth."

"I care little about wealth. All I want is enough to clothe and feed me, and give me a little home."

"A little home! Yes, it's time," remarked the other, as he seated himself in his big chair by the table. "Why don't you marry?"

The old man's eyes narrowed until there could only be seen a slit of fire between the lids, and a bitter smile came to his lips. He had told his

wife a year ago that he had cut Carnac out of all business consideration. So now, he added:

"Tarboe's taken your place in the business, Carnac. Look out he doesn't take your little home too."

"He's had near a year, and he hasn't done it yet."

"Is that through any virtue of yours?"

"Probably not," answered Carnac ironically. "But I've been away; he's been here. He's had everything with him. Why hasn't he pulled it off then?"

"He pulls off everything he plans. He's never fallen over his own feet since he's been with me, and, if I can help it, he won't have a fall when I'm gone."

Suddenly he got to his feet; a fit of passion seized him. "What's Junia to me--nothing! I've every reason to dislike her, but she comes and goes as if the place belonged to her. She comes to my office; she comes to this house; she visits Fabian; she tries to boss everybody. Why don't you regularize it? Why don't you marry her, and then we'll know where we are? She's got more brains than anybody else in our circle. She's got tact and humour. Her sister's a fool; she's done harm. Junia's got sense. What are you waiting for? I wouldn't leave her for Tarboe! Look here, Carnac, I wanted you to do what Tarboe's doing, and you wouldn't. You cheeked me--so I took him in. He's made good every foot of the way. He's a wonder. I'm a millionaire. I'm two times a millionaire, and I got the money honestly. I gave one-third of it to Fabian, and he left us. I paid him in cash, and now he's fighting me."

Carnac bristled up: "What else could he do? He might have lived on the interest of the money, and done nothing. You trained him for business, and he's gone on with the business you trained him for. There are other lumber firms. Why don't you quarrel with them? Why do you drop on Fabian as if he was dirt?"

"Belloc's a rogue and a liar."

"What difference does that make? Isn't it a fair fight? Don't you want anybody to sit down or stand up till you tell them to? Is it your view you shall tyrannize, browbeat, batter, and then that everybody you love, or pretend to love, shall bow down before you as though you were eternal law? I'm glad I didn't. I'm making my own life. You gave me a chance in your business, and I tried it, and declined it. You gave it to some one else, and I approved of it. What more do you want?"

Suddenly a new spirit of defiance awoke in him. "What I owe you I don't know, but if you'll make out what you think is due, for what you've done for me in the way of food and clothes and education, I'll see you get it all. Meanwhile, I want to be free to move and do as I will."

John Grier sat down in his chair again, cold, merciless, with a scornful smile.

"Yes, yes," he said slowly, "you'd have made a great business man if you'd come with me. You refused. I don't understand you--I never did. There's only one thing that's alike in us, and that's a devilish self-respect, self-assertion, self-dependence. There's nothing more to be said between us--nothing that counts. Don't get into a passion, Carnac. It don't become you. Good-night--good-night."

Suddenly his mother's face produced a great change in Carnac. Horror, sorrow, remorse, were all there. He looked at John Grier; then at his mother. The spirit of the bigger thing crept into his heart. He put his arm around his mother and kissed her.

"Good-night, mother," he said. Then he went to his father and held out a hand. "You don't mind my speaking what I think?" he continued, with a smile. "I've had a lot to try me. Shake hands with me, father. We haven't found the way to walk together yet. Perhaps it will come; I hope so."

Again a flash of passion seized John Grier. He got to his feet. "I'll not shake hands with you, not to night. You can't put the knife in and turn it round, and then draw it out and put salve on the wound and say everything's all right. Everything's all wrong. My family's been my curse. First one, then another, and then all against me,--my whole family against me!"

He dropped back in his chair sunk in gloomy reflection.

"Well, good-night," said Carnac. "It will all come right some day."

A moment afterwards he was gone. His mother sat down in her seat by the window; his father sat brooding by the table.

Carnac stole down the hillside, his heart burning in him. It had not been a successful day.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF THE THREE TREES

During Carnac's absence, Denzil had lain like an animal, watching, as it were, the doorway out of which Tarboe came and went. His gloom at last became fanaticism. During all the eight months of Carnac's absence he prowled in the precincts of memory.

