VALLEY OF THE STARS

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NOTE

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Chapter I
A POET SANG TO ME

They lay in the deep grass and the ferns and the bracken high up on the Beaumont, looking down on the valley, down on the world. Simonne's chin was cupped in her hands; Pierre sat, cross-legged, the little red-covered notebook he always carried, open on his knee, his pencil poised above it, his brow furrowed. It was so hard to look at Simonne and then put words on paper. There were no words for what he felt. Angrily he tore out the sheet he had scribbled upon, crumpled it into a ball and flung it away. The vagrant wind seized it and rolled it over the grass.

"Surrender!" She slanted grey-green eyes at him, her full mouth curving. "I don't blame you. It's Spring in Acadie, Pierrot—and would you seek to put that in words?" She waved her hand at the Valley of Memramcook where the orchards climbed the slopes in clouds of snowy blossom, where the sea-wind riffled the high marsh grass and the river wound in gleaming beauty between the dikes.

"I could do something with that, Simonne; it is you who show me how small are my talents. I look at you and I want to write an epic."

"No girl wants an epic, Pierre. I should fall asleep before you had finished reciting the first canto."

"I love you, Simonne."

She looked at him slowly, at his brown face, his black eyes that seemed to glow, his black hair waved by the wind. Tall Pierre. Strong, slender, bold Pierre.

"That is epic enough for me," she said, plucking a blade of grass and twisting it around her fingers.

"But you do not love me!"

"I dare not. See—" She pointed with the spear-head of grass to the red house far below them, an old and stately house. "The roof looks good from here, *mon ami*, but if you were close to it you would know that it needs shingles; and from here you cannot see how scarred and faded the paint is, how the sills are sagging, how the gardens are neglected and the outbuildings ready to fall down and destroy the few poor horses, cows and pigs that remain to the House of Caron, of which I, Simonne, am the last frail hope."

"Why should you take it all on your shoulders? Just because your family left you a heritage of fame—"

"Why must I remain silent when the village poet and schoolmaster recites me an epic; turn from him and think most earnestly of worldly things? I do not know, Pierre. It would be easy, oh, so easy, just to close my eyes and feel the sunlight on my eyelids and the scent of the apple-blossoms in my soul—just to swim on a sea of light and warmth and fragrance—and listen to your verses. But I cannot." She shook back impatiently the curling chestnut hair that the wind drove down upon her brow.

"But what will you do? You are finished at the convent in a few weeks' time, your house and your farm are only hopeless weights on such little shoulders; there is nothing here for you."

"You forget Edmond." There was forced assurance in her voice. "My brother, you know, is a great man in France, a great engineer and a great aviator."

"But you have not heard from him in months. You do not know—"

"I know he would not fail me." There was pride—the pride of *grande dame*, the great lady, in her tone, in the lift of her chin, pride that would never let her admit the fears that had been born of her brother's long silence. Up to this quarter he had paid her way at the Convent of Ste.-Ursule and sent enough beside to maintain the Caron place at least after a fashion. Then had come silence, profound and mysterious.

"But if he should. If you are left alone to face the world—"

"Enough, Pierre." She stood up straight and tall. He too stood up, facing her, looking down on her, the deep chestnut of her hair, in which glowed

reddish lights, the sweep of her lashes, long and lovely, the contours of her slender body sculptured by the winds that crossed the marshland. Bravely she looked at him. "Yes, it may be that I shall be left alone to make my way. I shall make out as best I know how. Always, Pierre, I shall have the consolation of knowing that 'when I was fair and young, a poet sang to me,' made poems to me—epic poems in three or four words."

"Then you liked my epic?" His arms went out to her, sought to draw her to him, and for a moment it seemed that she would come to him. She loosed herself lithely, easily.

"No, Pierre. I want you to have nothing to regret and I do not want to have too much to remember."

"I could have no regrets, Simonne. And you—have no remembrances unless happy ones. I have nothing to offer you now." He smiled wanly. "A village-schoolmaster's prestige and his salary, a cottage on the fringe of the marsh and a poem or two. Someday I will have more." His dark eyes held a prophetic look. "Someday I will have fame, money—" He shook his head and his eyes looked sad. "And I will want to give it all to have back this hour, this hour of scent and blossom and green hill and blue sky and the wind in your hair, on a hilltop in Acadie. And I can never have it back."

"Maybe then it will not mean so much to you."

"Always, Simonne," he said earnestly, softly. "Always."

They walked slowly down the Beaumont, down the winding road to Memramcook Village, and the daisy heads and buttercups were thick along their way and in the hedges the small birds darted and sang. From the lowland meadows came the tinkle of the bronze bells on Holstein and Jersey and the slow sheep on the hillsides looked at them with quiet interest as they passed. It was sunset time and across the great valley, the high hills grew blacker and blacker as the sky's gold deepened into crimson and grew darker, as the great torch of the sun dropped below the world. There the steeple of St. Thomas Church pointed its sooty spire towards heaven and there the white cluster of the Convent of Ste.-Ursule had windows all of fire as the last light shone upon them.

"You'll hate to leave the convent, Simonne."

"In a way, yes. I've had peace there—so much peace. But I often wonder if we are really made for peace. If it doesn't make us more helpless. Birds would soon forget how to fly if there were no cats, if there were lots of food always at hand."

"You didn't learn that in the philosophy class of Sœur Brigide."

She laughed. "But no! There one learns mostly of heaven. She could draw a map of it, that good sister."

"I prefer Memramcook," said Pierre, gazing over the miles of hill and marsh and the river in the soft, lingering light. "Could heaven be better?"

She was spared an answer. Young Noë Brideau, the station-agent's son, came running up the hill, brandishing a yellow envelope—the second telegram that had come to Memramcook in his twelve-year-old memory. "For you, Ma'm'selle Caron! It is just now arrived, and all the way from France!"

"Thank you, Noë." She took the telegram with steady hand, but her eyes, meeting Pierre Gay's, asked for strength, for courage. She slipped a brown finger under the flap and slit the envelope. Her face did not change expression as she read, but she kept staring at the blue lines on the yellow sheet long, long after she must have learned their import.

Finally, she folded the paper, while Pierre and young Noë watched her uneasily. "It is well, Noë," she said quietly. "Here is something for you."

The little boy saluted and scampered away. Pierre questioned her with his eyes, wisely, pityingly. She said, "It is Edmond. He did not fail me. I knew he would not. But he is dead."

"Simonne!" He caught her hand in both his. It was cold, her hand. He felt that all her body was cold and the chill was going into her spirit. He longed to take her in his arms, to give her warmth, comfort, peace, but he knew that now, even in this moment of agony, she was farther away from him than ever before. Her sorrow was her own. No one could ease it, no one lessen its bitterness. Only tears would help. "Can't you cry, Simonne?" The strangeness of her eyes, the shadow over her face that was the shadow of Death's black wings, frightened him. "It will help you to cry."

"I cry—in here." She touched her breast, small and round under the blue convent dress.

"That is not good. Tears should be out."

"He died cruelly, Pierre. His aeroplane fell, caught fire. It must have been as if he was cremated. Ashes—and he was big and strong. And if ashes, they should have been scattered on this wind in his own land that he loved. They should have been scattered from the top of the Beaumont where you and I sat among the ferns. He used to love it up there—Edmond. It was he

who took me there first, when I had to be led by the hand. And he said, 'From here, Simonne, O, ma Simonne, you can see as much of the world as ever you'll need to see and more of beauty than from any other place.' But he soon forgot that. He wanted to climb higher than the Beaumont and look on wider scenes than this. Now I can cry, Pierre."

Her cheek lay against his lapel and his chin touched the softness of her hair. His arm light about her shoulder felt the long, racking sobs that shook her, that came from the deepest places of her being. Her hair was fragrant in his nostrils; fragrant as meadow-sweet, as apple-blossoms in the dew or green ferns on a brook's brim, was her youth, delicate, unspoiled, that made him think of a young flower opening, filled with wonder, epitomizing the great, the beautiful force of the life-stream, all in one little bud, all in one little body.

"There now, I am better, Pierre. I will go home now. I must hurry for I have to be back at the convent for Benediction at seven."

"Yes, it will be good to go there. You will find solace there—more than I can give you, though, God knows, little Simonne, I'd give my life to keep you from feeling pain."

"You are good to me, Pierrot. Sweet to me. And I shall not forget."

They came to the sagging gateposts of the Caron place—gateposts made of cobbles set in mortar. Once straight and impressive, they leaned at crazy angles now and the wrought-iron gates that hung from them were rusty and broken. Faded and weathered, too, were the walls of the old house glimpsed afar off up the driveway among the tall spruce and cedars and the poplars in their new pale green frocks.

"When may I see you again, Simonne?" He hated to lose her, hated to think of her alone for even a few minutes in that ancient barracks of a house. "Let me go as far as Ste.-Ursule with you?"

"Please, no, *mon ami*. I have just some books to get, some few things. Then I will take the train to Pont Lefebvre and from there ride across to St.-Joseph with Isaie, who carries the mail. And you may not see me for quite some time. I have my examinations to write and my valedictory to prepare and, oh, so many things." She tried to speak brightly of all these things that, an hour ago, had seemed so important, so worthwhile—her graduation, the day she had waited for so long, the hall crowded with parents and friends, the bishops in their purple, the dignitaries of the province, in morning-coats and dove-grey Ascot ties; the speeches, the music. But how could she go through with it now? What would it mean to her, so lonely, so young, with

the future a great and frightening question-mark? Edmond had been her tower of strength, Edmond, who had always called her "Little Simonne," always written to her as if she had not grown a day older since her twelfth birthday, six years ago, on which he had gone away.

"*Au revoir*, Pierre," she said quickly, and as quickly kissed his cheek, and ran up the weed-tangled drive, her hair flying, her full skirts blowing wildly—a lovely, lost little figure that made his heart throb achingly and made him hate the poor life that was his, that rendered him so helpless to do anything at all for her, that made even his speaking of love seem an act of treachery. How can you think of love, poor schoolmaster, let alone venture to tell her you love her? Why, you have only milk and bread and a bit of cheese for supper—and would you ask Simonne to share such fare! You need a hair-cut these last few weeks and it is most fortunate that you have the reputation of being something of a poet, otherwise one would snicker at your hair over your coat-collar. Simonne is for some man who has wealth and position, who can give her things worthy of her beauty. Bah, you could give her stale brioches and ballads—poor things for one so lovely.

And thus sadly thinking young Pierre strode angrily, dourly home to the little cottage on the edge of the great marsh, flung himself into his rickety armchair, lit his pipe and stared frowningly, unseeingly at the pale little stars that looked frightened in at his open door, and all about him rose the chorus of the birds and then the piping oratorio of the marsh-dwellers, the myriad frogs in their green-scummed ponds, in their ditches and sedgy shallows. And the wind sighed among the pine-trees and firs with gentle, wistful whisperings and the gull's wing-beat sounded overhead and the owl hooted distantly from the little churchyard up the hill. But all these things, that other nights he loved, he heeded not at all tonight. He thought only of her, of the childish sweetness of her mouth, the beauty of her that made him catch his breath and filled him with dreams so beautiful that they were near to madness.

No one lived at the Caron Place. An ancient dame, Artemise Gautreau, came from the village once a week to keep the house in order; her still more ancient husband, Alphonse, looked after the stock and did a little gardening. Artemise was there, in the kitchen, when Simonne returned. Her dim eyes could not see the havoc, the ravages of grief, in that young face. On the table were hot biscuits and jam and on the stove was tea drawing.

"You will eat your supper now, Ma'm'selle Simonne? It is ready for you."

"I will try, madame. It is—I do not feel like supper. It is Edmond. He is dead, madame—burned up in his aeroplane. Just now I have received the news."

"Aï!" Artemise waved her hands on high and on her face was an anguished look. "Aï! My poor little one, but this is sad for you. So alone you were, but then one thought of Edmond and knew that not always you would be alone."

"It is so." Simonne's eyes were dry; they had a fixed, unseeing look, as she sat down at the table and, putting her elbows upon it, rested her chin in her cupped hands. "I did not mind being alone, for I knew that he was—was somewhere, and he thought of me and one day I would see him again. He promised to come home for my graduation and I was so proud, so happy to think of him there in the audience listening while I read the valedictory. Ah, Edmond—Edmond—" She covered her eyes for a moment. The old dame sat down in the rocker by the stove, got up, poured the tea and brought it to her.

Then it was quiet there, not even the ticking of a clock, only the soft purr of the fire and now and then the scampering of a mouse deep in the walls. Lonely, empty, forlorn. Old Artemise remembered well when the big house rang with voices and laughter and footsteps gay and light, when Simonne's grandfather lived and all his sons and daughters thronged about him. All gone now, all vanished down strange, adventurous paths. Of the sons, three, including Guy, Simonne's father, had been killed in action; of the daughters one, returning from Indo-China, had perished when the *Georges Philippar* burned in the Red Sea, another had been in a car that hurtled off the Corniche road. They had lived gallantly, recklessly, brightly, these Carons, prodigal of their youth as of their wealth, careless of any future, forgetful of any past. Now Edmond had gone to join those tall, dark, laughing ghosts of the Caron men, those slender, lovely wraiths of the women of his house; and she sat here alone save for the old crone whose head nodded, who drowsed and awoke groaning, here in the tumbledown château that had cradled her race.

She got up unsteadily at last and went into the living-room to get the books she had left there. She stood gazing about her at the shadows, glad of the dimness of the twilight that mercifully hid the faded and shabby coverings, the torn and mended curtains, the rugs with their all but

obliterated patterns, the pathetic portraits of those who had died so young—her father, his brothers, Michel and Yvon, splendid in their uniforms with the ribbons of valour across their breasts. Edmond, young and smiling, seeming almost to speak to her, to call to her.

She ran from the room. It was like a tomb. So many things there to remind one sadly of life, of brightness, of joyous hours, of warm friendships and tender loves. And nothing—nothing at all remaining.

"I go back to Ste.-Ursule now, madame." She stopped with her hand on the knob of the kitchen door. "I think I shall not come back here next week."

"But your graduation-dress, Ma'm'selle Simonne!"

"I shall come the afternoon before graduation day. It will be time enough. I shall come at three and we can try it on then. I could not come back before that time. I—" She pulled the door open quickly and ran out into the yard and down the drive where the stars were beginning to shine among the cedars. Far off she heard the whistle of the train. It pulled into Memramcook Station just as she reached the platform. At Pont Lefebvre, only a few miles down the line, Isaie was waiting to pick up the mail. She climbed into his car and rode across the marsh to the Village of Ste.-Joseph and the kindly refuge of the convent.

That night, at prayers, the chaplain asked them all to pray for the repose of the soul of Edmond Caron. She hardly realized what the words meant, that it was her own brother who was dead, whom now the murmured prayer was for. "May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, at the mercy of God, rest in peace." One by one, on the altar, the tapers were going out; so one by one had all the bright moments of her life, after burning all too briefly, gone out, never to be rekindled. Now this, the brightest light she had ever known, had been snuffed out forever, and all about her was a vast darkness, terrible, frightening, in which was no tiniest pinpoint of light. Into that darkness she had to walk, walk not gropingly, timidly, but bravely, head held high, as was the tradition of her race, of those brave ones who had marched with Charlemagne, with St. Louis, with Montcalm.

There, the tapers were all out now. The sweet hum of young girls' voices died in a swift diminuendo. They rose as one, genuflected, filed from their benches out of the chapel, through the door to the great dormitories. Mother Angélique, the Superior, took her arm as she passed and walked along with her. The old nun's eyes were dark, bright, living, strangely young and clear, and her voice was so soft, so soothing—"I do not need to ask you to be brave, Simonne, nor to counsel you that never for a moment must you cease

to believe that in all things, no matter how wrong some of them may seem, God's hand is firm and sure and right, and that he takes away only to give back a thousand-fold. You believe that, Simonne?"

"Yes, Mother." The grey-green innocent eyes looked wide into the wisdom of the nun's. "Though God has taken what I most loved away from me, I shall believe that He knows best."

"It is well, my little one. God will love you."

She had sore need of someone's love in the days that followed—days without light or hope. She tried to forget, to lose herself in the work of her classes, the numerous examinations, the busy rush of Commencement preparations. All about her girls were talking of the dresses they would wear, this girl of how her mother had gone through all the great stores of Montreal to find the one most lovely, this other of how her cousin in New York had bought hers from a grand salon on Fifth Avenue. Then, of who would come to witness their graduation—"My uncle, Sire Georges Laporte, comes all the way from Quebec to present the prize he has donated." "My Aunt Hortense will come from Sherbrooke and I will go home in her great car with Jules, her chauffeur, to drive us."

And for Simonne—nothing. For that great day, nothing; and beyond that great day, still less. That was the thought that came rudely, frighteningly, into every hour of her day, and even at night haunted her dreams—after Commencement, what? Where should she go? What should she do? One never heard of girls finishing at Ste.-Ursule and going right to work and making enough money to live. One had to wait and perhaps write the Civil Service papers and then, if one passed, wait still longer for a place. And in the meantime one must live, one must eat.

There was the old house, of course, but it was worth nothing at all, since Edmond had borrowed as much money as he could on it, to finance his trip to France. True, he had paid some back, but the rest was far more than she would earn in years of work. She saw compassion in the eyes of her classmates, in the gentleness of her teachers, in the way they all spoke to her, favored her, spoiled her. She heard two of the very smallest girls talking in the playgrounds one day, almost weeping over her plight. "That poor Simonne—she has no father, no mother, no one to come to see her. Think of that, Berthe—to have no one in all this world to come look at your pretty dress and cry for joy over you!"

"What will she do, that lovely Simonne, when the convent is closed? Do you think, Evangeline, that Mother Angélique will let her stay here? Perhaps

she will become a nun and be here to teach us some day."

"I think not. One says the schoolmaster in Memramcook, whose name is Pierre Gay, is much in love with her and would make her his wife if she at all wanted him. But he is poor, that young man, with only a small cottage and no money at all."

"Ah, it is the misery, that."

"It makes one weep."

It made Simonne weep. She turned away quietly, quickly. They did not see her at all. She stumbled down the path to the Grotto and knelt on a prie-dieu and cried into her cupped hands and prayed incoherently—for what, she did not know. For courage perhaps, for the strength to go on, to believe, to have faith in the mercy of this God who had taken her parents and then taken Edmond, who had been all that remained to her, all her world. One must believe that He was good, this God, but she had loved Edmond so much.