While Junia was at home he had been watchfully determined to save her from Tarboe, if possible. He had an obsession of wrong-mindedness which is always attached to crime. Though Luke Tarboe had done him no wrong,

and was entitled, if he could, to win Junia for himself, to the mind of Denzil the stain of his brother's past was on Tarboe's life. He saw Tarboe and Junia meet; he knew Tarboe put himself in her way, and he was right in thinking that the girl, with a mind for comedy and coquetry, was drawn instinctively to danger.

Undoubtedly the massive presence of Tarboe, his animal-like, bull-headed persistency, the fun at his big mouth and the light in his bold eye had a kind of charm for her. It was as though she placed herself within the danger zone to try her strength, her will; and she had done it without real loss. More than once, as she waited in the office for old John Grier to come, she had a strange, intuitive feeling that Tarboe might suddenly grip her in his arms.

She flushed at the thought of it; it seemed so absurd. Yet that very thought had passed through the mind of the man. He was by nature a hunter; he was self-willed and reckless. No woman had ever moved him in his life until this girl crossed his path, and he reached out towards her with the same will to control that he had used in the business of life. Yet, while this brute force suggested physical control of the girl, it had its immediate reaction. She was so fine, so delicate, and yet so full of summer and the free unfettered life of the New World, so unimpassioned physically, yet so passionate in mind and temperament, that he felt he must atone for the wild moment's passion--the passion of possession, which had made him long to crush her to his breast. There was nothing physically repulsive in it; it was the wild, strong life of conquering man, of which he had due share. For, as he looked at her sitting in his office, her perfect health, her slim boyishness, her exquisite lines and graceful turn of hand, arm and body, or the flower-like turn of the neck, were the very harmony and poetry of life. But she was terribly provoking too; and he realized that she was an unconscious coquette, that her spirit loved mastery as his did.

Denzil could not know this, however. It was impossible for him to analyse the natures of these two people. He had instinct, but not enough to judge the whole situation, and so for two months after Carnac disappeared he had lived a life of torture. Again and again he had determined to tell Junia the story of Tarboe's brother, but instinctive delicacy stopped him. He could not tell her the terrible story which had robbed him of all he loved and had made him the avenger of the dead. A half-dozen times after she came back from John Grier's office, with slightly heightening colour, and the bright interest in her eyes, and had gone about the garden fondling the flowers, he had started towards her; but had stopped short before her natural modesty. Besides, why should he tell her? She had her own life to make, her own row to hoe. Yet, as the weeks passed, it seemed he must break upon this dangerous romance; and then suddenly she went to visit her sick aunt in the Far West. Denzil did not know, however, that, in John Grier's office as she had gone over figures of a society in which she was interested, the big hand of Tarboe had suddenly closed upon her fingers, and that his head bent down beside hers for one swift instant, as though he would whisper to her. Then she quickly detached herself, yet smiled at him, as she said reprovingly:

"You oughtn't to do that. You'll spoil our friendship."

She did not wait longer. As he stretched out his hands to her, his face had gone pale: she vanished through the doorway, and in forty-eight hours was gone to her sick aunt. The autumn had come and the winter and the spring, and the spring was almost gone when she returned; and, with her return, Catastrophe lifted its head in the person of Denzil.

Perhaps it was imperative instinct that brought Junia back in an hour coincident with Carnac's return--perhaps. In any case, there it was. They had both returned, as it were, in the self-same hour, each having endured a phase of emotion not easy to put on paper.

Denzil told her of Carnac's return, and she went to the house where Carnac's mother lived, and was depressed at what she saw and felt. Mrs. Grier's face was not that of one who had good news. The long arms almost hurt when they embraced her. Yet Carnac was a subject of talk between them--open, clear eyed talk. The woman did not know what to say, except to praise her boy, and the girl asked questions cheerfully, unimportantly as to sound, but with every nerve tingling. There was, however, so much of the comedienne in her, so much coquetry, that only one who knew her well could have seen the things that troubled her behind all. As though to punish herself, she began to speak of Tarboe, and Mrs. Grier's face clouded; she spoke more of Tarboe, and the gloom deepened. Then, with the mask of coquetry still upon her she left Carnac's mother abashed, sorrowful and alone.

Tarboe had called in her absence. Entering the garden, he saw Denzil at work. At the click of the gate Denzil turned, and came forward.

"She ain't home," he said bluntly. "She's out. She ain't here. She's up at Mr. Grier's house, bien sur."

To Tarboe Denzil's words were offensive. It was none of Denzil's business whether he came or went in this house, or what his relations with Junia were. Democrat though he was, he did not let democracy transgress his personal associations. He knew that the Frenchman was less likely to say and do the crude thing than the Britisher.

Tarboe knew of the position held by Denzil in the Shale household; and that long years of service had given him authority. All this, however, could not atone for the insolence of Denzil's words, but he had controlled men too long to act rashly.

"When will Mademoiselle be back?" he asked, putting a hand on himself.

"To-night," answered Denzil, with an antipathetic eye.

"Don't be a damn fool. Tell me the hour when you think she will be at home. Before dinner--within the next sixty minutes?"

"Ma'm'selle is under no orders. She didn't say when she would be back--but no!"

"Do you think she'll be back for dinner?" asked Tarboe, smothering his anger, but get to get his own way.

"I think she'll be back for dinner!" and he drove the spade into the ground.

"Then I'll sit down and wait." Tarboe made for the verandah.

Denzil presently trotted after and said: "I'd like a word with you."

Tarboe turned round. "Well, what have you got to say?"

"Better be said in my house, not here," replied Denzil. His face was pale, but there was fire in his eyes. There was no danger of violence, and, if there were, Tarboe could deal with it. Why should there be violence? Why should that semi-insanity in Denzil's eyes disturb him? The one thing to do was to forge ahead. He nodded.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked presently, as they passed through the gate.

"To my little house by the Three Trees. I've got things I'd like to show you, and there's some things I'd like to say. You are a big hulk of a man, and I'm nobody, but yet I've been close to you and yours in my time --that's so, for sure."

"You've been close to me and mine in your time, eh? I didn't know that."

"No, you didn't know it. Nobody knew it--I've kept it to myself. Your family wasn't all first-class--but no."

They soon reached the plain board-house, with the well-laid foundation of stone, by the big Three Trees. Inside the little spare, undecorated room, Tarboe looked round. It was all quiet and still enough. It was like a lodge in the wilderness. Somehow, the atmosphere of it made him feel apart and lonely. Perhaps that was a little due to the timbered ceiling, to the walls with cedar scantlings showing, to the crude look of everything--the head of a moose, the skins hanging down the sides of the walls, the smell of the cedar, and the swift movement of a tame red squirrel, which ran up the walls and over the floor and along the chimney-piece, for Denzil avoided the iron stove so common in these new cold lands, and remained faithful to a huge old-fashioned mantel.

Presently Denzil faced him, having closed the door. "I said I'd been near to your family and you didn't believe me. Sit down, please to, and I'll tell you my story."

Seating himself with a little curt laugh, Tarboe waved a hand as though to say: "Go ahead. I'm ready."

It was difficult for Denzil to begin. He walked up and down the room, muttering and shaking his head. Presently, however, he made the Sign of

the Cross upon himself, and, leaning against the wall, and opposite to Tarboe, he began the story he had told Carnac.

His description of his dead fiancée had flashes of poetry and excruciating touches of life:

"She had no mother, and there was lots of things she didn't know because of that--ah, plenty! She had to learn, and she brought on her own tragedy by not knowing that men, even when good to look at, can't be trusted; that every place, even in the woods and the fields where every one seems safe to us outdoor people, ain't safe--but no. So she trusted, and then one day--"

For the next five minutes the words poured from him in moroseness. He drew a picture of the lonely wood, of the believing credulous girl and the masterful, intellectual, skilful man. In the midst of it Tarboe started. The description of the place and of the man was familiar. He had a vision of a fair young girl encompassed by clanger; he saw her in the man's arms; the man's lips to hers, and--

"Good God--good God!" he said twice, for a glimmer of the truth struck him. He knew what his brother had done. He could conceive the revenge to his brother's amorous hand. He listened till the whole tale was told; till the death of the girl in the pond at home--back in her own little home. Then the rest of the story shook him.

"The verdict of the coroner's court was that he was shot by his own hand --by accident," said Denzil. "That was the coroner's verdict, but yes! Well, he was shot by his own gun, but not by his own hand. There was some one who loved the girl, took toll. The world did not know, and does not know, but you know--you--you, the brother of him that spoiled a woman's life! Do you think such a man should live? She was the sweetest girl that ever lived, and she loved me! She told me the truth--and he died by his own gun--in the woods; but it wasn't accident--it wasn't accident--but no! The girl had gone, but behind her was some one that loved her, and he settled it once for all."

As he had told the story, Denzil's body seemed to contract; his face took on an insane expression. It was ghastly pale, but his eyes were aflame. His arms stretched out with grim realism as he told of the death of Almeric Tarboe.