The weeping ended quickly. There was some strength in her, some stiffness that soon put an end to the outward signs of sorrow. She would not weep, she must not. She would show them all how brave she was. The day after tomorrow, Closing Day, when she read the farewell-address, her voice would be firm and clear; it would ring out strongly. But she thought of the Roman gladiators—*morituri te salutamus*—we who are about to die, salute you. Like the other girls, she would stand on the threshold of life, but where their steps took them into bright gardens, into gracious houses and pleasant fields, hers—into what rough and stony tracks would her steps take her, into what regions of mist and darkness, into what places of terror and pain!

She went, next day, to Memramcook, to the old house where Artemise Gautreau, understudied by Madame Plourde, the village seamstress, waited to fit her dress. Ah, it was a lovely dress—a lovelier dress even than the one to find which the shops of Montreal had been turned inside out, or the one for which Fifth Avenue had been combed. Here was such satin as those poor girls would never know, such d'Alençon lace, such seed pearls, such exquisite workmanship—for this was indeed the dress, now revised by Artemise and Madame Plourde, that Simonne's mother, Amélie Labrecque, had worn when she was graduated from the Ursuline Convent in Quebec, the very dress which she had worn when first Guy Caron's eyes rested on her.

"You know well the history of this dress, Ma'm'selle Simonne?" Artemise spoke through a mouthful of pins that made her look rather like a

walrus with frozen whiskers. “You do not ever forget that, *bein*?”

“I do not forget, madame. It is the dress my good mother was wearing when he who was to be my father first met her and loved her.”

“And who knows,” began Madame Plourde, pointing her pin-whiskers at Artemise, “but what—” And Artemise stopped her with a scowl. One knew, in Memramcook, that the schoolmaster, Pierre Gay, was madly in love with Simonne Caron, and one did not at all approve of it—most certainly not. The Carons were a great family. True, they were poor now, they had nothing. But it was not fitting, even now, that this lovely Simonne should have to do with a wretched schoolmaster; who also wrote poetry.

“I do not think history will repeat itself, Madame Plourde,” smiled Simonne, looking down at the creamy beauty that sheathed her body, at the flaring skirt that billowed away from her slender hips in white waves of loveliness. “But I love to wear it, this gorgeous dress. I am proud to wear it —proud—” Her mouth quivered for an instant, then became firm and in the carriage of her head was a grace, a dignity, regal, superb, that awed and impressed the two old ones and made them feel that unease which besets the simple of heart when they meet that which they cannot understand. But she was always kind and gentle, Simonne, and thoughtful of those about her, and presently she had the ancients twittering with pride so honest was her praise of their handiwork.

She left them to put the finishing touches to the dress and walked slowly up the Beaumont. She thought of the many, many times she had climbed that hill, always with the anticipation of fresh discoveries of beauty. There one always found something new—some violet of a paler purple in the spring, some maple in the fall that flaunted a flamier red, some sky of sunset in the winter that spread hues more gorgeous and varied across the westering sky than any others seen before. Now, in early summer when the warm sun of June was working its magic with tree and flower, the road to the Beaumont was the road to Paradise. But, she thought, the next time I pass this way, all will be different. I, Simonne, will be different. I will have closed a door upon a part of my life, and never again can I open that door. And the thought made her heart heavy and her step slow for she could not see the next door nor even the way her feet should go.

Pierre was waiting for her, sitting on a flat stone among the ferns. He was hatless, his thin face looked pale, tired, under its tan. The little notebook was open on his knee and he rolled a pencil in his fingers, but there were no words on the page. He got up slowly as she approached, watched her with

intent, adoring eyes as she threaded her way among the rocks and the hummocks. He took both her hands in his. "I did not dream two weeks could be so long," he said earnestly. "I walked over to St.-Joseph a number of times but always the Convent of Ste.-Ursule looked as if no one had ever lived there—only closed doors and blank windows; only the doves in the convent-garden and the fountain—they were the only things that moved."

"*Bien!*" She smiled, sat down with him on the stone and folded her hands. "Convents are made for quiet, Pierre. What would you?"

"Oh, I just wanted to see you, Simonne, O, ma Simonne!"

"You were very disappointed?"

"Very disappointed. But now—well, this makes up for a lot—to have you near me. And after tomorrow I—I'll see you often and often. I'll see you every day, won't I?"

"I do not know." She spread her hands in a gesture eloquent of hopelessness. "After tomorrow—Who can tell anything about after tomorrow? Not I."

"But you'll stay here in Memramcook? There is no place else—"

"Oh, that is just it. I have thought of it so many times, so much. I have thought it over and over and over till I feared I would go mad. There is no place else, yet how can I stay here! I could not keep the house. I could not work; there is no work. I shall go to Moncton perhaps and find employment in an office there or in a store."

"You! In an office! In a store!" He looked at her as if she had uttered sacrilege. "Why, you could not—"

"I am just a girl, like other girls, Pierre. You have talked to me, treated me, as if I were a goddess, but the goddess has a pretty good appetite and likes nice clothes and—"

"Oh, I know all that, Simonne. Just the same, I cannot bear to think of you rubbing shoulders with God knows what. You are so young, so untainted—"

"I cannot be always young," she answered gravely. "Nor—nor perhaps always untainted. I have to go into that world of God knows what. I'm not afraid."

"Simonne! Don't think of it! Don't go! Marry me. I love you—love you so much that I feel my love will make up to you for most of the things I

cannot give you. We'll be happy. We can live—some way. Next year, it may be, I shall be paid more and you know I have sold some of my verses and—and with you always near me I can write such beautiful things—"

"Such as, 'I love you'. Ah, Pierrot!" She caught his hand and pressed it close to her. "You are so good, so generous, so kind. You would shelter me, you would give up anything to keep me from the least little bit of hardship, I know it; but you offer me more than I would ever ask of any man."

"It is that you do not love me enough, Simonne."

"I have never known love. I am happy when I am with you—but is that love?"

He caught her roughly in his arms and bent her head back till her eyes, wide, terrified, outraged, looked up into his. He bent to find the sweetness of her mouth. All the time she did not resist, but lay strangely passive across his knees. Only in her eyes was more than she could have expressed by any sound, any movement. He tried not to look at her, but the strange eyes drew his and held them and he could not bring himself to kiss those lips so near, so temptingly near, to his. He lifted her gently and helped her to stand up.

"That—" She did not look at him, but at her forearm where the marks of his fingers showed white against the brown skin—"Surely that was not love, Pierre!"

"I do not know," he said sullenly. "It was what I wanted to do and I—and I could not. Perhaps you should go with the good sisters, Simonne, and —"

She laughed at that. "I think not. No, I love life too much for that."

"You did not like me to take you in my arms, to kiss you."

"I thought when I looked at you then that you had forgotten me, that—that something you wanted was much more important than I was."

"Perhaps it is so—perhaps love is something greater than the lover or the loved."

"Then why me more than any other girl, Pierre?"

"Ah, it is something about you. I could love you, worship you, even if I were never allowed to touch you or kiss you or smooth your hair."

"And would that be love, Pierre?"

He laughed outright then and her own silver laughter joined with his and presently, hand-in-hand, they walked gaily down the hill, forgetting everything except that they were young and it was June.

Simonne left early for the convent, the lovely dress folded carefully and packed in a little case, along with a pair of satin slippers and stockings of cobwebby silk. It made her feel better just to carry all those wondrous things; it brought her close, somehow, to the mother she scarcely remembered and it gave her a warm consciousness of still belonging to the happy, untroubled life of Ste.-Ursule. Yes, for a little while yet she would belong and these last few hours must be memorable.

It was almost dusk, a warm blue fragrant dusk, as she followed the road that leads from Memramcook Village to Pont Lefebvre. Never had she seen the valley more calm and lovely. The serpentine river was glassy smooth, mirroring the green walls of the dikes, reflecting the starlight in little spurts of brightness. Far across the great plain of marshland tiny lights popped out here and there like blossoms in the gloom. Almost dusk when a great white car slid up beside her and stopped with velvety smoothness. She looked, startled, at the driver, glimpsing a dark face under a grey cap and wide shoulders under a fawn gabardine coat. The good sisters warned their charges that they must never talk to strangers, especially strangers who drive cars and, most especially, cars like this one—long, low and rangy, a veritable rocket of a car. But he accosted her in exquisite French, such as she seldom heard spoken in her own land. He said,

"Could you direct me, mademoiselle, to the Village of St.-Joseph?"

And before she could think, the words were out. "Why, it is there I am going, monsieur. One follows this road to Pont Lefebvre, the next village; there, one turns right and traverses the iron bridge and then straight across the marsh and—"

"*Ah, merci!*" His teeth showed white. "But since you are going there, too, would it not be well for us both if you would ride with me and issue directions as we go. You may, if you wish, point out such places of interest as are visible and as may interest a stranger in a strange land?"

"But, *monsieur*! I do not know—"

"Please." He slid from under the wheel, stepped out and opened the door for her. "It would be an act of charity, *mademoiselle*. Think! If I should become lost on this vast marsh and have to drive aimlessly around perhaps until the winter comes, then to perish of your terrible cold—would you ever forgive yourself? After all, we speak the same tongue."

In spite of all Mère Angélique's counsel and all her assurances that such young men as this were dispatched directly from the dark dwellings of the evil one, to prowl through the world and seek young girls for devouring, Simonne stepped into the car and relaxed gratefully against the deep leather cushions. He got in then, the purr of the engine deepened until it became like the music of an organ, a singing, rhythmic sound, and the great tires played a tune of their own on the pavement.

"Is there an inn of some sort in St.-Joseph?" he asked presently.

"Oh, yes, there is la Maison St.-Joseph, kept by Tilmon Bourgeois and his good wife, Lucille. There you can have room and board, *monsieur*."

"Thank you. I shall always remember it gratefully if you will direct me there. Indeed I shall always be grateful to you for—"

"You turn sharply to the left here by the barber-shop of Henri, *monsieur*."

"Ah, yes. I should most certainly have gone past that place—"

"And you are about to cross the main line of the Canadian National Railways, *monsieur*, and it is about time for the Ocean Limited and—"

"So!" He drew up for the crossing. "I will stop, look and listen." But he looked mostly at her, she was sure, and felt her cheeks grow hot and knew they were flushed and was glad of the merciful dusk.

"Now it is safe to go, *monsieur*. Straight across the marsh now and at the head of the hill by the church you may let me off, please; then you drive up to the right and the fourth house is la Maison St. Joseph. You will see the sign and probably Tilmon standing at the door or one sitting on the verandah."

"That is clear. Now perhaps, since you have been so helpful, you could help me some more. Do you know something of the Convent of Ste.-Ursule?"

She smiled quietly and looked sideways at him, wondering if he knew the convent-dress and if perhaps, knowing it, he wasn't having a game with her. But he was very serious, his eyes fixed on the road, his gloved hands firmly on the wheel.

"But yes," she said then. "I know something of it. Tomorrow is Closing Day there." She pressed the handle of her little case and closed her eyes to picture the white satin dress and the little fairy slippers.

"Ah!" he said relievedly, "then I am in time!"

"For the closing? Oh, yes. It will begin at ten o'clock in the morning. You come to see someone graduate, *monsieur*?" How sweet, how wonderful, to have one like him come from some far place just to see your graduation, to smile at you, to tell you how lovely you were. Who would it be—Rosalie Deschamps? The young de Lesseps—she came from France, as did this young man.

"Yes," he said absently. "No—I do not think it is her graduation. She is just a little girl. Perhaps you know her—" Simonne's heart stopped utterly —"her name is Simonne Caron."

Her silence did not arouse his suspicions. He thought she was thinking, searching her memory to find out if she knew such a one. But, in reality, she was swallowing, trying to loosen the chords of her throat, trying to make her mind move. She felt like crying, like laughing, like throwing her arms about his neck. At last, he glanced at her. "Do you know a child of that name, mademoiselle? She would be about—oh, from the way Edmond—he was her brother and my dear friend—spoke of her—I should say perhaps twelve years old."

Yes—yes, Edmond would always think of her, as if she never could grow older—Simonne, O, ma Simonne—little Simonne.

"I—I know that girl, *monsieur*." It was hard to speak so that he could understand her. She was so shy of him now, so frightened, she trembled. She wished she might get out of the car. She kept her hands clenched until he came to the top of the hill in front of the church. "There, *monsieur*, if you please, it is necessary that I get out."

He stopped. "I am so sorry to lose you. And I am so grateful to you. Perhaps you will be at the closing tomorrow? Perhaps you will help me find the little Caron?"

"Perhaps." She stood looking up at him as he held the door open for her. She saw that his face was very thin, very handsome. He seemed, for the first time, to get a good look at her. She could tell—and her heart leapt with the knowledge—that he found her lovely. "I—at any rate, I shall no doubt see you, *monsieur*, for I shall be there at the closing."

"I am so glad. Good night, *mademoiselle*."

"Good night, *monsieur*."

She gave him her hand briefly, then hurried quickly away. She heard him call to her. "But I forgot—oh, *mademoiselle*—what is your name? Mine is Marcel Bernard—"

But she pretended not to hear him. The pebbles scattered wildly away from her flying feet. She hugged the little case that held the precious dress. She looked up at the stars, slowing her gait, dreaming. Marcel Bernard—yes, Edmond had spoken of this one, his very best friend. And he had loved Edmond enough to think of his little sister—the little Caron.

Simonne's eyes were so bright, her cheeks so softly radiant, that little Sister Eulalie, the porteress, clapped her hands and Mother Angélique, coming from her office, stood stockstill at the transformation: she had been so pale, so listless, so tired, of late. "But you look happy tonight, Simonne!" Mother Angélique looked at her shrewdly. "What then has come to you?"

But she could not tell even the kindly Mother. It was too great, too dear, too precious. She said, "Oh, *ma mère*, it is that I have prayed long for something, some great favor, for tomorrow—and it has come."

"Ah, but it is a great thing, the faith; a wondrous thing, the prayer," said Mère Angélique. "Have I not so often told you so? Now you will never doubt. I am very happy over this, Simonne—happy that you will have what you prayed for."

If the good Mother had even dreamed that what Simonne had prayed for was now sitting on the verandah at Tilmon's inn, smoking a cigarette, gazing at the stars and thinking how lovely was the girl who had guided him there, she might not have been quite so happy. Marcel Bernard fished a little box from his pocket, opened it and looked at the child's bracelet it contained. "I should have asked that girl," he muttered, "if this would be likely to fit that little one and also how I am going to adapt myself to the rôle of nursemaid. Ah, well, Edmond, it is for you, *mon ami*."

Chapter II
THE WINGED GOD

Simonne's bed was in that most prized location—by a radiator and by a window. The earliest sunbeams found their way in that window and played gay little games upon her pillow and touched her hair and her lips and her nose—all part of the game—and finally her eyelids and the long dark lashes, so that she awakened and caught them but was never, never angry with them, no matter how tired she might be, no matter how late she might have lain awake in the darkness, watching the green-shaded night-lights and thinking of many things.

As last night. She had heard the convent-clock strike one, strike two, and she had wished, as when she was a very little girl on the eve of a great day, that it might jump seven or eight hours and bring her right up to the longed-for time. Still, anticipation was sweet. She hugged herself; all her body tingled with delight. How amazed, how happy, how envious everyone would be when they saw who had come to witness her graduation! How the little ones' eyes would pop and the eyes of her classmates look admiringly at Marcel Bernard and jealously at her.

She thought of him, just a little way up the village-street, at la Maison St. Joseph. She wondered if they had found a room for him—there were so many visitors here for the closing. But of course they would find a room for such a grand young man. The best room would be given him—maybe Tilmon's very own room, with the three moose-heads in it, where Sophie St. Amende's father, who was a senator, had once stayed and asked Sophie and her up to see him.

After two before she fell asleep and not yet six when the sunbeams, at their old happy game, awakened her. How still it was! The little chirping of the birds seemed to make it stiller, and the distant tinkle of the cow-bells. She could see the green hillsides across the valley, see the grey smoke beginning to rise from the chimneys of farm and cottage, and sometimes a dog barked or a milk pail rattled in the farm below the convent. She heard the slow crunch-crunch of heavy clogs on the gravel far below her window and knew that it was old Hippolyte, the bell-ringer, on his way to St. Thomas Church, to ring the angelus. Yes, it was ten minutes to six by her wristwatch, the little white-gold watch Edmond had sent her from France.

She raised her pillow, better to see the beauty of the morning and feel the warmth of the sun. All about her, other girls were stirring now, with sleepy eyes and tumbled hair and there were whisperings and laughter. The last day—who cared for rules on the last day! Mademoiselle Cloutier, who was dormitory-mistress, might scold and threaten to her heart's content today—no one would mind. Some of the girls were already brushing their hair, others making for the shower-baths, others packing travelling-cases or eating smuggled bon-bons. Hermance Lapage, whose bed was below Simonne's, at the next window, was boldly smoking a cigarette just as she had vowed to do on the last day. The smoke smelled nice in the morning air, but it might not be well for Hermance, even on the last day, if Mademoiselle Cloutier should catch her.

The angelus boomed out, moving the morning stillness in great waves of sound as when a rock is dropped into the centre of a still pond—boom-boom-boom—thunderous golden tones rolling for miles across the marshland, heard in all the four villages. Pierre, in his little cottage, perhaps already in his garden, would hear it and love it. Marcel Bernard would be awakened from his sleep and would perhaps swear and wonder why he had come to this lost place beyond the rim of the world just to see some little girl whose brother had been his friend.

"Oh, I hope he will not be angry when he finds out that I deceived him, that I am not a little girl at all, that I am eighteen instead of twelve. Perhaps he will not like me. And he must like me! I want him so to like me!"

She reached for her own mirror and brush and went to work on the thick wavy tresses, brushing them until they shone—a good hundred strokes. "One would think you prepared for a lover, Simonne." Emma Breau, in the bed across from her, watched her lazily and laughed at her blushes. "Ah, it is then true! Who is this lover? Surely not the dark-eyed schoolmaster who makes the pretty verses and interrupts his class to come to the door and watch us when we pass on promenade!"