"You've got the whole truth, m'sieu'. I've told it you at last. I've never been sorry for killing him--never--never--never. Now, what are you going to do about it--you--his brother--you that come here making love too?"

As the truth dawned upon Tarboe, his great figure stretched itself. A black spirit possessed him.

When Denzil had finished, Tarboe stood up. There was dementia, cruelty, stark purpose in his eyes, in every movement.

"What am I going to do? You killed my brother! Well, I'm going to kill you. God blast your soul--I'm going to kill you!"

He suddenly swooped upon Denzil, his fingers clenched about the thick throat, insane rage was on him.

At that moment there was a knock at the door, it opened, and Carnac stepped inside. He realized the situation and rushed forward. There was no time to struggle.

"Let him go," he cried. "You devil--let him go." Then with all his might, he struck Tarboe in the face. The blow brought understanding back to Tarboe. His fingers loosed from the Frenchman's throat, and Carnac caught Denzil as he fell backwards.

"Good God!" said Carnac. "Good God, Tarboe! Wasn't it enough for your brother to take this man's love without your trying to take his life?"

Carnac's blow brought conviction to Tarboe, whose terrible rage passed away. He wiped the blood from his face.

"Is the little devil all right?" he whispered.

Denzil spoke: "Yes. This is the second time M'sieu' Carnac has saved my life."

Carnac intervened. "Tell me, Tarboe, what shall you do, now you know the truth?"

At last Tarboe thrust out a hand. "I don't know the truth," he said.

By this Carnac knew that Denzil was safe from the law.

CHAPTER XV

CARNAC AND JUNIA

Tarboe did not see Junia that evening nor for many evenings, but Carnac and Junia met the next day in her own house. He came on her as she was arranging the table for midday dinner. She had taken up again the threads of housekeeping, cheering her father, helping the old French-woman cook--a huge creature who moved like a small mountain, and was a tyrant in her way to the old cheerful avocat, whose life had been a struggle for existence, yet whose one daughter had married a rich lumberman, and whose other daughter could marry wealth, handsomeness and youth, if she chose.

When Carnac saw Junia she was entering the dining-room with flowers and fruit, and he recalled the last time they met, when she had thrust the farewell bouquet of flowers into his hand. That was in the early autumn,

and this was in late spring, and the light in her face was as glowing as then. A remembrance of the scene came to the minds of both, and the girl gave a little laugh.

"Well, well, Carnac," she said gaily, her cheek flushing, her eyes warm with colour: "well, I sent you away with flowers. Did they bring you luck?" She looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Yes, they brought me a perfect remembrance--of one who has always been to me like the balm of Gilead."

"Soothing and stimulating, eh?" she asked, as she put the flowers on the table and gave him her hand--no, she suddenly gave him both hands with a rush of old-time friendship, which robbed it of all personal emotion.

For a moment he held her hands. He felt them tremble in his warm clasp, the delicate, shivering pulsation of youth, the womanly feeling. It was for an instant only, because she withdrew her fingers. Then she caught up an apple from the dish she had brought in, and tossed it to him.

"For a good boy," she said. "You have been a good boy, haven't you?"

"I think so, chiefly by remembering a good girl."

"That's a pretty compliment--meant for me?"

"Yes, meant for you. I think you understand me better than anyone else."

He noticed her forehead wrinkle slightly, and a faint, incredulous smile come to her lips.

"I shouldn't think I understand you, Carnac," she said, over her shoulder, as she arranged dishes on the sideboard. "I shouldn't think I know you well. There's no Book of Revelations of your life except in your face."

She suddenly turned full on him, and held his eyes. "Carnac, I think your face looks honest. I've always thought so, and yet I think you're something of a scamp, a rogue and a thief."

There was determination at her lips, through which, though only slightly apart, her beautiful teeth, so straight, so regular, showed. "You don't play fair. What's the good of having a friend if you don't tell your friend your troubles? And you've been in trouble, Carnac, and you're fighting it through alone. Is that wise? You ought to tell some bad man, or some good woman--if they're both clever--what's vexing you.

"You see the bad clever man would probably think out something that would have the same effect as the good clever woman. They never would think out the same thing, but each 'd think out what would help you."

"But you've just said I'm a bad clever man. Why shouldn't I work out my own trouble?"

"Oh, you're bad enough," she answered, "but you're not clever enough."

He smiled grimly. "I'm not sure though about the woman. Perhaps I'll tell the good clever woman some day and let her help me, if she can. But I'd warn her it won't be easy."

"Then there's another woman in it!"

He did not answer. He could not let her know the truth, yet he was sure she would come to know it one way or another.

At that moment she leaned over the table and stretched a hand to arrange something. The perfection of her poise, the beauty of her lines, the charm of her face seized Carnac, and, with an impulse, he ran his arm around her waist.

"Junia--Junia!" he said in a voice of rash, warm feeling.

She was like a wild bird caught in its flight. A sudden stillness held her, and then she turned her head towards him, subdued inquiry in her eyes. For a moment only she looked--and then she said:

"Take your arm away, please."

The conviction that he ought not to make any sign of love to her broke his sudden passion. He drew back ashamed, yet defiant, rebuked, yet rebellious. It was like a challenge to her. A sarcastic smile crossed her lips.

"What a creature of impulses you are, Carnac! When we were children the day you saved Denzil years ago you flung your arms around me and kissed me. I didn't understand anything then, and what's more I don't think you did. You were a wilful, hazardous boy, and went your way taking the flowers in the garden that didn't belong to you. Yet after all these years, with an impulse behind which there is nothing--nothing at all, you repeat that incident."

Suddenly passion seemed to possess her. "How dare you trifle with things that mean so much! Have you learned nothing since I saw you last? Can nothing teach you, Carnac? Can you not learn how to play the big part? If you weren't grown up, do you know what I would do? I would slap the face of an insolent, thoughtless, hopeless boy." Then her temper seemed to pass. She caught up an apple again and thrust it into his hand. "Go and eat that, Adam. Perhaps it'll make you wise like the old Adam. He put his faults upon a woman."

"So do I," said Carnac. "So do I."

"That's what you would do, but you mustn't play that sort of game with a good woman." She burst out laughing. "For a man you're a precious fool! I don't think I want to see you again. You don't improve. You're full of horrid impulses." Her indignation came back. "How dare you put your

arm around me!"

"It was the impulse of my heart. I can say no more; if I could I would. There's something I should like to tell you, but I mustn't." He put the apple down.

"About the other woman, I suppose," she said coldly, the hot indignation gone from her lips.

He looked her steadfastly in the eyes. "If you won't trust me--if you won't trust me--"

"I've always trusted you," she replied, "but I don't trust you now. Don't you understand that a good girl hates conduct like yours?"

Suddenly with anger he turned upon her. "Yes, I understand everything, but you don't understand. Why won't you believe that the reason I won't tell you my trouble is that it's best you shouldn't know? You're a young girl; you don't know life; you haven't seen it as I've seen it--in the sewage, in the ditch, on the road, on the mountain and in the bog. I want you to keep faith with your old friend who doesn't care what the rest of the world thinks, but who wants your confidence. Trust me--don't condemn me. Believe me, I haven't been wanton. Won't you trust me?"

The spirit of egotism was alive in her. She knew how much she had denied herself in the past months. She did not know whether she loved him, but injured pride tortured her. Except in a dance and in sports at a picnic or recreation-ground no man had ever put his arms around her. No man except Carnac, and that he had done it was like a lash upon the raw skinless flesh. If she had been asked by the Almighty whether she loved Carnac, she would have said she did not know. This was not a matter of love; but of womanhood, of self-respect, of the pride of one who cannot ask for herself what she wants in the field of love, who must wait to be wooed and won.

"You don't think I'm straight," he said in protest. "You think I'm no good, that I'm a fraud. You're wrong. Believe me, that is the truth." He came closer up to her. "Junia, if you'll stand by me, I'm sure I'll come out right. I've been caught in a mesh I can't untangle yet, but it can be untangled, and when it is, you shall know everything, because then you'll understand. I can free myself from the tangle, but it could never be explained--not so the world would believe. I haven't trifled with you. I would believe in you even if I saw, or thought I saw, the signs of wrong in you. I would know that at heart you were good. I put my faith in you long ago--last year I staked all on your friendship, and I haven't been deceived."

He smiled at her, his soul in his eyes. There was truth in his smile, and she realized it.

After a moment, she put out a hand and pushed him gently from her. "Go away, Carnac, please--now," she said softly.