"No." Simonne thought with swift regret how quickly she had forgotten Pierre. But, for that matter, she had forgotten everything else except the wondrous fact that one had come especially for her graduation. Hermance Lapage, in the bed at the next window, had finished her cigarette and was now indulging in a forbidden pre-breakfast perusal of La Presse. The big black letters on the front page caught Simonne's eyes, but she read the words a number of times without grasping their significance. When she did, she leapt out of bed and ran to Hermance and knelt on the floor beside her. "Oh, may I see for a moment, Hermance? Please—"

"It is dull." The Lapage, whose mother was an actress in Paris, rolled big black eyes at her. "What interests you, Simonne? This about Marcel Bernard flying from Paris to Mo'réal?"

"Yes." She was reading avidly. "Yes, is it not too marvellous!"

"Pretty smart! Do you know him?" She grinned maliciously. "Maybe he flew over just to see you!"

"Oh, I think not. He would have come anyway, but—"

Laughter, from Hermance and all within earshot, awakened Simonne to realities. They were laughing at her, good-humoredly enough, but laughing none the less. She took a last look at Marcel's picture as he stood with the two other men who had accompanied him on his flight. Noted sportsman and aeroplane-engine designer, the story called him. And he—he had driven from Montreal all the way down to Memramcook just to see her!

The other girls were watching her, their laughter quite gone. They knew Simonne and loved her. And they knew her story. After all, her brother had been quite an important man in France, his name often in the news with stories of the advances made in the design of aeronautical engines. Might it not be—

The convent bell interrupted their speculations. There were few laggards this morning; everyone tumbled out before the last stroke had died, before Mademoiselle Cloutier came, blue-nosed as always, from her cubicle, holding the big bell by its tongue, ready to rap sleepy-heads with the handle. This morning there were none to rap, and Mademoiselle Cloutier, who had been at the convent so long that she was as much a fixture as the statue of St. Anthony, felt vague regret at losing the very ones who all year made her life a torment. She walked down to Hermance Lapage's bed, saw the cigarette-end snuffed out on the floor, said nothing.

Everyone was putting on her best. There were little cries of admiration, of envy. When Simonne slipped the white satin, with its narrow waist and high, broidered bodice, over her head, they all stopped to stare. "*Mon Dieu*, Simonne!" called the dark Lapage. "You look lovely enough to be a bride. You will have the bishop making a speech with 'Vanity of vanities and all is vanity' for a text. You are not fair to the rest of us: you make us look like convent-girls."

"Ah, it is lovely, Simonne!" Mademoiselle Cloutier's watery eyes shone with honest admiration. "How beautiful you will look when you rise to read the farewell-address! And how sorry we will all be to lose you!"

"As I to lose you, *mademoiselle*, I assure you. You are good to like my dress: it is the one my mother wore when she finished convent in Quebec. It is—it is a lucky dress: she was wearing it when love came to her."

"Ah, but you must today think of higher, nobler things than love, Simonne."

The Lapage snickered. Simonne looked properly grave. The bell rang for morning-prayers and all the bright frocks and shining faces flocked towards the door. Simonne thought of the long quiet summer nights when the big *dortoire* would lie empty and lone in the moonlight, of how the moonbeams would search in vain for the blonde tresses or the black ones with which they used to play. And it made her sad to think that tomorrow morning, when her own little sunbeams came to play their morning game, she would not be there to greet them. But her sadness, her nostalgia, passed quickly. She thought of Marcel Bernard—like a young god come from the sky.

She was in the convent-garden with the others when the big white car came up the drive. It came slowly, as the vivid black eyes of M. Bernard searched the faces of the little ones. He is looking among the very smallest, thought Simonne, for the little Caron. *Sapristi!* When he sees his twelve-year-old he will—

He was looking at her now, looking intently. He stopped the car, got out, strode across the drive and onto the lawn. Simonne could hear the sharp little intakes of breath all about her. She heard Hermance Lapage say, "Name of a name of a name! It is he—Marcel Bernard." He came directly to Simonne and stood before her. He bowed very low, straightened and said, "Are not you, mademoiselle, the one who was so kind as to direct me to the inn last night? It was hard to see in the dusk and the starlight, but you are one who, once seen in no matter what light, would not readily be forgotten."

Simonne felt the battery of eyes all about her, the wonderment, the envy. "Yes, *monsieur*; it was I who directed you."

"And you said perhaps you would help me to find the little Simonne Caron. I have looked among the little ones but I see none—"

Somebody giggled. There was a reaching for handkerchiefs and a reddening of faces. "I think," said Simonne, "it will not be hard to find her. If you will come with me, *monsieur*?"

"My name is Marcel Bernard," he said. "I was late in asking yours." They walked down the path towards the Grotto. She was afraid now, timid of what he might say when he found out she had been making sport of him.

Yet she could not resist the temptation to prolong the game, and he aided her by asking, "What is she like, this little Simonne?"

"Oh, she is—" Simonne shrugged—"a rather lonely little person. She had—only her brother, you know—"

"Yes, I know. Edmond spoke of her constantly. I promised him that if anything happened to him I would become her guardian."

"Oh! And—and do you like the prospect?"

"I do not know." He smiled. "You see, I have never been a guardian before. Is she troublesome, a handful? Not, I hope, a spoiled little *gamine* who will lead me the devil's own existence?"

"I think not, Monsieur Bernard." They had come to the rock-pool below the grotto. There was no one else about. The birds darted and splashed in the fountain. She stopped, turned to him, smiled up at him, timidly, her cheeks turning slowly crimson. "I—will you forgive me, monsieur? Please say you will forgive me!"

"Forgive you, mademoiselle! For what, please, am I to—" He started, stared at her, wisdom dawning slowly in his eyes. "*Grand dieu!* You—you do not tell me that you are Simonne Caron!"

She nodded, as if apologizing for the fact. She looked down at the ground. She prayed earnestly that he would not be angry with her. She felt his hand under her chin, raising it until she had, perforce, to look into those bold, arrogant eyes. Thus they stood for moments, Simonne and Marcel Bernard. Then slowly a smile drove away the gravity from his face. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a box, opened it and gave her the tiny bracelet. "The choice," he said wryly, "lay between this and a doll that said '*Maman*'. I chose this."

They both laughed then and she found her hand in his. He drew her to a bench and they sat down and gazed at each other frankly, with a great shyness on her part, with a well hidden perplexity on his. A twelve-year-old was one thing; a young woman of eighteen, and a lovely one, was quite another. He had planned to spend some months in Montreal and it had been his idea to take his little ward with him and find for her a competent governess or nursemaid. Now he saw how ridiculous all his plans, even in their vagueness, had been. But the photo Edmond Caron had of her was that of a little girl, her hair in pigtails, her eyes round and wondering; this Simonne had hair such as he had never dreamed of and lashes long and dark that lifted at the tips, that lay against her smooth cheek when she closed her

eyes. She had lips that seemed always ever so little parted—full, sweet lips that seemed made for kisses, that seemed always to wait for them.

"You are not disappointed in Simonne?" She raised the great eyes to him after a long silence. "You would not rather I was the little one Edmond pictured? It is six years, you understand, since Edmond last saw me and for him I did not grow beyond that day."

"I would not have you any different, Simonne. It is just—just that a man gets something of a shock when he finds himself bringing playthings to a young lady. You are finishing at the convent today?"

"Yes. Today. I read the farewell-address. I—I did not look forward to it"—She smoothed the gleaming satin of her skirt—"after I heard the news of Edmond's death. I did not look forward to anything; then, last night, as I walked along the road to Pont Lefebvre you overtook me and I—"

He smiled understandingly. "It meant—so much to you, to have someone come?"

"It meant"—She drew a deep breath—"everything, *monsieur*. It made me think that, after all, someone cared, that I mattered to someone. Last night, I could hardly sleep for thinking of you, *monsieur*—" She caught herself up, her cheeks flooding pale pink, her gaze quickly averted.

He was silent. He was looking with new light into his own careless heart, into his own deep soul. He was wishing—he who had the world at his feet—that he had been a better, stronger man. He felt afraid, uncomfortable, for he saw that this girl looked upon him, who was of the earth earthy, as something sent straight from heaven. He was about to say roughly, "For God's sake, child, don't romanticize over me. I'm only a playboy of Paris and you and I belong to different worlds. I'll do my best for you, but, please, no sentiment!"

And he could say nothing of the kind. He who could be ruthless, hard, calculating, who could discount a woman's tears as readily as he could her promises, found himself saying, "It makes me happy, little Simonne, to find out that my poor presence makes your day a brighter one. I—" He bit his lip, frowned portentously—"I am your legal guardian, you know, so it is my duty, *ma petite*, as well as my pleasure, to be here."

"Yes, *monsieur*." She was still looking at her fingers, twined in her lap.

"After—after the exercises are over we shall have luncheon together, you and I, and we can talk about the future—about what you wish to do—perhaps further study—perhaps—"

"Yes, *monsieur*." She looked at him sideways, shyly.

"And you are to worry about nothing, Simonne. You are well provided for and—"

"I do not worry, *monsieur*, now that you are come."

"Oh! But I—"

The convent bell rang out, making the doves flutter wildly as if the sound beat against their wings.

"Now I must go, please." She stood up. She looked bravely into Bernard's dark eyes. "I would like you to wish me luck, *monsieur*—my legal guardian."

His voice sounded strange, husky. "All the luck there is, Simonne. I shall be wishing you luck all the time you are making your address."

"I shall not be afraid." She gave him her hand and went quickly up the path from the Grotto. He stood looking after her until the last glimpse of white was gone. Then he sat down on the bench once more, stared at the statue of the Virgin in the niche in the Grotto and wondered if he wouldn't feel better if it and all these gentle, mystic things that surrounded him meant something in his life.

He smiled, thinking of what his friends in Paris, in London, in New York, would say if they saw him, Marcel Bernard, sitting in the garden of an Acadian convent, playing parent to a vision in white satin and lace. He knew what they would say and think and it made him feel a sudden surge of bitterness that it was so. Presently, as he sat there, he heard a chorus, far-off, angelic, ethereally sweet and lovely, and he thought he had never heard in any grand opera-house, anything half so beautiful. He thought he could distinguish her voice—a warm rich contralto. He could see her standing there, all in white, her arms and throat so brown, so rounded and dear.

He did not know how to pray; the things that stirred in his soul, deep in his soul, were inchoate, incoherent things, but their dominant thread was some great wish new-born in him, to make himself a better and a greater man. His hands were clenched when he stood up, and he felt strength like a great tide flow into his body and life come into his soul. He glimpsed in that moment how vast is man's potentiality—how he can be god or clod, how great forces blow in and out of his soul like great winds, and how he may respond to those forces or remain untouched by them, according as he is disposed.

He walked slowly up the path and entered the hall at the rear door, where he saw people standing. She was on the stage, Simonne, standing in front of her classmates, a beribboned paper—streamers of purple and gold—held in her brown hands. Her eyes found his as he entered and for a moment held his, and her voice faltered, then went on, ringing, clear, filling his heart with tumult—

"—and as in joy we walked so long together, my friends, so in sorrow we must part. Our paths have wound through blossomy meadows, beside rivers sleeping in the sun and there has been joy along our way. Now we turn to other paths and be they wide or narrow, smooth or rough, go they in dark places or to the pinnacles of light, let us walk them bravely, let us love and let us believe—"

All about him he saw faces rapt, intent, eyes fixed upon her as she read and in every breast the same thing stirred and they lived again, those grown old, some hour when they had stood on the threshold of a new life and, looking back, they saw the roads they had travelled, the hills they had climbed, the dark waters crossed, and they knew whether or not they had walked bravely, with love and faith.

Now, the bishop and the prime minister, come especially for the occasion, but, of course, "amply repaid for the sacrifice by being privileged to share in this concourse of youth and freshness," made the usual sounding and impractical speeches; the diplomas and prizes were read out by Mother Angélique and presented by His Excellency; the orchestra played and everyone sang Ave Maria Stella, O Canada and God Save the King. Then, in the chapel there was benediction and the age-old hymn that is sung at every convent or college-closing in the Acadian land—*En vous quittant, mère chérie*—"In quitting you, our cherished mother—" And how it poured forth from those young hearts, some gay, some sad beyond all knowing—

"Always I will be your Mother
You will find my altars everywhere."

Then they streamed from the flower- and incense-scented gloom of the chapel into the golden warmth of the sun, the green brightness of the trees and lawns, the wild free chorus of the birds, Marcel Bernard found himself gazing into the wise, all-seeing eyes of the old Abbess, Mother Angélique, whose arm protectingly encircled the waist of her favorite student. He felt himself inadequate, uneasy—he who had walked casually in courts and senates—before this quiet little nun who gazed up at him confidingly, trustfully, yet knowingly.

"We are honored, M. Bernard, to have such a brave and gallant gentleman at our closing, and we are happy to know that Simonne is to be in your charge."

"You honor me by what you say, *ma sœur*." He bowed gravely. "What I have seen and felt here has impressed me with the seriousness of my charge and brought home to me my shortcomings. Your valedictory, Simonne, was most beautiful. I was proud to listen to you."

"Oh, thank you, *monsieur*!" Her eyes misted. To hear him say that, to see how he gazed at her, as if she were the most important thing in all the world! Mother Angélique looked gravely from her to Marcel Bernard and her thin smooth fingers touched unconsciously the great wooden beads that hung from her girdle. "I must leave you now," she said softly to them both. "God go with you, little Simonne, and with you, Monsieur Bernard." With a gentle smile she turned away and they were alone.

Simonne was looking at the convent, the white walls, the bell in its cross-crowned cupola, the clambering vines and the honeysuckle, the winding paths among the cedars, the distant silver sheen of the Memramcook River wide between its dikes. No more, her heart said, no more. She would come back to it, but as a stranger, and the old rapture would never be hers again. New voices, new faces, other Junes, stretching down the years, other girls bidding farewell, feeling this little sickness, this pain of loss, in their young hearts.

"It makes you sad, Simonne?"

He had been watching the play of memory on her face. She started. "Oh! Yes, it has been really my home since I was a very little girl. There's something safe about it. In there, one feels sheltered, secure. But then"—She smiled gaily—"the world is a good place, too, is it not? It offers much that one could never find in Ste.-Ursule."

Yes, he might have told her, much of disillusionment and pain, as well as rapture; but he would not try to dispel that brightness from her eyes. He knew, too, that she would not believe today that the world could be anything but wonderful. He said, "*Eh bien!* If you are ready now, my sweet girl-graduate, we shall repair to the inn of St.-Joseph and find something good to eat."

It was a delight for her, that first meal with Marcel. To sit across the little table from him, to hand him his tea, to wait upon him shyly in a hundred little ways. Ah, it was such pleasure that she wanted the luncheon to last forever. She could look at him now to her heart's content. She could see the

grey hair at his temples, the fine little lines about the corners of his eyes, the lean strength of his jaw, the firm, kindly cut of his mouth, and each time he caught her looking at him she felt utterly confused and timid until he smiled or laughed outright at her and told her that he did not bite even tender little convent-girls.

"But I am no longer a little convent-girl. See! There is my diploma on Tilmon's buffet. I am learned in shorthand, in typing, in penmanship, in music—oh, I am a veritable box of knowledge! Ask me a question, *monsieur* and see me display my knowledge—a question on any subject."

He frowned, pursed his lips, broke one of Lucille's brioches and stared at the half of it. "Well then, how do you like your new guardian?"

"Eh! Why, I—"

"Yes?"

She looked at the table-cloth as if the answer were written there. Then she looked up suddenly, looked him full in the eyes and he felt a quickening of his heartbeat, a turbulence in his blood and cursed himself for asking such a question and vowed never again to be so rash. Those eyes of hers, so bright, so clear in the brown of her face, the wavy, silky hair, so like a little girl's hair. "That is the easiest question you could ask me, *mon gardien*. I—I like my new guardian ever, ever, ever so much. I think, of all the guardians in the world, he is the nicest."

"One hundred per-cent correct, Mademoiselle Caron. For that, you shall receive a prize just as soon as we reach some place where there are shops. Right now, I suppose you want to go to the train to say goodby to your friends."

"If you please, *monsieur*."

It was heaven to ride in the big car, to lean back against the cushions of red-oak colored leather, to feel the power and strength and speed that Marcel handled so deftly, to dart past the slower cars on the marsh-road and return with a gay wave of the hand the salutations of their occupants.

On the station-platform at Pont Lefebvre there were tears, kisses and confusion. Some of those who boarded the train she would never see again, others perhaps casually once or twice in her lifetime. All the gay and carefree hours she had spent with these girls came rushing back to her now, making her heart leaden, filling her with a vast sense of loss and loneliness which she could not, she felt, have borne, if he had not been at her side, tall and assured—her guardian.

Quite unaware, he seemed, that everyone among the hundreds there knew who he was and looked at him with admiration. He smoked his pipe and while she talked to Hermance Lapage and Emma Breau, he sat on one of the little wagons used for luggage and gazed pensively at the green vista of the marshes.

"What a grand time you will have, Simonne!" The dark Lapage looked only at Marcel Bernard when she spoke. "With such a guardian! Do you know that a thousand women have loved him? I heard my mother speak of him often. In France, they call him Don Juan. Ah, how I envy you! I think all the world will envy you. Where does he take you?"

"I do not know. I—I have not thought about it." Hermance's words had come with shocking impact—"A thousand women have loved him"—yes, who could help but love him! But that did not mean that he had loved any of the thousand. She looked at him, sitting so quietly, so contentedly; but even here in these rustic surroundings, there was a suggestion of the winged god about him and his gaze seemed to be fixed on far-off things.

"It will be hard for the little schoolmaster," said Emma teasingly. "He will be quite eclipsed by this great sun that has risen. He will be left here to pine away and perish of a broken heart."

"Bah!" The Lapage's actress-mother had had three husbands and was now the darling of a rich *parfumier*. "There is no such thing as a broken heart—certainly not among men. For a while that rustic bard of yours will make dreary ballads and sigh 'Simonne, O ma Simonne' then he will meet some other Phyllis or Chloë and, pouf! off with the old love and on with the new."

"You are a little cynic, *mademoiselle*." Lost in the vehement expounding of her thesis, as the others were lost in listening, she had not at all noticed Marcel Bernard's approach. "Such old wisdom from such young lips!"

Hermance Lapage colored under the makeup which it had caused the good nuns bitter anguish to behold. "Well, *m'sieur*, is it not truth?"

"Not absolute truth, I think. It is dangerous to say such things and, I think, fatal to believe them."

"Then you—"

"Ah, do I believe in broken hearts?" He smiled widely. "Now you come near home. I have heard of many, but I have seen none. And, for the good God is merciful and spares His chosen from answers that might embarrass—here comes the train!"

The dark Lapage looked steadily at him. “Perhaps that was a dangerous thing to say, Monsieur Bernard. Come to think of it, there are hearts—and I know at least one such—that could be broken—that are soft and trusting and gentle and pure.” She gazed full in his eyes a moment longer and he gazed as steadily into hers. Then, as if satisfied with what she saw, she smiled, gave him her hand and said, “*Adieu*. It has been good to meet you. We are happy to leave Simonne in your care.”

“And I thank you for your trust, *mademoiselle*.”

Then they boarded the train, emptying the long platform; the train got under way, handkerchiefs fluttered from windows—fluttered bravely until distance blotted them out. Simonne turned from watching Hermance and Emma on the platform of the observation-car, and put her arm in his. She said, “I do not feel as sad as I thought I would. In fact, I do not feel sad at all.”

“That is good. I do not want you to feel sad, ever.”

“Will you come now to my house at Memramcook?”

“Gladly. I want to see the home of the Carons. I know a lot about it just from listening to Edmond. There are great cedar trees whose spires touch the stars, and a brook runs past the house and there is a high hill beyond it called the Beaumont, where often he went with you.”

“That is so.” She smiled sadly. “But, with Edmond, the house was like me—it did not grow any older. It is something of a ruin now.”

They got into the car and followed the road they had travelled last night. Only last night! To Simonne it seemed a blissful age ago. Events before last night were things that had happened in another life and a new one had begun when she met him. The June sunlight was golden, warm on her face. She closed her eyes, rested her head on the cushions, felt the wind toy with her hair. She wondered if he were looking at her, if he found her at all lovely. He had known so many lovely women that perhaps she meant nothing to him, just a girl who had been wished upon him, just a charge to be looked after.

And when she opened her eyes she saw a dark frown on his face and a certain grimness about his jaw, and he was driving very fast. They were coming now to the little white schoolhouse at Memramcook. Classes were being dismissed. She saw the little boys and girls flocking into the road. “Please be careful, *monsieur*!” She touched his arm urgently. “It is a school here.”

"Is it the school conducted by the rustic bard of whom the girls were speaking? Does he really make poems to you?"

"Yes." She spoke stiffly. "It is the school he teaches, Pierre Gay. He was —was always very kind to me."

Marcel muttered something she did not catch. She saw Pierre, his dark head bare, coming down the path to the schoolyard gate. "Perhaps you would like to stop, Simonne?" his tone was gentle again. "No doubt he would like to see you in your lovely costume."

He stopped the car abreast of Pierre, who looked at them for a moment, bewildered, startled out of this quietude. Then he recognized Simonne and the books he carried dropped to the turf. He came quickly around to her, scarcely glancing at Marcel. And for a while, standing by the car door, he gazed at her and did not need to speak, for all his soul was in his eyes. Then he managed to say, "It went well, the closing? Your valedictory—?"

"All went well, Pierre. It—it was wonderful. I wish you could have been there. But, Pierre, this is Monsieur Bernard, who comes from France, who was Edmond's dear friend and who is to be my guardian."

The two men looked at each other, measured each other, the quiet country youth and the man of the boulevards and of the high exploits, and each knew, somehow, that they met on a common ground in what they felt for this girl.

"I am honored to know you, Monsieur Bernard."

"And I to know you, Monsieur Gay."

That seemed to end it. The motor was still running. She looked almost piteously at Pierre's solemn face, at his eyes that seemed tired. She said, "I will see you soon, Pierre—very soon."

"Yes, Simonne—very soon. Goodby."

Marcel nodded. The car moved off. Pierre stood watching it, watching the bright head so close to Bernard's shoulder. He caught his lower lip with his teeth. The road was empty, deserted, all the valley was filled with the quiet of mid-afternoon, the children, in their magic way, had vanished. He turned presently and picked up the books he had dropped. A sheet of paper had fallen from one of them. On it were some verses he had made while the little ones were writing their themes. He glanced at them. They were for Simonne on her graduation and he had thought them good and thought how lovely it would be to read them to her high up on the Beaumont this

afternoon. Now he crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it into the gully that ran through the schoolyard. He watched it bob along and disappear down the hill towards the river. The river would carry it down to Fundy and oblivion—the pre-destined home, he thought bitterly, of such dreams as his.

Chapter III
SIMONNE PASSES

The day was kind to the old house of the Carons, the sunlight gilded the mossy shingles of the roof, the thick green foliage of the vines hid the cracked and rotting clap-boards of the walls, the leafy birches and maples concealed the broken shutters, the peeling paint. And, within, old Artemise had done wonders with the ancient furniture, the worn rugs, the decrepit hangings. The faded house seemed to have one last splendid effort, like a war-broken soldier, to stand erect and proud, to do honor to her, the last of her line.

From room to room and through the neglected gardens to the little brook where she and Edmond used to swim, she conducted him, talking freely, gaily. It was so good to have someone who was interested in these things that were her life, someone to listen sympathetically and share her own innocent pleasure. But Marcel Bernard's joy, though she did not know it, was far more in her than in the house of her fathers. He had never had such an experience as this, had never known any other girl quite like her. The thought of the years ahead, years in which she would be always close to him, filled him with a heady intoxication that gave way to swift sobriety and, with it, depressing doubts and ponderings.

To be with her and not—love her? He tried to laugh at himself, to tell himself he was becoming childish. He was past thirty now, she was only eighteen. He was, already, old and wise in the ways of the world, old and wise too, he assured himself, in the ways of love. With such as Simonne he had nothing to do. Her innocence, her sweetness, her youth—they were not for him. He steeled himself against her and swore to such gods as he knew, and vowed on her dead brother's memory, that to him she would be just a little girl with whose future he had been sacredly entrusted. But there were times, as when he bent to smell the flowers she had gathered from the garden, when he caught the fragrance of her hair, touched the smoothness of her arm, when he felt a wild, mad drumming in his blood, a desire greater than he had ever before experienced.

"Bah! It is just the newness of it, the novelty of having this lovely child in my care. It will wear off. It will have to wear off. Let me leave her for a while, let me have some time to think, to map out my course of conduct, and

all will be well. If I—if I were to fall in love with her—how preposterous!—I should never forgive myself."

So, for his own protection, though he found himself strangely loath to leave her and lingered with her in the garden until it was almost sunset, he declined her invitation to supper and, telling her of letters to write and others to read, he drove slowly back to St.-Joseph and the quiet of the inn. And, at once, he began to feel lonely for her, began to know, as never before, how empty and selfish his own life had been. There had been regret in her eyes when he left her, even though he promised to come for her around noon the next day—and that look of wistfulness had made his heart soar, had made him absurdly happy.

"Now, I must come out of this," he assured himself as he sat on the wide window sill of his room, gazing out on the blue dusk over the marshes. "This is like an old man having mumps or some other childish ailment. A convent-girl, a little one fresh out of school—And you, my wise Monsieur Bernard, little friend of the Folies-Bergère, little frequenter of all the hot-spots, and beloved of the croupiers at Monte Carlo—for you, she is forbidden. You must, without delay, make arrangements for her future—"

He tapped his teeth with his pipe-stem. "Let us see. There must be a legacy, and a good one, from Edmond. Just now I can make sure that it is rather a handsome one, enough certainly to enable her to study further or find a husband or—*Bon*! I shall take her to Montreal and find there a wise companion for her and let her meet people. Some good youth with lots of money and, let us hope, some sense, will quickly discover her; they will marry and I, conscious of a good deed well done, will take myself back to France and perhaps marry a forty-year-old widow. That, *hélas*, is what I deserve. Had I met Simonne eight years ago or—"

He laughed ruefully, swung himself down from the window-seat. "I am such a grand old man, already guardian to a little orphan! I have played some queer parts, but never one so strange as this nor one perhaps so difficult. Still, it will not be difficult unless I make it so. I must be careful. I must be aloof, impersonal—in short," he finished gravely, "I must be a man."

He thought of Pierre Gay, the shabby, dark-eyed schoolmaster. He had read Pierre's story in his eyes as they gazed upon Simonne. "But there is nothing there for him. She is made for something better than the poverty-stricken existence of a schoolmaster's wife. She will be well away from him;

she is so susceptible, so gentle towards everything. But I think she will have none of him."

That was so.

Even as Marcel was sitting in the window of the inn, Simonne and Pierre were walking down the Beaumont. She was far away from Pierre tonight. He knew it and it made him heart-sick. She tried, too, so hard to be kind, to be gentle, to make him think that everything was as it always had been, between them. She chattered gaily of the closing, of the crowds, of Marcel Bernard, and she did not notice how always her talk came by not too devious routes back to Marcel Bernard.

"But what do you know of this fellow?" Pierre's brow was cloudy, his voice gruff. "He drops down from the skies and you immediately accept him as one sent straight from heaven."

Her smile vanished then. It was true. He was always in her thoughts. All this time she had been with Pierre, all the time she talked of other things, it was of Marcel Bernard she was thinking. Of how he had looked when she told him her name in the Grotto, of how their eyes had met when he came into the assembly-hall, of how she had faltered in her speech, of how proud he had been of her.

"He—he seemed as one sent from heaven, Pierrot. Think! Had he not come, who would have been there to see me, to be interested in me, to come to me after it was over and tell me it was well! Please do not be angry with me—please! He was Edmond's friend. It was Edmond who sent him."

"But to have such a man for a guardian!" Pierre shook his head. "It is preposterous! It is not right!"

"Why is it not right? He is good, kind—"

"He is a man of the world—very much of the world—and you—you are so beautiful. To such a man you will be like some rare untasted wine to a gourmet, like some potent untried drug to an addict. He will—"

She felt her body grow hot and her blood seemed to thicken in her veins. She knew what Pierre meant—knew vaguely just what he was thinking about. "And I—have I not something to say about that?"

"What will you say? You are young, impressionable. Half the silly women in the world are ready to make themselves sillier over men like Marcel Bernard—adventurers, romantic figures. You will fall in love with him."

"I—I will not."

"No doubt you already have—and do not know it."

"Pierre! You are being mean and cruel. You are hurting me and never before have you been unkind—"

"I can't help it. Simonne!" He laid his hand on her arm, stopping her, making her look at him. "It almost drives me mad to think of you—going away with him, being with him all the time. I—I could stand not having you for my own as long as I knew you were here in Memramcook, as long as I knew you were no one else's. I was resigned to that. I hoped that in time you would come to love me enough to—to marry me. Then he comes—and I feel that I am losing you forever."

"Do not say that, Pierre!"

"I must say it! Do not go with him, Simonne. Stay here—stay with me. I promise you I will make you happy, and you will never regret. These hills, this valley, this place—you always loved it here, your 'valley of the stars' you named it and wondered that Edmond was not content with it. Now you—"

"But I will come back. You know I will come back."

"You will not come back to me. I feel it. I know it. You will change. He is rich. You will be rich. You will meet new friends, learn to love new things. You will have new values and the poor schoolmaster of Memramcook with his out-at-elbows suit and his too-long hair—you will laugh at him and at yourself for ever having bothered to listen to him."

"No! No, it will never come to that. I shall never forget you, Pierre—never forget that a poet sang to me when I was young and fair."

He looked despairingly at her. "But you will go away. I will come up here on summer evenings to watch the sunset and you will never come."

"Some night—I promise you."

"I—I hope you will be happy, Simonne. I want you to be."

"I will be. Oh, it will not be for long, I tell you. But he—M. Bernard has plans for my future. I must study something, learn to do something well, so that you and he will be proud of me. It is a chance I cannot miss. I was almost in despair, you know, wondering what I should do after the convent closed; then he came—"

"I know. It is well for you."

"Yes." They had come now to the sagging gates of her home and stood there under an aged elm where the birds chirped softly and the leaves rustled with little whisperings. The evening was warm, the air soft and fragrant with the smell of rich earth lately turned by the ploughshare. "And I shall come back one day, Pierre, and make the old house young again—new paint, new shingles, new flowers, new curtains—and you then will come each day and have tea with me. We shall walk up the Beaumont again and look down upon the world and it will be a better world for I shall have learned something about it."

"I do not know if that will make it better. Perhaps it is best when seen with the eyes of youth and freshness, perhaps there will be a too-old wisdom in your eyes, Simonne, when you return."

"You try to spoil it all for me, Pierre." She looked darkly at him. "It seems that you—that you do not want me to have anything. You want me to bury myself here, to be poor, forgotten, unhappy—"

"No, I do not—indeed I do not. I want your happiness more than anything else. It is just that I—*Bien*! We will let it pass, little one. Go and be glad, and, if you will, remember that I always love you, that I will still be here in these places where we were happy and that I will be thinking of you."

"I will not forget, Pierre. Good night."

He took her hand and carried it to his lips and kissed it. She wanted to fling herself into his arms, to cling close to him, to comfort him; not to leave him like this, so unhappy, so forlorn. But he dropped her hand and went away quickly and she watched his spare, shabby figure go down the road to the village and it seemed tonight that the road went far, far away beyond her ken and that Pierre would keep on walking.

She leaned against the gatepost and dried her eyes with her handkerchief. It had been such a happy day to end on this sad note. They had been friends so long, she and Pierre. They had spent so many bright and carefree hours together. Perhaps he was right, perhaps, for him and her, life would never be the same again. She was on the threshold of a new world, and gay and enticing that world seemed. It would be the smart world of fine cars and yachts, of grand hotels, of wealthy, luxury-loving people—people whose ways were foreign to Pierre Gay, whose lives, which he called useless and empty, he affected to despise.

She found herself championing Marcel now. There was nothing empty or useless about Marcel's life. There couldn't be. He was so strong, so vital, so

sure of himself. He would show her how to make something of her life. The future held no terrors for her now. Marcel would mount her on a winged steed. He would ride with her and they would travel fast and far.

She walked slowly up the drive where the pines and cedars swayed and rustled, where the little brook gurgled along the roadside and in the thickets the birds stirred the dry leaves, and summer insects glowed in the grass. Artemise was still in the kitchen, sitting in the old rocker, dozing in the dusk, with Maréchal, her big tortoise-shell cat, slumbering in her lap.

She awoke from a nap as Simonne stood in the doorway, watching her with a little smile. The old eyes peered dimly and the thin, hesitant voice said, "Ah, Madame Amélie, you are then returned! Has M'sieur Guy—" She stopped, shaking her head. "I was dreaming, Ma'm'selle Simonne. I think in my dream it is long ago, before you are born, when first your mother have come here. You are so like her and there in the twilight—It makes all things the same, the twilight, and the years seem nothing. She used to come in that door, just at dusk, when she first came here. Like you, she was always kind to Artemise."

"It makes me glad to think I am like her."

"Oh, much like her. Now you go away, *hein*? You go to Mo'réal and be a great lady. You marry some rich man and come back here in the summer-times maybe with your little ones."

"*Aï*, Artemise!" She laughed softly. "You travel too fast, *mon amie*. I do not think of marrying yet."

"But that young man—he who is your guardian—he thinks of it."

"How can you say that! You do not know—"

"My eyes are not so dim. The way he spoke, the way he looked at you—"

"You imagine things, madame. He is a great man, that one, and many girls have been in love with him. Is it likely then that he would care for me? It is just because I am Edmond's sister that he is kind to me. Only that."

Artemise shook her head. "It may be that many have loved him, yet he may never have loved. That is possible."

Yes, Simonne liked to think so too. She had dreams, so many dreams. Bidding the old dame goodnight, she took her dreams with her up to the big room under the eaves that had once been her mother's, that now was hers. What if he did love her? What if he found in her something that made him

happier than all those others could make him? What if it should happen that all her life would be spent with him? She would be Madame Bernard, and in summer they would come here to Memramcook and perhaps some day, on the road they would pass Pierre. Pierre would walk in the dust that billowed up from the wheels of their car—

Vivid, girlish dreams, running hither and thither, but always in bright places, always in places where there was no cloud, no shadow, no faded flowers, no stark and winter-stripped tree. Marcel—always Marcel. She sat at her window until the last light had gone and the stars came out in the blue sky; sat there happy in her dreaming, not minding the solitude at all for now she felt she would never again be alone.

"Madame Bernard," she murmured. "Yes, perhaps it will be like that. And, oh, I hope Pierre will not hate me then. Pierre was very angry tonight. Never before have I known him to be cross with me, but tonight he was like a bear, so dark and scowling."

Pierre, at that moment, was walking purposefully across the marsh to St.-Joseph. His brow was still lowering, his eyes still very dark and cloudy. He raged at his own impotence, tortured himself with the thought that here she was slipping away from him, going away forever. And to what? Yes, to what? That was what angered him most, that doubt, that fear, that question to which he must find an answer. She had no one, that little girl—no one. Blindly she gave herself into the care of this stranger. No doubt, of course, that Edmond Caron had duly appointed him to be her guardian, but Edmond was a wild and harum-scarum sort of fellow. Irresponsible, himself, it was quite unlikely that he would give any thought to the kind of man he would want to be his sister's guardian.

"Perhaps," mused Pierre, making a face at Georges Gauvin's cows as they cropped the marsh grass by a rail-fence, "I shall do no good at all by going to him, but go to him I will. She would not thank me. No doubt, she would be angry with me and tell me I had no right to do such a thing. She would be wrong. I have a right and to me it is the best right in the world: I love her and whatever I do is for her."

He found Marcel Bernard sitting on the rustic bench on the verandah of la Maison St.-Joseph, smoking his pipe and looking at the stars. He said, "*Bonsoir*, M. Bernard. It is a lovely night, this."

"It is a memorable night," said Bernard. "I have never known one more lovely nor an air so pure as this nor yet such peace as you have here in the valley. It is the nearest thing to Paradise that I can imagine."

It was Paradise, thought Pierre, till you came. He said, "Yes, it is all you say of it. It is what the English poet Gray describes as 'far from the madding crowd'. But you, *monsieur*, belong rather to the madding crowd, *n'est-ce pas*?"