A moment afterwards he was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN GRIER MAKES A JOURNEY

John Grier's business had beaten all past records. Tarboe was everywhere: on the river, in the saw-mills, in the lumber-yards, in the office. Health and strength and goodwill were with him, and he had the confidence of all men in the lumber-world. It was rumoured that he was a partner of John Grier, and it was a good thing for him as well as for the business. He was no partner, however; he was on a salary with a bonus percentage of the profits; but that increased his vigour.

There were times when he longed for the backwoods life; when the smell of the pines and the firs and the juniper got into his nostrils; when he heard, in imagination, the shouts of the river-men as they chopped down the trees, sawed the boles into standard lengths, and plunged the big timbers into the stream, or round the fire at night made call upon the spirit of recreation. In imagination, he felt the timbers creaking and straining under his feet; he smelt the rich soup from the cook's caboose; he drank basins of tea from well-polished metal; he saw the ugly rows in the taverns, where men let loose from river duty tried to regain civilian life by means of liquor and cards; he heard the stern thud of a hard fist against a piece of wood; he saw twenty men spring upon another twenty with rage in their faces; he saw hundreds of men arrived in civilization once again striking for their homes and loved ones, storming with life. He saw the door flung open, and the knee-booted, corduroyed river-man, with red sash around his waist and gold rings in his ears, seize the woman he called wife and swing her to him with a hungry joy; he saw the children pushed gently here, or roughly, but playfully, tossed in the air and caught again; but he also saw the rough spirits of the river march into their homes like tyrants returned, as it were, cursing and banging their way back to their rightful nests.

Occasionally he would wish to be in it all again, out in the wild woods and on the river and in the shanty, free and strong and friendly and a bit ferocious. All he had known of the backwoods life filled his veins, tortured him at times.

From the day that both wills were made and signed, no word had been spoken concerning them between him and John Grier. He admired certain characteristics of John Grier; some secret charities, some impulsive generosity, some signs of public spirit. The old man was fond of animals, and had given water-troughs to the town; and his own horses and the horses he used in the woods were always well fed. Also, in all his arrangements for the woods, he was generous. He believed in feeding his men well. It was rough food--beans, potatoes, peas, lentils, pork in barrels-salted pork; but there was bread of the best, rich soup, pork well boiled and fried, with good tea, freshly made. This was the regular

fare, and men thrive on it.

One day, however, shortly after Carnac's return home, there came a change in the scene. Things had been going badly for a couple of days and the old man had been seriously overworked. He had not listened to the warnings of Tarboe, or to the hints thrown out by his own punished physique. He was not a man to take hints. Everything that vexed his life roused opposition. This Tarboe knew, but he also knew that the business must suffer, if the old man suffered.

When John Grier left the office it was with head bowed and mind depressed. Nothing had happened to cause him grave anxiety, yet he had been below par for several hours. Why was he working so hard? Why was life to him such a concentration? Why did he seek for more money and to get more power? To whom could it go? Not to Fabian; not to his wife. To Tarboe--well, there was not enough in that! This man had only lately come into his life, and was only near to him in a business sense. Carnac was near in every sense that really mattered, and Carnac was out of it all.

He was not loved, and in his heart of hearts he knew it, but he had had his own way, and he loved himself. No one seemed to care for him, not even his wife. How many years was it since they had roomed together? Yet as he went towards his own home now, he recalled the day they were married, and for the first time had drawn as near to each other as life could draw. He had thought her wonderful then, refined, and oh! so rich in life's gifts. His love had almost throttled her. She was warm and bountiful and full of temperament. So it went for three years, and then slowly he drew away from her until at last, returning from the backwoods, he had gone to another room, and there had stayed. Very occasionally he had smothered her with affection, but that had passed, until now, middle-aged, she seemed to be not a room away from him, but a thousand rooms away. He saw it with no reproach to himself. He forgot it was he who had left her room, and had set up his own tabernacle, because his hours differed from hers, and because she tossed in her bed at nights, and that made him restless too.

Yet, if his love had been the real thing, he would have stayed, because their lives were so similar, and the rules of domestic life in French Canada were so fixed. He had spoiled his own household, destroyed his own peace, forsaken his own nest, outlived his hope and the possibility of further hope, except more business success, more to leave behind him.

That was the stern truth. Had he been a different man the devotion his wife had shown would have drawn him back to her; had she been a different woman, unvexed by a horrible remembrance, she would have made his soul her own and her soul his own once again. She had not dared to tell him the truth; afraid more for her boy's sake than for her own. She had been glad that Tarboe had helped to replace the broken link with Fabian, that he had taken the place which Carnac, had he been John Grier's son, ought to have taken. She could not blame Carnac, and she could not blame her husband, but the thing ate into her heart.

John Grier found her sitting by her table in the great living-room, patient and grave, and yet she smiled at him, and rose as he came into the room. His troubled face brought her forward quickly. She stretched out a hand appealingly to him.

"What's the matter, John? Has anything upset you?"

"I'm not upset."

"Yes you are," she urged, "but, yes, you are! Something has gone wrong."

"Nothing's gone wrong that hasn't been wrong for many a year," he said.

"What's been wrong for many a year?"

"The boys you brought into this world--your sons!" he burst out. "Why isn't Carnac working with me? There must have been something damned bad in the bringing up of those boys. I've not, got the love of any of you, and I know it. Why should I be thrown over by every one?"

"Every one hasn't thrown you over. Mr. Tarboe hasn't. You've been in great spirits about him. What's the matter?"

He waved a hand savagely at her, with an almost insane look in his eyes.

"What's he to me! He's a man of business. In a business way I like him, but I want my own flesh and blood by me in my business. I wanted Carnac, and he wouldn't come--a few weeks only he came. I had Fabian, and he wouldn't stay. If I'd had a real chance--"

He broke off, with an outward savage protest of his hands, his voice falling.

"If you'd had your chance, you'd have made your own home happy," she said sadly. "That was your first duty, not your business--your home--your home! You didn't care about it. There were times when for months you forgot me; and then--then--"

Suddenly a dreadful suspicion seized his brain. His head bent forward, his shoulders thrust out, he stumbled towards her.

"Then--well, what then!" he gasped. "Then--you--forgot--"

She realized she had gone too far, saw the storm in his mind.

"No--no--no, I didn't forget you, John. Never--but--"

She got no farther. Suddenly his hands stretched out as if to seize her shoulders, his face became tortured--he swayed. She caught him. She lowered him to the floor, and put a hassock under his head. Then she rang the bell--rang it--and rang again.

When help came, all was too late. John Grier had gone for ever.

CHAPTER XVII

THE READING OF THE WILL

As Tarboe stood in the church alone at the funeral, in a pew behind John Grier's family, sadness held him. He had known, as no one else knew, that the business would pass into his own hands. He suddenly felt his task too big for him, and he looked at Carnac now with sympathy. Carnac had brains, capacity, could almost take his father's place; he was tactful, intuitive, alert. Yet Carnac, at present, was out of the question. He knew the stress of spirit which had turned Carnac from the opportunity lying at his feet.

In spite of himself there ran through his mind another thought. Near by, at the left, dressed in mourning also, was Junia. He had made up his mind that Junia should be his, and suddenly the usefulness of the business about to fall into his hands became a weapon in the field of Love. He was physically a finer man than Carnac; he had capacity; he had personality; and he would have money and position--for a time at least. In that time, why should he not win this girl with the wonderful eyes and hair, with the frankness and candour of unspoiled girlhood in her face? Presently he would be in the glare of sensation, in the height of as dramatic an episode as comes to the lives of men; and in the episode he saw advantages which should weigh with any girl.

Then had come the reading of the will after the funeral rites were over, and he, with the family, were gathered in the dining-room of the House on the Hill.

He was scarcely ready, however, for the prodigious silence following the announcement read by the lawyer. He felt as though life was suspended for many minutes, when it was proclaimed that he, Luke Tarboe, would inherit the property. Although he knew of the contents of the will his heart was thumping like a sledge-hammer.

He looked round the room slowly. The only embarrassment to be seen was on the faces of Fabian and his wife. Mrs. Grier and Carnac showed nothing. Carnac did not even move; by neither gesture nor motion of body did he show aught. At the close of it all, he came to Tarboe and held out a hand.

"Good luck to you, Tarboe!" he said. "You'll make a success, and that's what he wanted more than anything else. Good luck to you!" he said again and turned away. . . .

When John Grier's will was published in the Press consternation filled the minds of all. Tarboe had been in the business for under two years, yet here he was left all the property with uncontracted power. Mrs. John Grier was to be paid during her life a yearly stipend of twenty thousand

dollars from the business; she also received a grant of seventy thousand dollars. Beyond that, there were a few gifts to hospitals and for the protection of horses, while to the clergyman of the parish went one thousand dollars. It certainly could not be called a popular will, and, complimentary as the newspapers were to the energy and success of John Grier, few of them called him public-spirited, or a generous-hearted citizen. In his death he paid the price of his egotism.