"Yes." Bernard spoke after a moment. "If one must belong definitely to one crowd or the other, I doubtless rank as one of the madding. I have never thought much about it. I was born into the life I know, just as you, no doubt, were born into this."

"Simonne was born into this, *monsieur*."

He felt Bernard's hard, clear gaze dart towards him. "Yes?" The Frenchman's voice was faintly amused. He guessed now why the schoolmaster had troubled to stop and talk to him. The poor fellow was setting himself up as Simonne's protector.

"Yes." Pierre's words came faster now. "This is the only life she has known ever. True, hers has been superior to the lives of the other little girls in Memramcook. She has had more opportunities at home, perhaps, but of the world, your world, M. Bernard, she knows nothing. She was content with what she had here—the hills and the marshes, the woods and the river. She would always have been happy here, if you had not come."

"Without granting what you say, *mon ami*, has it occurred to you that I had no choice about coming here? I made a promise to a man who is dead."

"Yes—yes, I know that. But you did not promise to take her away from home, to introduce her to the life of the cities."

"Which must, of course, be a wicked and dangerous life—that is what you wish to say, isn't it?"

"It is. I—I question your qualifications, M. Bernard, to act as guardian to Simonne. You are, if you will pardon my saying so, hardly the type of man —"

He stopped. Bernard had got to his feet. Pierre stood up, too. Bernard tapped the dottle from his pipe onto the palm of his hand, and threw the dry ash and cinders away. "You are a good fellow, Gay," he said quietly. "You are sincere and honest. You are also very easy to see through. I am so used to devious-minded people. You are worried, I take it: over Simonne; you wonder if I am capable of looking after her, if perhaps she will not come to harm. I will be honest and sincere with you: she will come to no harm with me. My sole desire is to help her to find a spot in life, to guide her, to take her brother's place."

Pierre was taken aback by this candid speaking. He had expected Bernard to be angry, to fly at him or at least to laugh at him. "You—but, if you will pardon me again, *monsieur*, you are one who has a reputation with women; Simonne is young, impressionable; to her you are a glamorous figure and she—"

He could feel Marcel Bernard's deliberate gaze. He heard him say deliberately: "I am no glamorous figure to myself, Gay. And that, my old one, is what matters. I have no illusions about Marcel Bernard. You agitate yourself needlessly, my friend, if these are the things that trouble you. She is to me just a little girl, the sister of my dead friend, entrusted to my care."

"You speak fair, M. Bernard," Pierre said grudgingly. "And I believe you. You will promise me that you—that you will never make love to her, that you will have nothing to do with her—"

"You talk like a father-confessor—" Bernard grinned—"working on the village Don Juan."

"You have been called Don Juan, *monsieur*—and not in a village."

"Damn it, Gay, you are a persistent fellow! Very well, then, I promise, if it makes you feel any better, that little Simonne is forever safe from me."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"It makes you feel better?"

"Much better."

"You care a lot for the little Caron yourself?"

"More than I like to think."

"It is sad, that. You would not, however, want her to give up her chances of advancement and bury herself here. Edmond left her some money, enough to complete her education and give her a little besides. Perhaps some day she will come back to you."

"I think not."

"Ah, you are a pessimist, I fear. But you are a sturdy fellow and she is fortunate to have such a champion."

"As she is fortunate in having you, M. Bernard."

"That is as it may be." Bernard's voice was serious. "I feel that this is a grave responsibility, I assure you. When you came along I was thinking of it. Indeed, I have thought of little else since I found out Simonne was not the

child I expected to see, but a young lady. What is a guardian supposed to do, can you tell me?"

"I—I had hoped to be her guardian, her—I think I should have known what to do—I'd have starved for her, gone in rags for her, suffered hell for her, killed for her—all those things I was prepared to do."

"Very heroic, I'm sure—and very poetical. But I mean, in a practical sense. I can, of course, find good teachers for her, good companions, good influences. I have no relatives in this country, unfortunately, but I have a good many friends in Montreal. There is one, Adèle Mercier, who might do. We shall go see her when we get there." Abruptly he changed the subject. "Did you know Edmond Caron very well?"

"Not at all well. He didn't spend a great deal of time around here—mostly in Moncton tinkering with aeroplanes. I had only slight acquaintance with him."

Yes, thought Marcel, Edmond would find little to interest him in this rather solemn and mournful young man. Edmond liked swift movement, whether in persons or things, which was why he had loved airships. "Edmond was quite a man in France, chief engineer with la Compagnie La France Aeronatique. He had been working on a new engine that far surpassed anything we had ever seen. He loved his work. It was a passion with him."

"And it cost him his life."

"Yes, that is the price one sometimes pays—for the thing one loves. And perhaps it is not too big a price at that."

"Well, I have detained you too long, M. Bernard. I shall go now. You will forgive me if I have seemed to overstep some bounds. You will understand that it is because I care so much for her—so much. I would kill the one who harmed her, *monsieur*."

He said it matter-of-factly, but no one could mistake his earnestness, his purpose. Bernard laid a hand on his shoulder. "It must be a great thing to care like that, M. Gay. It does you honor. And, believe me, I understand and appreciate the sentiments that brought you here, that made you speak as you did. So now, goodnight. Do not worry about her. She will be safe in my care."

He sat there, smoking, long after Pierre had gone. Tomorrow he would return to Montreal, and Simonne would go with him. His delight at the prospect was quite out of proportion, he knew that. Perhaps, he thought, it

would be better to start out right and let her take the train. But no, that would be a confession of fear, of weakness. And he was not afraid of himself nor had he anything but the greatest confidence in his strength. "Anyway," he mused, "if I even dared to kiss her that confounded schoolmaster would find out about it in some occult way and come after me on murder bent."

Simonne was ready, her trunk all packed and her little cases neatly arranged on the verandah when he drove up the next day at noon. She had said all her farewells in the village. "All except Pierre," she told Marcel. "I did not see him. There is a substitute teacher there today and she did not know where he had gone or when he would be back."

"That is strange. He didn't say anything last night."

"You were talking with him last night?"

"Briefly."

She looked at him, questioning him with her eyes. "He—he came to you to speak about me."

"Yes. He—is very fond of you. He came simply to ask me to take good care of you."

"He was not angry, not—?"

"Not at all. I can understand how he felt. He loves you, Simonne."

She colored under his steady regard. "Oh, I do not know."

"You do not love him?"

"I do not know what love is, *monsieur*."

He laughed. "In your ignorance, *ma chère*, you are only one of a vast company."

"Even you—you do not know?"

"I thought I did—" He began to pick up her travelling-cases and stow them in the rumble-seat. He wasn't going to discuss love with a convent-girl. Confound women, anyway, courtesan or convent-girl, they were always eager to philosophize on love. He had engaged in too many such verbal tilts and in their aftermaths.

Alphonse, the aged consort of Artemise Gautreau, came to help him strap the trunk on the big luggage-carrier. Soon the last buckle was fastened and they were in the car. Old Artemise was crying into her apron. Alphonse

rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. In the village-street children and grownups waved cheerily at them and Marcel sounded the deep-throated horn in reply. Then they left the village behind and arrowed across the marsh on the Post Road to Quebec. Her eyes lingered on the valley, vast and peaceful in the sun. She turned in her seat and gazed at the golden cross atop the spire of the Church of Lourdes which perches high up on the Beaumont. Quietly, in her heart, she said goodby to all this. To Pierre, she said goodby. She had a feeling, amounting to belief, that he was sitting up there on the Beaumont, among the ferns and the bracken, looking down on the valley, down on the world, down on the passing of his love.

Chapter IV
THE GOVERNOR'S GARDEN

The wind rippled past them, hummed steadily in their ears. It played with Simonne's hair, impishly plucking out gleaming strands from under her red beret and making them blow in the sun as if to say, "Here is a prettier gold than yours, my friend." The long winding miles of road slid under the nose of the chrome gargoyle who rode far out in front of the white car. Cottages, farmsteads, towns fled by them and the great motor sang with organ tones, smooth, throbbing, beautiful.

Out of Westmorland now and through the quiet country and the sleepy villages of Kent—Cocagne, Richibucto, Ste-Anne; northward to Northumberland and the long bridge over the Mirimachi. Here they stopped to drink pop and here to eat ice-cream. She saw the twinkle in his dark eyes as he watched her licking the strawberry cone. She colored, smiled up at him, feeling very young, very awkward, but very happy. He was looking at her as if she were a little child, he was amused at her enjoyment of the sweets he bought her, at the way she rounded the ice-cream with her pink tongue and the way she looked at it as if measuring it.

"*Bébé!*" he said chidingly, his teeth flashing white.

"But I am not *bébé*!" The grey-green eyes were resentful. "Yes, I like ice-cream, bon-bons—"

"It is not only that."

"No? Then what is it, M. Bernard?"

"It is"—He drew a deep breath—"it is just that you seem never to have had the mothering, the care of parents, the love—"

"I had Edmond. Oh, and I had Artemise and Madame Plourde and Alphonse and Mère Angélique and—and Pierre."

"They could not make up to you for what you lacked, Simonne." He thought, she has been cheated out of so much love; years that should have been crammed full of affection, of cherishing, of sweetness, of warmth, have been dry, empty, lonely, barren, for this little one. Even, she does not know what it is she has missed. Because she has never known a deep love, she is

ignorant of what such love can mean. She is lonely, pathetic, making a little world of her own in her heart, living in it, playing at happiness.

"Are you thinking about me, *monsieur*?"

"Simonne," he said sternly, "I am being the guardian now, pondering seriously on my duties. Will you have some more ice-cream?"

"Oh! I—no, I think not, thank you."

"Well then, we will go on. Tonight, I think, we will stop at Petit Rocher, leave early in the morning, stay the next night at the Château Frontenac in Quebec and end up at Montreal the day following. Is it well?"

"It—it is heavenly, *monsieur*."

"You have never been to Quebec?"

"I have never been anywhere—except Moncton, Shediac and Cap Brulé. But I have seen pictures of Quebec and I have read books about it and Sœur Jeanne d'Arc, who comes from there, talked often of its wonders. How I shall love to see it, to walk in those places where great men like Champlain and Frontenac and Talon once walked."

"And wicked men like François Bigot and Hugues de Paen and ladies like Angélique des Méloises."

"They were very wicked, I fear. But they must have been happy some times, even in their wickedness."

"Ah, no doubt." He nodded gravely. "They were wicked in the grand manner, Simonne—meaning, if you're sure to have indigestion, you might as well have it from lobster and champagne as from bread and cheese."

"I like lobster," she said gravely as they got into the car again; "I have never tasted champagne." He looked at her sharply but the pretty mouth was quite grave and he could not see the twinkling green imps that danced in her eyes. He could not keep from glancing at her profile, the slightly tilted nose, the round, stubborn little chin, the long lashes, the golden tan of her cheek and neck.

"Are you happy, Simonne?"

"Ever so happy." Her shoulder moved instinctively closer to his arm, then drew shyly away. He found himself wishing it had stayed there, wanting to put his arm about the slim shoulders and draw the warm, vital little body close to him. He could sense, had sensed from the start, the utter innocence and sweetness of her. It thrilled and abashed him. It made him

fetch himself up very short right now, made him think darkly, you've done many things in your life that were unworthy and ignoble, but if you play lightly with this young heart, you are less than a man. And he thought of his promise to Pierre Gay and thought of Edmond Caron whose little sister she was.

"Are you always so thoughtful, *monsieur*?" The big round eyes had never left his face. "You talk to me, I answer; then you become lost in your own thoughts and think no more about me. Tell me: I am not a care to you?"

"Of course not, child. How could you ever think that?"

"You are a busy man. You are famous. You must have many things to do; yet you came for me and—"

"That was a duty I owed to Edmond," he said, and felt the hurt his words gave her. "It has turned into a great pleasure." He smiled down at her. "You know, I thought I'd have to have a *bonne* for you and that I'd have to set up a nursery in my house. Instead, I suppose I'll have to advise you about your evening gowns, your car, your sweethearts."

She was silent for a good part of a mile. He thought she had forgotten his words, but she said, as if he had only just spoken; "And—will you like that rôle better than the one of nursemaid?"

In his heart he knew he wouldn't like it at all. He would hate her sweethearts—a lot of impossible young pups, no doubt. "I have no choice," he said. "I'll have to like it. Oh, I will like it."

"You will like it—yes." She looked down at her hands. He would like it if she had some other one for sweetheart, some man who would take the worry of her away from him. He didn't care for her—not that way. To him, to the great Marcel Bernard, she was just a little *fille du convent*—a convent-girl—whom he had to look after because of a promise made to her brother. She felt sad, thinking so; but she knew it must be like that.

She didn't talk much after that. They came at dusk to Petit Rocher and put up at the inn there. Sitting across from him at the little table she was happy again. They were seated in a glass-enclosed *salle-à-manger* that looked out on the smooth waters of Baie des Chaleurs, glinting with golden light in the sunset. The tables and chairs were painted black and orange and the glassware was blue. They ate fresh lobster and crisp lettuce and drank tea.

"And I will smoke, if you please, Monsieur my guardian." Brown fingers demanded one of Marcel's cigarettes. "For now, you see, I have left the

convent behind and am on my way to be a lady."

"What is your picture of a lady?" The dark eyes were alive with laughter.

Simonne wrinkled up her nose and blew smoke inexpertly. "Oh, you know. You have met so many ladies. You are just making fun of me. But wait a while, *monsieur*. I learn fast. You will see that."

"Don't learn too fast, Simonne. Don't learn too much either. You—you are very lovely as you are." Thinking of some of the ladies she might meet, might seek to pattern herself after, he half wished she were back in Memramcook. He felt a nervous dread of the days that lay ahead of him. He wished he were older, wiser; that he might feel more sure of himself in this new part he had to play.

Dance music from Montreal—Mo-réal, as the sugar-sweet voice of the announcer caressingly said it—came over the radio, breathing of mystic moons and heavenly kisses, of moments ecstatic and sweet surrender. She wished—how she wished!—that he did not look so stern, so pensive; that he would laugh and be gay and swing her into his arms and dance with her. He looked up suddenly from a deep contemplation of his cigarette and his eyes, meeting hers, saw the wistfulness in them.

"You want to dance, Simonne?"

"Oh, very much! You will dance with me?"

He got up without a word. Shyly, hiding her eagerness, her sudden joy, she came into his arms, all warm and golden. He held her lightly. Her back was like a boy's, firm and very straight, but the perfume of her hair, the beauty of her lashes, the wonder of her eyes—these were a woman's, these thrilled him, captivated him. She danced naturally, beautifully, lost utterly in the swing of the music. He felt that he never wanted to let her go, felt that already she belonged to him, had made herself a part of his life. He wanted to hold her close, close, and press his cheek against her hair.

"I'll always want to," he thought bitterly. "More and more as the days go by, and I dare not. I should not hold her in my arms like this. It shows me too much the wonder of her. Edmond, my poor friend, you left me a grave trust to fulfill. Had I known—But no, I'd have undertaken it anyway. And I'll fulfill it, *mon ami*; be sure of that."

"You will have many to dance with in Montreal, Simonne," he told her. "All the time there are parties and always dancing. You will have your fill of it."

"I like best to dance with you, I think." She looked up at him with unconscious coquetry. "And you—do you like dancing with me?"

Too much, he might have told her—far too much. But he said, "Of course, I shall always claim a dance from my ward."

"And it will not be just a duty?"

"Never that. You turn all duties into joys, Simonne."

"I am glad. Sometimes I have been afraid, you see."

"Don't ever be. No one could help loving you, child."

He regretted saying it until he saw the happiness in her eyes, in her smile. She is sweet, sweet, he thought then. Just a child, pleased with the things that please a child. I can love her, surely, as I would my own sister.

"It makes one happy to be loved," she said gravely. "I have never been so happy."

After they wearied of dancing, he walked with her through the little town. In his own heart was a strange, new elation. He had often thought that there was nothing else in the world to stir his emotions, to awaken him, to make him think that life was good. Yet tonight he felt a great joy, a great lift in his spirits. Tonight he felt strong as he had not felt in many years. He felt militant, ready to fight, to wage war against fate—he who had long ago resigned himself to easy apathy.

This she had done to him.

They walked back under the stars, the gay young man of Paris and the little Acadian convent-girl, and between them was a strange understanding, an ease, a peace, that made him marvel, that she took quite for granted but loved nonetheless. At the door of her room they paused, gazed at each other, smiled.

"Am I a good guardian, Simonne?"

"Oh, *monsieur*!" She lowered her gaze, her cheeks hot with a sudden blush. She touched the coarse tweed of his sleeve timidly and turned away. He knew that she was crying and because he knew too that they were tears of happiness he said only, "Good night, Simonne. I feel you'll be always happy with me."

"Yes, *monsieur*." It was only a choked whisper. "Always, with you." Then she opened the door and went in, closing it softly. He stood for a moment staring at the dark panels, feeling lonely and bereft, seeing in one

flashing revelation how time could intensify that feeling until it was torture. He went slowly to his own room and sat down on the bed, pulling aimlessly at his tie, the myriad thoughts of his too-swift life crowding, tumbling, jostling in his brain. The world he thought he knew, the life that he had been so sure was yet in its fluent mold—where were they now? His hard, uncompromising set of values, the prices he put on things—what of them?

He lit a cigarette and stood at the window staring out at the blue and silver mystery of the night over the Baie des Chaleurs. Somewhere out there, he thought, there is an answer to all things, yet a man must seek his answers in his own heart—must seek them there all his life or call himself a failure. And you, Bernard, he thought, have never searched very much or very deeply into yours. You must look now, look hard, and let us hope to the kind God that there is some good thing in it.

There could be nothing but good in it, nothing that was not fine and noble, nothing that was not admirable: so thought Simonne as, at her own window, she pulled aside the curtains and gazed out. Swiftly, in her heart, Marcel Bernard had attained godhead. She saw the blue-black night, its robe so brightly jewelled, only as a vague background against which thronged the bright pictures of the day, the teeming memories of what he had said, of what he had done, of how gently, tenderly he had held her in his arms as they danced. She closed her eyes, picturing his dark head above her, seeing the clear line of his jaw, the firm bronze of his neck, dreaming, dreaming—

Life was opening for her, slowly, beautifully. A bud unfolding into flower, a crescent moon, a melody gathering strength. She could feel tonight that all her world was changing; the lights, the colors, even she herself, would be different from now on. The few hundred miles she had put between herself and the Beaumont were interstellar spaces, so remote, so of another era, seemed the hours she had spent upon the hilltop, so unreal the things she had said there and dreamed. Only Pierre's epic was real—"I love you." She could still hear those softly spoken, earnest words. She would hear them down the endless slopes of Eternity and she would see the wistful eyes of him and picture him sitting alone upon the hill watching the roads that lead into the Valley and out of it; always watching.