The most surprised person, however, was Junia Shale.

To her it was shameful that Carnac should be eliminated from all share in the abundant fortune John Grier had built up. It seemed fantastic that the fortune and the business--and the business was the fortune--should be left to Tarboe. Had she known the contents of the will before John Grier was buried, she would not have gone to the funeral. Egotistic she had known Grier to be, and she imagined the will to be a sudden result of anger. He was dead and buried. The places that knew him knew him no more. All in an hour, as it were, the man Tarboe--that dominant, resourceful figure--had come into wealth and power.

After Junia read the substance of the will, she went springing up the mountain-side, as it were to work off her excitement by fatigue. At the mountain-top she gazed over the River St. Lawrence with an eye blind to all except this terrible distortion of life. Yet through her obfuscation, there ran admiration for Tarboe. What a man he was! He had captured John Grier as quickly and as securely as a night fisherman spears a sturgeon in the flare at the bow of the boat. Tarboe's ability was as marked as John Grier's mad policy. It was strange that Tarboe should have bewildered and bamboozled--if that word could be used--the old millowner. It was as curious and thrilling as John Grier's fanaticism.

Already the pinch of corruption had nipped his flesh; he was useless, motionless in his narrow house, and yet, unseen but powerful, his influence went on. It shamed a wife and son; it blackened the doors of a home; it penalized a family.

Indeed he had been a bad man, and yet she could not reconcile it all with a wonderful something in him, a boldness, a sense of humour, an everlasting energy, an electric power. She had never seen anyone vitalize everything round him as John Grier had done. He threw things from him like an exasperated giant; he drew things to him like an Angel of the Covenant. To him life was less a problem than an experiment, and this last act, this nameless repudiation of the laws of family life, was like the sign of a chemist's activity. As she stood on the mountain-top her breath suddenly came fast, and she caught her bosom with angry hands.

"Carnac--poor Carnac!" she exclaimed.

What would the world say? There were those, perhaps, who thought Carnac almost a ne'er-do-well, but they were of the commercial world where John Grier had been supreme.

At the same moment, Carnac in the garden of his old home beheld the river too and the great expanse of country, saw the grey light of evening on the distant hills, and listened to Fabian who condoled with him. When Fabian had gone, Carnac sat down on a bench and thought over the whole thing. Carnac had no quarrel with his fate. When in the old home on the hill he had heard the will, it had surprised him, but it had not shocked him. He had looked to be the discarded heir, and he knew it now without rebellion. He had never tried to smooth the path to that financial security which his father could give. Yet now that disaster had come, there was a glimmer of remorse, of revolt, because there was some one besides himself who might think he had thrown away his chances. He did not know that over on the mountain-side, vituperating the memory of the dead man, Junia was angry only for Carnac's sake.

With the black storm of sudden death roaring in his ears, he had a sense of freedom, almost of licence. Nothing that had been his father's was now his own, or his mother's, except the land and house on which they were. All the great business John Grier had built up was gone into the hands of the usurper, a young, bold, pestilent, powerful, vigorous man. It seemed suddenly horrible that the timber-yards and the woods and the offices, and the buildings of John Grier's commercial business were not under his own direction, or that of his mother, or brother. They had ceased to be factors in the equation; they were 'non est' in the postmortem history of John Grier. How immense a nerve the old man had to make such a will, which outraged every convention of social and family life; which was, in effect, a proclamation that his son Carnac had no place in John Grier's scheme of things, while John Grier's wife was rewarded like some faithful old servant. Yet some newspapers had said he was a man of goodwill, and had appreciation of talent, adding, however, the doubtful suggestion that the appreciation stopped short of the prowess of his son Carnac in the field of Art. It was evident John Grier's act was thought by the conventionalist to be a wicked blunder.

As Carnac saw the world where there was not a single material thing that belonged to him, he had a sudden conviction that his life would run in other lines than those within which it had been drawn to the present time. Looking over this wonderful prospect of the St. Lawrence, he had an insistent feeling that he ought to remain in the land where he was born, and give of whatever he was capable to its life. It was all a strenuous problem. For Carnac there was, duly or unduly, fairly or unfairly, a fate better than that of John Grier. If he died suddenly, as his father had died, a handful of people would sorrow with excess of feeling, and the growing world of his patrons would lament his loss. No one really grieved for John Grier's departure, except--strange to say --Tarboe.

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