She lay awake in the greyish dark of the little white-walled room under the steeply pitched roof of the inn. She watched the lights of cars passing on some distant hill as they moved across the ceiling above her bed, wondering about those who journeyed so late, who they were and where they went, thinking that perhaps tomorrow night, perhaps on many nights, the lights of

Marcel's car would shine into cottage windows and others would wonder about her and him.

"Who passes by this road so late?
Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Who passes by this road so late?
Always gay!
Of all the King's knights 'tis the flower—"

Her lips shaped the lilting words of the old play-song of her days at Ste.-Ursule. It was Marcel who passed by the road so late and he, of all the King's knights, was the flower. Marcel—she said his name, loving it, loving him not shyly, not shamedly now, but with a great singing in her spirit, a light that was a glory. "*Bébé*," she murmured, on the border between waking and sleeping. "He called me *bébé*. I am not *bébé* any longer. I am a woman now—his woman." And there was a smile on her lips when she slept, curving their full red beauty, a smile that still hovered there when she awakened to the sunlight in her room, to the early morning bustle of Petit Rocher, the pre-breakfast clatter from the kitchen, the up-and-at-'em tread of commercial-travellers passing her door on the way down to the eggs and bacon, the goodly savor of which, mingled with the incense of the coffeepot, came up to meet them.

Today Marcel planned on an early start, so to have extra hours in Quebec. Simonne wore her little yellow frock and a jaunty woven hat of fawn color and she had a red polo-coat that Edmond had sent her last summer from Paris. Marcel had not yet appeared when she went downstairs and out onto the verandah, out into the golden light and warmth, the still lingering dew of the morning. Blue coated martens with jolly white gorgets soared about the little bird-houses in the yard and darted in-and-out at the tiny doors. At the foot of the steps a tall youth in a McGill blazer was dusting the bonnet of his car.

"Wasted labor," he said, grinning up at her, a merry grin. "But off with the old dust and on with the new. You must be the goddess of Petit Rocher—or are you just a visiting goddess?"

"I pass by this road," said Simonne, smiling, thinking of the play-song.

"Alas!" said he. "All the best things pass. You go north, I'll bet, and I go south and—" She saw his gaze go past her. She turned and Marcel was there at her shoulder. There was a shadow on his face and his eyes were a little bleak. But all that passed when he looked down at her. "How now, *ma petite*! You still have the convent trick of getting up at dawn!"

"I shall have it until I acquire the smart world's trick of going to bed at that time. The early morning hours are the loveliest."

"Yes. Well, shall we go to breakfast?"

"If you will, *monsieur*." She smiled at the boy in the blazer, Marcel nodded to him. They went in. He thought of the way he had reacted to seeing her talking to that youth. Quite like a jealous schoolboy, he told himself, half-amused, half-angry. Why, it is quite natural for her to talk to young persons like herself. I am turning into a sort of Bluebeard, I fear. It was jealousy—of all things. I am finding again all those emotions I used to know, reverting to my childhood; I'll be having mumps or measles next.

"Simonne, do you always talk to strangers?"

"But no! That one—he was such a pleasant boy and today I am so happy —"

"Ah, yes—just bubbling over with happiness."

"You did not mind—my talking to him, *monsieur*?"

"Of course not." He smiled fondly at her across the crisp white table-cover. "Today I am so happy myself that I could not be angry with you no matter what you did. I could not be angry with anyone—not even myself."

"You are sometimes angry with yourself?"

"Often. Since I have become your official guardian I have to be very severe with myself, you understand."

"I am such a care?"

"Not such a care—unless a casket of precious stones is a care, or a gold mine."

"I am so precious! Ah, you make fun of me!"

He laughed, letting her think so, but he had not been making fun of her. His had been a white night, filled with thoughts of his past, of this present so utterly different from anything he had looked for. She was making something different of his life, he knew; even in the short time her path had merged with his, it was she who led the way. And women, he had told himself over and over, lying there in the darkness—women were the same, whether convent-girl or cocotte, whether sixteen or sixty; and they could play the very devil with a man's life. This one's little fingers can grasp as quickly and hold as strongly as the sharp-nailed talons of any harpy of the

boulevard. I must be careful. I must not make a fool of myself. And this as much for her sake as for my own.

But he found all those sophisticated thinkings meant very little this morning and all his worldly-wise resolutions were vanishing like the dew on the rose leaves by the window where they sat. How bright her eyes were this morning, how absurdly fast his heart beat when they looked into his with worship ill-disguised. She reached out the window and plucked a pink cinnamon-rose and gave it him without a word and he took it wordlessly and breathed in its fragrance and fastened it to his lapel as if it were something rare and precious.

Then there were sea-trout and thin slices of potato fried crisply and soft rolls and honey and coffee. He thought, I could go on like this forever. The joy of seeing her in the morning more than makes up for the agony of losing her at night. Simonne, Simonne, what have you done to me, you little witch, you warm, golden, funny little thing! Most unguardian-like thoughts. He frowned at his coffee. Well, tomorrow they would be in Montreal and he would hand her over to Adèle Mercier and go about his business and forget her.

"*Eh bien!*" He gathered up his change, leaving a generous *pourboire*. "Off to Quebec now, Simonne. I thought perhaps if we got there early enough we could go to the Ursulines and talk with the Mother Superior—you know, about your going to study there."

"Oh, yes." She didn't smile. "But—but that is months away, is it not? I will not have to study in the summer time or—I mean, M. Bernard, you will not—" She stopped, utterly confused, trembling. She looked at him beseechingly. And he knew she wanted to say, "You will not leave me alone." He felt guilty, knowing what had been in his mind, knowing that the last thing in the world he wanted was to leave her alone.

"We will not talk of it now," he said. "There is lots of time. I want you to be happy now. *En route!*"

At evening the white car reached the heights of Levis across the broad St. Lawrence from the lowering rock of Quebec, the Gibraltar of America. The sunset light seemed to shine upon the centuries here as it transformed grim grey battlement and bastion and ancient steeple and sloping roof and winding street into a city of Elfland. "One can imagine," said Marcel, "that the great Cardinal Laval still is there in his palace, that Louis de Buade, the great Frontenac himself, still paces up and down at the Castle of St.-Louis, that Bigot and his wild men-friends and gallant ladies still hold high revel at

Beaumanoir, that Jean Talon still looks in at his brewery. All their ghosts live there. Hear the bells, Simonne!"

The golden pealing of the angelus bells came over the silver water, striking against the tree-clad heights of Levis, echoing near and far. They listened, enraptured. Slowly they drove down to the ferry and were carried across the river to the Lower Town. Then up near-perpendicular streets to the Château, standing on what was once the site of the Castle of St.-Louis.

Here, thought Simonne, as, close at his side, she passed through the arched doors, I enter upon another life, his life. Here was the smart world of two continents, drinking, dancing, dining. Soft lights and music attuned to their softness, deep carpets muffling the sound of hurrying feet. She watched Marcel Bernard, on whom it all had no more effect than the little inn at Petit Rocher. "You will rest in your room for a little while, Simonne," he said at her door. "Presently I will come for you."

"If you please, *monsieur*." She gave him a smile and went into the great room where the boy had set down her bags. Such a room! She had heard Sophie St.-Amende and Lapage and others speaking of grand hotels. She spent moments after the boy had gone, just gazing about her before exploring the big tiled bathroom and all the other wonders. That took so long, and the bath that followed it, that she was just brushing her hair when Marcel came.

He watched her. Each stroke of the brush seemed to make brighter the golden lights in the thick chestnut waves. She wore a white skirt and sweater now and a little gold locket nestled in the brown hollow of her neck. She could see him in the mirror as he sat by the window smoking pensively, gazing at the river and the slow departure of a great vessel bound for the sea. Watching him, the swift play of his emotions shown by the movement of lip or eye, she forgot the hair-brushing. He glanced over at her and in the mirror their eyes met and their glances locked and held until both looked away.

"It is wonderful here, M. Bernard."

"You like it?"

"I love it. Do not you?"

He shook his head. He didn't like it. He was coming back into his own world now, the gold and glitter, the laughter and jest, the champagne and caviar; it had no attractions for him. In his own room he had thought bitterly, resentfully, Here's the end of this so happy interlude, of these hours with her that are so innocent, so happy. And he didn't want them to end. He couldn't

see why all his life should not be like this. But it couldn't. "*Sapristi!*" he muttered. "I am becoming soft and senile. I have been taking the nursemaid rôle too seriously."

"But why don't you like it?"

"It's my world, Simonne, and I wearied of it long ago. But I shall enjoy it tonight because I shall see how happy you are. It is fun for you, eh?"

"Yes! It is like a fairy-tale for me. I think I am in a dream and fear that presently I will wake up and find a sunbeam on my nose and hear the bells of the convent and see Mademoiselle Cloutier standing over me holding the little bell by the tongue all ready to rap me smartly with the handle—'Raise yourself, Simonne, sleepy one. Mark well, that is the summons for chapel.'"

Marcel laughed. "That would not be such an unpleasant awakening as you might think. There are lots of worse ones. Well, if you are ready, *chère*, we will walk through the town and recall the history of New France."

But the evening was too warm, too glorious, for history, even such colored history as Quebec's. They found a little tea-room high up on the hill and lingered there over supper until the stars came out above the great river, over the dark hills that loomed across from them like ramparts of a weaker fortress. There was a stillness on the city as they gazed down upon its lights glimmering in the hazy dusk, yet around it seemed to flow the tide of the centuries and all the splendid, the gallant, the knavish, the wicked ones who had lived and died below this frowning crag seemed to have left here something of their brief existences and all about were shadows and whisperings, shadows of things long gone, whisperings of words forgotten.

They felt its spell, its glamour, fall upon them like a magic cloak. When they spoke their voices were low, softly pitched, yet clearly audible. They did not speak much. He was thinking: in a little while now this quiet joy will end. There will be no more of this sweet intimacy. I will hand her over to Adèle. Yes, I can trust Adèle to make something of her—something good. She is an anachronism, this little Caron. She wears crinolines in a day of sheath-like skirts and backless dresses, yet, for all the voluminous coverings of innocence and convent-teaching and morals she is far less well protected against the wolves than are the women of Adèle's world. But she must never become hard, metallic, as they are. She must not deride everything, as they do. She must keep that warm glow in her eyes, that sweetness of expression about her mouth, and she must keep always those little vigil lamps burning before the images she has in her heart.

He did not know that his image had displaced all others, that before it a votive fire burned strongly. Even now, watching the glowing tip of his cigarette, the arc it made in the dusk or the little figures it described as he gestured when he talked, she kept thinking, I love him. I have loved him from the moment I saw him. And now I know what love is. If Pierre asked me now I could tell him; at least I would know what I wanted to tell him. I might not be able to put it in words. I love you—*je t'aime*—those were inadequate words. Love—that was this strange warmth, this tingling happiness, this melody in her heart, this wonder that made the night and the stars and the little wind in the trees and the sleepy twittering of the birds and the warm pine-scented air—that made the whole world different—this was love.

He held the red coat for her when they were leaving. His hand touched her shoulder and she trembled at his touch. Will he dance with me tonight, she wondered. Oh, it would be wonderful to dance with him here. Perhaps when we return to the Château—

When they did return the music lured them. But it was not the music of the dance. That was elsewhere. Here a string quartette, lilting violins and deep viola and mellow-singing 'cello, playing now a minuet of Lully, now a measured sarabande, now Liszt's "Dream of Love", completed the beauty of the night. The gorgeous counterpoint showered down upon them where they lingered on the terrace.

Now the viols played Schubert's Ballad from Rosamonde, that Simonne knew well from the convent music-room—

> "The full moon rises o'er the height,
> But where, my love, art thou?
> And where the kiss of fond delight
> That sealed our truthful vow?"

The star-glow glimmered upon her face. The music seemed made for her, for him, for this hour. Unspeaking they walked along, she close by his side, but not touching him. In all her being was a great joy, a great expectancy, a great readiness. They came to a place of silence and solitude, yet all about she seemed to hear the rustle of silks, the whispering of words warm and passionate and from the shadows what bright and mocking eyes looked out at her and him!

"This was the Governor's Garden, Simonne," he said. "And lovers wandered here under the moon and whispered things that were only the echo of things whispered down the ages, just as if now—"

He stopped. He wanted to go on. Her face, uplifted to his, urged him to go on, to say, as he had thought to say: "Just as if now I whisper of love to you, my own, it will be only the echo of those echoed whisperings. We are not real, nothing is real, but this thing that we feel in our hearts, this great and terrible force that possesses us. This only matters."

But he did not speak. He looked down at her and slowly his arms came up and encircled her and drew her close to him and for a moment he gazed on her face that was like a white flower in the star-glow and for a moment prayed and for a moment despised himself but for no moment resisted. His lips came down to hers, lingered on hers lightly, ecstatically. Her own warm arms were about his neck, clinging like a child's arms and the perfume of her hair, of her body, was a rose mist in which he was lost to all sense of time or place or fitness.

For moments they stood as one. Her eyes were closed. She floated on a great sea and bursting lights were all about her and in all her being was surrender and dissolution that brought a weakness, a lassitude into her limbs, that kept her where she was, wishing she might stay there always. Then, almost brusquely, he loosed her and her arms slipped from about his neck and reality came back—reality of flagstone and mortar and bare night and stars. The music had ceased. The night wind was suddenly chill as if it blew from the boreal places of Belle-Isle or from the grey bleakness of Labrador. She felt as if she had tumbled from the stars. She touched her lips still hot with the ardor of his kiss. She could feel still the strong clasp of his arms.

"I'm sorry, Simonne." His voice was as she had never before heard it—cold, impersonal. "That should not have happened. You must forget it, you understand. You must consider that it did not happen."

She could not believe what she heard. Why should he say such things? Perhaps it was because he had kissed so many women; perhaps he did not want to be loved by her.

"It was the night, the stars, the music, the magic of this place, the spell of old dead loves that still lingers here. It was all those things."

"And it was not I?"

"It was not you." He lied, but did not know he lied. Surely, he told himself, it was not her presence; had it been any other girl he would have done the same. So it was wrong, it would be making a wrong worse, to let her get any foolish ideas from this unreal episode. She was a child, a convent-girl, of a caliber with fools and poets—warm, romantic, building huge rose-windowed castles on a thing so trifling as a kiss.

"And I must forget—forget that you—!"

"It will be well to forget."

Suddenly, she laughed—not the warm, spontaneous laughter that he loved to hear from her. She laughed as often he had heard other women laugh. *Dame*, he thought, knowledge is born in them, and they're sizing up a man even while they love him.

"Why do you laugh, Simonne?"

For a moment she did not answer him. Her head was lowered and he could not see her face. He put his finger under her chin and lifted it until he could see her eyes that were dark, full of mystery, in that strange light.

"I do not laugh at you, *monsieur*."

"Then at what?"

"Oh, at a book I read once."

"Yes?"

"You know Remy de Gourmont?"

"They did not let you read de Gourmont in the convent."

"No, no, no. It was Edmond's book. One thing in it I read that came back to me when you were speaking and made me laugh; it was that a woman still remembers the first kiss when a man has forgotten the last. I could not understand it when I read it, but now—" She turned away, her shoulders drooping.

"Simonne!" He reached out to stay her. He damned himself for ever having done this thing. "Simonne, listen to me!"

"Yes, *monsieur*." Obediently. He knew she wasn't paying attention to him at all; she was listening only to the sad things her own heart said. But he floundered along, feeling ridiculous, futile, knowing that he had fallen from some high place where she had set him. "A kiss is nothing, Simonne—that is, I mean, you must think nothing of it. You are very lovely, very sweet, and you are in my charge. Perhaps I should not have kissed you. Certainly, I should not if it is going to cause you regret—"

"Oh, no! Please—please do not think that, *monsieur*. Never regret. To remember it will always make me happy—while it makes me sad, you understand."

He looked at her in desperation, started to speak, thought better of it. They walked back to the Château and went in. There was dance music here —throbbing, seductive, making one's feet move to its rhythmic beat. But now she did not want to dance. In the lobby someone called, "Marcel!" She saw a red-headed girl in a Nile green evening gown, sitting with a group of six. The girl had vivid violet-blue eyes, their size and color accentuated by the extreme pallor of her face and the garish redness of her mouth.

Marcel muttered something. His hand closed on Simonne's elbow. "Come, *petite*. I want you to meet these people. The girl is Adèle Mercier."

Simonne walked obediently beside him. She felt the appraising, wondering looks. She was glad of the touch of his hand on her arm. It gave her strength. These people were so sure, so poised. She heard meaningless names. A baron—one was a baron—at the convent one used to dream of meeting a real live baron. It meant nothing now. She was conscious of the Mercier girl's wise eyes that seemed to look into her soul, conscious too of lifted brows and faintly cynical smiles when Marcel told them of his guardianship.

Some of them had known Edmond. They were kind to her. Adèle drew her down on the cushions and looked at her as if she were a museum-piece, amusedly but in friendly fashion. "So! And you are the secret of M. Bernard's disappearance from Montreal! You must have been the envy of the convent when he arrived in all his glory. How does it feel to have such a guardian?"

"I am afraid I am a burden to him. He expected to find a little girl, you see, because Edmond always spoke of me as if I were *bébé*. Then when he found I was not little—"

"Yes." Adèle Mercier's hair was like a deep flame. It was thick and she wore it *en coronet*. Simonne thought, "Someday I shall wear mine like that. Perhaps—perhaps he likes it like that." She looked up at Marcel. He was talking to some of the others. Looking at him, she forgot all else, forgot where she was, forgot the girl beside her and did not see the wise, pitying smile that curved Adèle's mouth. She was thinking of the Governor's Garden, of his dear face above her in the stars' pale light, of his kiss that had been lovelier than her dreams of heaven. Forget it, she thought, I could never forget it, *monsieur*—I have too little to remember.

Chapter V
"YOU ARE NOT TO CRY"

Adèle Mercier rode with them to Montreal. Simonne was rather glad of her presence, Marcel definitely so, inconsistently wishing, at the same time, that she were in Hell or Halifax. But she sat there on the other side of Simonne, who was pressed close to him as he drove. It didn't matter: all the warm, happy intimacy, all the light-hearted talk and laughter of the road to Quebec, were gone now. Perhaps, if he were alone with Simonne he could put things right, could chase that serious look from her eyes, that little droop from her lips.

"I have done a very foolish thing," he assured himself for the hundredth time. "Something that it will take months, even longer, to undo. She is so young, so impressionable. It may be that the moving finger of love has inscribed something on her heart. But it is love she is concerned with—not me. She will find the same rapture—and the same sadness—again, with someone more her own age. She will forget. It is nonsense, and sentimental nonsense, to say a woman still remembers the first kiss when a man has forgotten the last. Perhaps I shall be the one who longer remembers. The memory will be a happy one. I never before knew such happiness as in that moment, never before hated myself so much for having lived through other moments that were but a poor shadow of that one. I wonder what Adèle would say if she knew. Perhaps she does know. Women have a way of finding out such things without ever asking."

Adèle knew. From the moment she saw Simonne looking at him, Adèle had known. It twisted her heart a little to see that rapt, dreaming look in this little girl's eyes. There was the glow of first love in that look; there was worship and surrender. But Adèle knew Marcel Bernard, knew he was too strong to accept lightly such a precious gift as this little one was holding out to him. Marcel was mature, of her world. Marcel had known many loves. A pity this convent-dove should have her heart broken over him. Still, mused Adèle cynically, watching the rain spatter and stream on the sloping windshield, it is perhaps as well to have the heart broken when one is young. That way it has a longer time to heal, and it is more easily healed, just as it is more easily broken.

A grey murky pall of rain and mist blotted out the river and made the cottages and church-steeples along their road look ghostly and unreal. The windshield-wipers clicked back and forth, back and forth, like busy metronomes marking the beat of the motor's throbbing song; the tires swished steadily on the pavement. Simonne sat quietly between them. Today she could not talk to Marcel as she had on the way up from Memramcook. It wasn't because of Adèle's presence. Had they been alone, she and Marcel, it would have been no easier for her to talk to him. Last night, in her room, she had cried herself to sleep. At times she had hated him, wished he had never come her way. This pain of heart she felt now was worse than any other ill she had known. Why had he kissed her, held her like that, if it all must be forgotten? How could one forget anything so poignantly sweet?

Perhaps, to him, it was neither new nor very sweet. Perhaps this girl of the flamy hair and vivid blue eyes had known love with him. Perhaps what she thought of as something godlike and holy meant little or nothing to persons like Marcel and Adèle. Maybe when one got to know love better, to have more of it, one didn't suffer like this.

Today she felt like a stranger and saw in true perspective her position with regard to Marcel Bernard. She had had no right to take him, to take everything, so much for granted. He had been too good to her, devoting all his attention to making her happy. Now he was back in his own busy world and in it she had no place. Foolish to think that the pleasure of those first few days was a permanent thing. She felt now that he was slipping away from her, that whatever of nearness and understanding had come into their relationship had given way to the bare bond of a guardian to his ward.

"I was wished on him," she thought miserably, hating the drab muggy day, the sodden hedges, the murky sky. "He would have been as good to any other girl, as kind. I wanted too much of him when he was already giving me more than I was entitled to. What a silly little country-girl he must think me! Well, I shall study to be different. I won't go on looking as if the heart had died in me, as if I didn't care to live any longer; though I feel that way. I won't show it. I must not show it. Adèle would never admit that a man had been able to hurt her."

Adèle was looking at her, comically, with one eye; the other was hidden by the rakish down-sweeping brim of her tan felt hat. Simonne smiled at her, shyly. She knew, rather she feared, that Adèle had learned her secret, that Adèle had guessed in a moment how she felt towards her guardian. And Adèle was quietly laughing at her, thinking of it all as a childish crush, much like the affairs one joked about at school.

Adèle said, "You and I will have a good time, Simonne. I won't let you become lonesome for your Acadian hills. While M. Bernard is out peddling his little airships, you and I will go to the big shops, go riding, go to concerts, to dances. We will be gay. One needs to be gay after years of convent-life. I know. I served my time at Sault aux Recollets. One gets quite out of touch with the world."

"Which is just as well perhaps," said Marcel, his eyes narrowed, peering ahead into the slanting rain. "The world is a mess."

"Ah!" The Mercier girl's crescent-shaped brows lifted. "How cynical we are this morning! Lay it to the rain and the foul weather, Simonne. We weren't made to go through life by the by-ways, *mes amis*, if we really want to live we take the highroad. The traffic is thicker there, one finds thieves, rascals, a thousand dangers—but one lives."

"High road or low—they lead to the same place," muttered Marcel perversely.

"I suppose you're regretting that you didn't join the Trappists or some other cheerful monks, M. Bernard," mocked Adèle.

Marcel smiled at her wryly. "I have thought stranger thoughts, *mademoiselle*. Sometimes, flying over those endless miles of ocean, when it seemed that we must have got away from the world altogether, I have had a glimpse of the wisdom of such people as do get away from it."

"You're flying around in circles, my winged one. Well, here's where you come to earth." A toll-bridge was the bringer to earth. "You find toll-bridges everywhere," said Adèle to Simonne, looking slyly at Marcel Bernard as he paid the fee. "On the road of life just as on the road to Montreal. And when we can't pay the toll—why, we just don't go on."

Marcel stared at her for a moment. "See what a splendid teacher I have selected for you, Simonne. She will be philosopher, guide and friend to you. In short order you will be well versed in the Mercier philosophy."

"Some of it," amended Adèle, fishing for a cigarette. "I'm not always like this, Simonne—mostly on rainy mornings, and we don't have so many of those."

"I shouldn't mind if we had a lot of them, *mademoiselle*." Simonne looked fairly into the violet-blue eyes. "I should like to acquire some wisdom."

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" Adèle almost choked on her cigarette. "So young and already desirous of acquiring wisdom. Has M. Bernard made you feel that you lacked wisdom, made you realize that it is a most important thing for a girl to have?"

"I should just like to have it. Does it make one happier?"

"That depends on how miserable one has been. I think it is a consolation at most times."

"And a curse at others," said Marcel. "Don't get too much wisdom, Simonne. You are lovely as you are."

"Wisdom," put in Adèle quickly, "would enable you to evaluate that remark, Simonne. He throws little bouquets like that all along his road like a king scattering smiles or a cardinal bestowing blessings."

"I see," murmured Simonne. She was learning, she thought. Yesterday she would have taken the remark entirely to herself, would have made much of it and built dreams and hopes upon it. She had learned already that one takes the flowers, not forgetting that their freshness and fragrance soon goes, that one receives the blessing but one still plans on tomorrow's breakfast.

They reached Montreal in the late afternoon. The rain had ceased, but the sky was still grey and overcast. Marcel drove them to an old house in Jeanne Mance Street. Adèle looked up at the topmost windows and said, "That, Simonne, is where I live and where you shall live. M. Bernard dwells in solitary state in Westmount. I helped him find the flat. It was such fun. First he wanted a nursery for you, then he decided you might have outgrown nurseries, and wanted a playroom. He has games and picture-books there for you."

Marcel laughed gaily. "What fun we had buying those books and games! Adèle would say, 'How old would she be? About fifteen?' I'd say, 'I think perhaps not quite that old—say fourteen.' Then we would march into a book-shop and make for the juvenile shelves. We did not get you any roller-skates but there is a nice paint-box and a basket-weaving set."

They laughed hilariously all the way upstairs. Simonne wondered if it wouldn't have been better if she had proved to be the little girl they looked for. As it was, she made new problems for them. And if she had been a little girl Marcel would have taken her home with him, she would be with him all the time. How often, she wondered, would he come here.

It was a lovely, gracious place, with great, high-ceiled rooms, with panel mirrors and modernistic furniture upholstered in white leather. It was

spacious, the rooms grander than those at the Château. A domestic, whom Adèle called Monique, was there to help them. She was a black-haired, brown-skinned little woman, part Indian.

Marcel, when Adèle asked him to remain, spoke ruefully of his mail, of a thousand things that awaited his attention. "I will leave you and Simonne to get acquainted and I will call you very soon. *Au revoir*, Simonne."

She gave him her hand, stilling its shakiness. She felt sick. She wanted to cry, wanted to fling her arms about his neck and say, "Don't go! Please don't leave me. I won't bother you. I'll sit in a corner or on the doorstep—anywhere as long as I am near to you, as long as I can call to you and you can hear me." But Adèle was watching them and Marcel's mouth, though smiling, was stern. So she said simply, "*Au revoir*, M. Bernard. You have been so kind to me. Believe me, I am most grateful to you for—for everything."

"Your servant, Mademoiselle Caron—always," he said teasingly. He touched her cheek lightly with his finger-tips, waved to Adèle and hurried out of the apartment.

Simonne stared at the blank panels of the door, forgetting Adèle, forgetting everything, knowing only that he was gone, that she was alone. "Oh, why did he have to go? Why could he not—"

"First lesson." Adèle's voice startled her. "We must never let our eyes say more than our lips, except to those we love and who love us."

"Oh!" Simonne turned to her. "Were my eyes then tell-tale?"

"Ever so much." Adèle came to her, put an arm about her shoulders and led her to a huge davenport with soft white leather cushions. They sat there. "Yes, I saw in your eyes last night at the Château Frontenac that Marcel had become a sort of god to you. That is so, isn't it? Or maybe you don't want to talk about it?"

"I—I don't know. You see, he has been so good to me, so kind. Perhaps I do not do well to repay his goodness, his kindness, by—by—"

"By falling in love with him." Adèle shook her gently. "The only way a girl of your age ever does fall, is in love, Simonne. Everything is different then. Love is more important even than living. Then one falls out of love, for some reason or other, and, oddly enough, the world still wags on, the sun still rises and sets and one feels a forgotten thrill at the sight of a box of bon-bons or even a nice lamb-chop with string beans—which is just what Monique is cooking for us now."

"That will be nice. It is lovely here. It is lovely of you to have me here."

Adèle laughed, "Funny child! I love having you here. I want you to be happy and to help make you happy."

"Have you known Marcel—M. Bernard"—hastily—

"Have I known him long?" Adèle helped her. "Five years. I met him when I was a student at the Sorbonne. He was studying aeronautics then, so was your brother Edmond. They used both to come to my apartment. We used to sing and dance and be very gay. Edmond often spoke of you, so that Marcel and I got to know you very well. We knew too Edmond's trick of forgetting that things and persons grow old and we might have realized that little girls grow into big girls. Marcel must have been surprised when he saw you."

"Oh, he was! The morning I told him—it was closing-day—we stood in the Grotto. I feared he would be angry with me for deceiving him. You see, I had known him some hours, since the night before, but he did not know who I was. It made me happy, so happy, to have him come to the Commencement. I had expected no one—"

"You had no friends there?"

"Oh, yes, some. But no one very close to me. No one I could call really my own, except Pierre."

"Who is Pierre?"

"Oh, he—he is the schoolmaster at Memramcook, where I live. He used often to walk with me, and he writes poetry."

"How idyllic! I didn't know anyone wrote poetry now. Strange, too, when there are so many, especially women, who love to listen to it. Did Pierre make poems to you?"

"Yes." Her eyes held a far-off look. "Yes, he made poems to me sometimes."

"And you still hear them, I think." Adèle put her hand on the back of Simonne's. "I do not know how much poetry you'll find here, *mon enfant*. There isn't much, and what there is doesn't ring so true. Still, there are men who can make a sonnet with a glance, a ballad with a sigh. Come, we will get ready for our supper. Monique is subject to black rages when one is late. And one is often late. I live alone, you see. I have a mother in Europe somewhere; no one else. That is why I am so glad to have you. I had a husband once—did you know?"

"A—a husband! He is dead then—"

"He is far from dead. We are divorced."

"Oh!" Simonne looked at her wide-eyed. She had never seen a divorced person before. In the convent one got the idea that divorced persons must be somehow different, that they must be rather wicked and dangerous. But Adèle—she looked like a girl. It had never occurred to Simonne that she might once have been married.

"I was very young," said Adèle lightly. "I took my love as seriously as you take yours. I thought, if I didn't have that love, that I couldn't go on living. Yet I lost it and I have gone on very well. One has friends. One can always dance and be gay."

Adèle had friends. They came, some of them, quite early in the evening—women like herself, smooth, poised, very self-assured young women, and rather bored-looking men. They sat and talked or danced to the radio-music. They were interested in Simonne. When Adèle told them she was Marcel Bernard's ward, they were even more interested in her. It seemed to strike them as strange that Marcel should be a guardian. Simonne remembered that Pierre had found it strange too.

A dark, olive-skinned fellow, impressive in evening-clothes, came over to her and bowed. She tried to recall his name. There were so many of them. "Maurice de Haerne," he said, smiling. Oh, yes, she knew now. He was a Belgian. She knew it from his pronunciation of French, so much like Sister Germaine's. "And you are the little Caron, eh?" He looked at her appraisingly. "I knew your brother—met him in France."

"Oh!" Her eyes showed pathetic interest. "I am so glad. You saw him perhaps not long before—"

De Haerne nodded. "The day before it happened I saw Edmond Caron in Paris. I am with the Belgian Air-transport. Edmond was, of course, well known to us and we regret his so untimely end. You, *mademoiselle*, are in the care of M. Bernard, I understand."

"Yes. He is my guardian. It was Edmond's wish."

De Haerne shrugged. "I do not know of that, of course. It would be in writing—a thing so important. Where M. Bernard and your brother were on such bad terms—"

"What is it you say, *monsieur*?" Simonne, who had been watching Adèle as she danced with a red-headed youth, turned quickly to stare at the

Belgian. “You say my brother and Marcel—M. Bernard—were on bad terms!”

“Oh!” De Haerne looked embarrassed. “It may have been nothing. It is nothing. I beg you to forget it. Doubtless, it was some trivial thing.”

“It must have been nothing, M. de Haerne. Edmond entrusted me to M. Bernard’s care.”

“And he would scarcely hand anything so precious over to an enemy, eh?” De Haerne smiled down at her. “Well, I am sure he will prove worthy of the trust and will be as good a friend to the sister as to the brother. I shall come again to pay my respects, if I may, Mademoiselle Caron.”

He bowed stiffly and strolled away. Simonne looked pensively after him. What he said, rather what he had clearly left unsaid, disturbed her greatly. Marcel had not said anything of quarreling with Edmond. Apparently then, if quarrel there was, it had been of no importance. Edmond, she knew, had been terribly hot-headed and impulsive. He was likely to quarrel with anyone. He would quarrel furiously one minute and make a fervent peace the next.

Adèle came to her. Adèle wore a dress that was like a silver sheath over her willowy body. “Well, Little Pigeon, why aren’t you joining in the fun? You look so serious, my child—and life is too, too short for seriousness.”

“I am a little tired, I fear. But tell me, please, who is this M. de Haerne?”

“De Haerne? Oh, he’s sort of a Belgian police-dog. Reminds you of one, doesn’t he? I don’t mean he is connected with the police. He sells aeroplanes or works for an aeroplane company, I think.”

“Is he a friend of M. Bernard’s?”

“An acquaintance only, I think. But why all these questions?”

“Oh, it is nothing. I am too curious. I suppose it is not the correct thing here to be too curious.”

“Not only that, Simonne; it is sometimes actually dangerous. The less one knows, the less one has to worry about.”

Monique came, scowling distastefully at the guests. “It is the telephone,” she announced, and as Adèle moved away, added vindictively, “For Mademoiselle Simonne.”

“Oh!” Adèle’s smooth masque was undisturbed. “It will be Marcel instructing you to go to bed early. Be nice to him.”

It was Marcel. His voice sounded cold, impersonal. She did not know he had debated a good hour with himself whether or not to call her. He said, "I thought I would find out if you are all right. If there is anything you need. And, oh, yes, if you can be ready about eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. I shall come and together we'll go to the lawyer's about your inheritance."

"I shall be ready, *monsieur*." She hesitated. "Thank you for calling me."

"Oh, it is nothing. Are you enjoying yourself there?"

"Very much. There are many people here—dancing." She thought of the time she had danced with him. She wanted him to know that she was not dancing with anyone here, but something kept her from telling him.

"Ah!" His tone wasn't quite so impersonal. "Well, it is nice that you enjoy yourself. But do not tire yourself too much."

"Very well, *monsieur*."

"Good night, Simonne."

"Good night, M. Bernard."

She heard him hang up. She put the telephone down slowly, hating to go back to the room of laughter and music, wishing that she were with him again in the white car riding over the world under a moon, riding on an endless road. What was there here for her? She did not want to dance, to flirt, to learn to slough off difficult things as, she was sure, Adèle Mercier did.

She went back to the big living-room. A blonde youth met her at the door and smiled at her and said, "Dance with me, *mademoiselle*?" She said yes. She didn't care. Surprisedly, she found after a moment that she enjoyed dancing with him. The music was soft, throbbing, contagious. You caught its rhythm; you couldn't help but catch it.

His name was Brossard. She waited for him to tell her he sold aeroplanes or, at least, parachutes, but it turned out to be bonds. "And you, I understand, have just come from the convent."

"Just a few days ago."

"Do you like this?"

"Yes. Where I come from there isn't much dancing or much fun. This is all new to me, but I do like it. You are all so kind."

"We cannot help it. You are different somehow from the girls one meets. You attract me. I speak for myself, but I dare say it is the same with the others."

"I am different—how?"

"Now that I cannot tell you." He was looking at her lips, so softly parted, so unconsciously tempting. His arm tightened about her waist. She did not resist and presently he loosed it. "Will you let me take you out some night soon to dinner and a show?"

"I should like that. But it will be necessary to ask—"

"Then you ask, my young one. The name is Antoine Brossard. I won't try to sell you any bonds. But I am so glad I found you. Do you really know these people? The red-headed giant with Adèle is Pete Rosson. He's a football-coach. The little fat fellow is Jean Morin. He owns a biscuit-factory. The girl with him is Rose Menard. She paints pictures almost as well as she does herself. The blonde is Margot Drouin. The tall fellow with her is de Haerne—looks like something out of an Oppenheim thriller."

"I've met him—I met them all of course."

"Ah! Here is Monique with some cocktails. You will have a cocktail?"

"I have never had one." She hesitated. "No, I think I will not have one now, thank you."

"Still the little *fille du convent*, eh?" Brossard cocked an eye at her over the rim of his glass. "Well, it's smart for one not to drink now, since everyone else does. Your health, Mademoiselle Simonne—and may you be happy in Mo'réal." His smile was gay but in his eyes she saw an earnestness, a question. He was Youth, this Tony Brossard, younger than Marcel, than Pierre. She wondered if he ever could be very serious.

"Yes, sometimes," he said. "Isn't that an answer to the question you were asking yourself?" He put down his glass and moved close to her, almost touching her. "You were wondering if I could be serious. Well, I can be—I could be about you."

"About me!" The way she colored, the swiftness of her confusion, thrilled him. He saw in her what Pierre, what Marcel had seen—some unspoiled, virgin beauty, that was like an aura about her. "You never saw me before tonight, M. Brossard."

"You must learn to call me Tony," he said firmly. "And if, as you say, I have not seen you before tonight, I can tell you that I have been looking for

you all my life. And that is not just talk. I knew you were the one as soon as I met you in the doorway."

"The one? Oh—"

"Tony!" It was Adèle's voice. "You are not making love already to my little girl!"

"I am trying. Don't spoil it now by telling her she is not to believe me."

"Shall I let her find it out for herself?"

"I don't think I could ever disillusion her. I'd hate myself forever after."

Innocence, thought Adèle, is ever beautiful. Odd how this shy little girl seemed to bring out the best that was in men. She didn't know about de Haerne, but here was Marcel Bernard going all soft about her, calling up after being away only a few hours. Here was Tony Brossard, delight of the debutantes, beginning to wear a Galahad look, to sit erect on his charger and boldly clutch his sword.

"I have asked Mademoiselle Simonne if I may take her out, Adèle. Does she have to ask permission from you?"

"As a matter of formality, I suppose. M. Bernard is her guardian, you know. I am a sort of deputy. I don't think there'll be any objection to her going out with you. Would you like to go with him, Simonne?"

The great eyes looked up at Tony. Adèle sighed. It was the girl's utter naturalness, the way she could do things that in others would seem the height of affectation. "But yes, I should like to go with Tony."

"Then you shall go."

"I'll telephone you tomorrow, Simonne." He looked at her lingeringly. The others were preparing to go on to another party. "Please don't forget me before tomorrow."

"Oh, I will not." Her hand rested in his for a moment. He was such a nice boy, so clean looking, so fair, his teeth so white. With him one would be always laughing, always gay. "Good night, *monsieur*."

"Good night, Simonne." Adèle felt sure he would have tried to kiss those soft lips had there been no one else to see. He said, "*A demain*, Adèle. I am so glad I came tonight. It has been a wonderful night."

The others came with hats and wraps. There was laughter, gay farewells. Their echo lingered in the hall, in the living-room when Adèle and Simonne

were alone. Monique went scowling and muttering about the dismal task of emptying ash-trays, carrying off empty glasses and wiping rings from tables.

"He is a pleasant one, that Brossard, eh?" Adèle sank back gratefully against the cushions. "You liked him?"

"Yes. It is hard to be unhappy with such a one. He is always making fun, always laughing."

"He has his serious moments, but not many of them. He seemed quite serious about you."

"Oh, please! He was just being kind because I am new here."

"Maybe." Adèle blew smoke at the ceiling. "Marcel—he is well?"

"Yes. He called to tell me that tomorrow morning he will come to take me to the lawyer's."

"Well, then, we must tuck you in bed soon. He will scold me if he finds you looking pale and tired. He can be very stern, Marcel."

"You are not ever afraid of him?"

Adèle laughed. "But I am! All women are. I don't know why it is, unless we see in him something too strong to give in to our cunning. One can talk most men into doing what one wants: not Marcel. He does what he wants to do."

"Always?"

"As long as I have known him. I fancy he always will, unless—" She did not finish. Simonne looked inquiringly at her but did not ask questions. She did not like to question Adèle. She felt that Adèle, without seeming, could evade any questions she did not like. Adèle was thinking, "Yes, he has always done what he wanted to do, he has been master of himself up to now. And he's afraid now. But men are fools. He is a fool even to think of putting his strong destiny into those soft little hands of yours. They, for all their softness, could twist and mar and destroy."

She knew why Marcel had stayed away tonight. She could see what an impression this quiet little girl had made on him. It is the novelty, she had decided; perhaps the paternal instinct coming awake in him. But she had begun to realize it was more than that. He was behaving like a schoolboy, being noble, deciding to keep away from his beloved, feeling that she, in some obscure fashion, would know how he suffered and perhaps suffer herself.

"It is all too absurd," she decided. "He will get over it in a few days. Anyway, Tony Brossard, if I mistake not, is definitely in the race, and that boy travels fast. Probably it will be youth calling to youth. Something in a young girl succumbs to black hair tinged with grey, but it's not the same romantic manifestation as one knows on a moonlight night with a boy who gazes into one's eyes—just gazes and says nothing except with his eyes. She has yet to know that, I'm sure. Unless the poet was like that. Probably he wasn't. Probably he was a very serious and moody sort of person and depressed her even while he charmed her."

Poor Pierre! Leagues and leagues away, over river and hill and forest, he wandered in the garden of his cottage. The wind blew cool and sweet across the marshlands and the stars were thickly strewn in the sky. He looked at them and it was a consolation, albeit a poor one, to know that on her, on Simonne, their soft light was shining, that perhaps as she looked at them she too thought, "They shine on Pierre." They made a link between her and him, a tenuous, far-stretched link. Somewhere an owl hooted, the shadowy shape of a fish-hawk floated overheard, the leaves of the tall poplar by his kitchen window rustled their eternal rustling. The land was still.

Strangely, to him, he had been able to write since she went away. He wrote and wrote. It was the only way he could forget, the only way he could dull the sharp edge of his pain and loneliness. When he wrote she was near to him, her spirit one with his, and in what he wrote was much of the deep feeling he had for her, much of the longing, the beauty of a love unfulfilled. Morning and evening, he walked to the top of the Beaumont and sat in the high grass and gradually heart-sickness and loneliness almost unbearable gave way to resignation, and because he had the dreamer's gift, he began to find a strange beauty in his bereavement, a rapture in his solitude.

Marcel came promptly at eleven. Simonne had been ready for a half hour, trying hard to hide her impatience from the amused eyes of Adèle, tiptoeing to the window, hoping each time to see the corsair shape of the white car sliding down Jeanne Mance Street. She saw it at last, and Marcel, hatless, his dark head gallant and proud. He looked up at the window and she waved to him. He waved back.

When Monique let him in, she wanted to run to him and fling her arms about his neck. How good it was to see him! How good to look upon his face! She had tried so hard to picture him last night before she fell asleep, and she could not. Strange, when you loved a face so much, that it should refuse to take form in your dreaming, that it should be only a vague blur, elusive, not to be captured ever. She wondered if, when you came to hate

one you loved, you could picture the hated face. But she could never hate anyone. The sun was golden in Jeanne Mance Street. The children were playing down there, shouting at their games. And Marcel was here with her, looking at her, she thought, her heartbeat quickened, as if it had been a long time since last he saw her.

Adèle said, and her speech made a jarring note there where the morning light was so freshly golden: "Our little convent-girl captivated them all last night, from the sinister Maurice de Haerne to the mercuric Tony Brossard. *Vraiment*, they were laying flowers at her feet, Marcel."

He smiled, but the smile lost itself in his eyes. He looked at Simonne questioningly. "De Haerne?" he said. "You met de Haerne?"

"Yes." The Belgian's words, saying to little, implying so much, forgotten through the night, came back to her now. She was startled to see Marcel's curiosity about the fact of her having met him. Was there something Marcel did not want her to know, that he was ashamed to have her know?

She drove the thought angrily away. There was nothing. Marcel was like a god. He acted like one, looked like one. So tall and bronzed, so dark, so vital. "Yes," he said musingly, "Simonne would be like a rare orchid to those sniffers of cabbage-roses. I can see all their romantic gestures falling flat, all their well-worn phrases perishing, when they came to her."

"But—but I found them charming, *monsieur*." She thought of Tony, of his smile, his fervent earnestness. "I assure you I did."

"New perhaps." He shrugged. "*Eh bien*, let us go to see Duplessis. I am glad you liked the gilded youth."

"Oh, yes," Adèle put in. "Tony Brossard wishes to be her squire one evening soon. I have given my consent, taking it for granted you would give yours."

"Brossard?" Marcel frowned. "I think I met him here. Fair-haired fellow?"

"Quite young," said Adèle sweetly. "And hectic and romantic."

"Ah, well." Marcel sighed. It was just as he had thought it would be. He hated these young pups. He had an urge to say, "No. Simonne must not go out with any of them." It wouldn't do. "It is all right," he said. "I am Simonne's guardian, not her gaoler. And you are wise, Adèle. You know, better than I do, what will be good for her."

"Yes." Adèle smiled. "Well, it will be good for her to be young, to laugh, to dance, to throw her weight about a bit, to cast off the pure white convent-lilies and wear red roses in her hair, to listen to Offenbach or even Irving Berlin instead of Palestrina and Mozart."

"Yes, I suppose so." Marcel was thinking of the quiet little grotto at Ste.-Ursule. It seemed worlds away and ages gone, that time so few mornings ago—the plash of the fountain, the flutter of the doves, the silver water falling and the white of the doves' wings, the fragrance like incense of the June morning, and Simonne lifting her eyes to his face so shyly. He was thinking of how he had felt there after she had left him—lifted up, exalted, purged of a lot of unbeautiful worldly things. He was wondering if ever again he would recapture that sensation that had been like a sacrament.

"Ready, Simonne?"

"Yes, *monsieur*." She went to Adèle and kissed her. "*Au revoir*, Adèle."

"I shall come back after we see Duplessis, Adèle, and the three of us might go somewhere and have luncheon?"

"Sorry, *mon vieux*. I am meeting Pete Rosson at the Ritz Carlton. You were kind to ask."

"I am sorry." He didn't look sorry. "I'll take Simonne then."

"Yes." She knew there was quiet exultation in his heart at the thought of having Simonne all to himself. She said, "I'll be back here by half-past two."

"That will suit."

He and Simonne went out. Ah, it was heaven to be with him again, to hear his footsteps behind her on the stairs, to brush his arm with hers as he held the car door open for her, to snuggle against the beloved red cushions close beside him. She looked at him as he started the car. She could not keep from looking at him. She wished it were again the moment of departure from Memramcook, with all those wondrous miles ahead.

"I wish we were starting out again, *monsieur*, on the road to Quebec, you and I."

He looked at her quickly. "One can never travel the same road twice, Simonne—in the same way. There is always something different when we try to journey old roads again."

"Could the second journey not be better?"

He shook his head. “I do not know. The first was very lovely—a perfect thing. I want nothing ever to spoil it.”

“The thought that it can never be again—that spoils it for me, *monsieur*.” She tried pathetically, with her poor timid weapons, to penetrate the hard shell of cynicism, of distrust. She saw all her arrow-points go blind against that armor. She thought, “He does not care for me. Now, when he has so many other things to occupy him, I do not matter.”

On St. Catherine’s Street, at the corner of Phillips Square, where the white-gloved hand of the traffic-policeman held them up, she heard someone call, “Simonne! Oh, Simonne!”

Tony Brossard stood on the curb, hat in hand. He waved gaily. He made motions of telephoning. He looked almost ecstatic. She waved a brown hand at him. “Hello, Tony.” The whistle shrilled. The white car surged forward at a furious rate. Marcel kept his eyes glued on the traffic. If she could see the look in his eyes she would surely know his unhappiness. Well, this was what he had looked for. This was bound to be. This was Offenbach and Irving Berlin; this was soft, colored lights and perfume and passion, arms langorously twining about the beloved, lips on silken, scented hair, dreams of a Sultan’s paradise, blood that flows warm and pulsing, flame that rushes to meet flame. Nothing in the convent-garden now but the quiet liquid sounds of the fountain, the rustling of the poplar-leaves, the cooing of the doves, the noiseless step of some little nun, the big beads slipping through her fingers.

“Duplessis’ office is here, Simonne.” He stopped before an old building in St. James’ Street. “Edmond left you some fifty thousand dollars. His effects I had sent over. They are here in bond. You are not to worry about anything, Simonne—ever. *Comprends-tu?*”

“Yes, *monsieur*.” She blinked her eyes a dozen times fast. She fumbled for her handkerchief and rushed it to her mouth. Marcel wet his lips.

“And you are not to cry, Simonne.”

“No, *monsieur*.” The round chin grew stubborn. “I am not to cry.”

Chapter VI
VAL MORIN

M. Adéodat Duplessis, a grizzled man with a head like a lion and a walrus moustache, had evidently known the family of Bernard for many years. He had come from Paris, he informed Simonne. He implied that it was a mistake for anyone to leave Paris and a greater mistake, once having left, not to return to that glorious city, queen of the world. He talked to Marcel like a Dutch uncle and positively winced about Simonne's legacy. "A lot of money, a great deal of money for such a little girl. A temptation to fortune-hunters."

Marcel laughed. "As if Simonne were not temptation enough herself, M. Duplessis. You are most unflattering and ungallant. Your long absence from the Boulevard Haussmann has caused you to lose the great distinguishing trait of our race."

"It is so," sighed M. Duplessis. "I have become a rustic. Permit me, Mademoiselle Simonne, to correct myself, to say instead that so much money with a plain girl would make her a temptation, with you no one could resist, since, added to the money is a jewel beyond all price."

"*C'est brave!*" laughed Marcel. "Splendid, M. Duplessis!"

"I am skeptical," pursued the lawyer, "about the efficiency of your legal guardian. However, it may be that he has qualities I have never even suspected. The responsibility will do him good."

"Mine is purely a directorial capacity," Marcel assured him. "Adèle Mercier is Simonne's mentor."

"Better perhaps." M. Duplessis looked shrewdly from Simonne to Marcel. "It is a miracle, my young friend, that you yourself have not fallen in love with your ward."

Simonne's cheeks grew hot. She looked at Marcel and quickly looked away. His face was expressionless. His voice was calm, easy. "That would be rather a breach of confidence, I think. I must respect my office."

"Ah, so! I see your point. Well—" M. Duplessis shrugged, spread his blunt-fingered hands. "There will be many here to fall in love with her. Now

you will sign papers, if you please."

They signed papers. It was soon done. And it was good to be out of the stuffy office, reeking of law-calf, dried-up inkpots, assorted clients and stale cigar-smoke. "I have three trunks of Edmond's at the customs, Simonne. Shall I—"

"Could you keep them for me, please—at your place perhaps—for a while? Then I could have them sent to Memramcook."

"Yes, I will do that. They contain mostly books, papers and the like."

"You have never told me much about Edmond, about his life there, his friends, what he did. His letters were always brief and sketchy. For a long time before he died there was no letter, nothing."

They were getting in the car then. Marcel was behind her, holding the door open, "He was very busy, Simonne. He worked hard over his engines. He had some great idea for a new-style motor that he said would revolutionize flying—something that cut the fuel consumption to a minimum. How far he got with his work I do not know. He was very secretive about it all. It may be that his ideas perished with him. He had a place of his own—that is, the Compagnie la France let him have it for his own use—where he worked and carried on his experiments. It was from there he took off on the test flight that finished him."

"It was very bad, that?"

"It was terrible, Simonne." He guided the car out into traffic. "I would not have you know of it. I would forget it myself."

"You—you were fond of Edmond?"

"I loved Edmond," he answered simply.

Simonne laid her hand on his arm for a moment. He kept looking straight ahead. Slowly she removed it. "You prove that, M. Bernard, by your goodness to me."

"You must not talk of it. One finds it very easy to be good to you. Now, if you like, we shall go have luncheon together. We shall celebrate your coming into your fortune. We shall go to the Mount Royal and everyone will look with admiration on my lovely ward and I shall be very proud."

"*Monsieur mon gardien!*" Simonne laughed. "You are so young to have such tremendous responsibilities."

"I age a year each day, my little one, worrying about what you will be when you grow up. What do you want to be?"

"I want to be yours from this minute until the day I die and I want to meet you in eternity and all that endless time will be too short to satisfy my love for you," she said softly in her heart. But to him she said, "I do not know. I have thought and thought about it, but that has not helped me."

"Of course you do not need to be anything unless you wish it. But it is good for a girl, as for a boy, to have some work ahead. To be sure, there is always marriage. That is a career in itself, perhaps—oh, most assuredly, that will be yours."

"I have thought of that."

"Oh, you have!" He looked at her for a moment. "Yes, I suppose all girls do from the time they start to play with dolls. If you should—*Sapristi!*" He broke off his speech suddenly, stared sharply at a closed car that waited abreast of them for the traffic-signal. Simonne looked too. She saw only a blue sedan, driven by a chauffeur, a stout man in a dark grey suit sitting in the back seat. As she looked the stout man sat back against the cushions, the shadows hiding his face.

"Is there something?" she asked Marcel.

"I do not know. But I will swear this is the sixth time I have seen that man since we arrived here yesterday. If it were not too absurd, I would think he was following me."

The whistle blew. The cars surged forward. Marcel manoeuvred the blue car ahead of him and swung the wheel hard over to take them up a side street. "We don't want company." He was frowning. "It is queer. You know, I'm not carrying the Rajah's Ruby or the missing pearls or anything like that. Just the same I feel quite sure I'm an object of interest to that man."

They saw no more of the blue car. The luncheon was a gay affair. "It is a sort of farewell, Simonne," he said at the end of it. "You see—" He stopped, seeing all the light go from her face, all the laughter flee from her eyes. She couldn't help it. She knew Adèle had told her not to talk with her eyes except to the man she loved and who loved her. But his words cut into her heart.

"You are not going away!"

"Oh, no! But I have to devote myself to my work. I came here to get orders for ships. There is much competition. So I shall have to work hard

and I shall not have much time to be with you. Of course you will have Adèle and you will soon know lots of people. There will be dances and parties—"

"Yes." She had managed by now to control herself, to simulate indifference. That, she supposed, was what one did when one's heart felt like a great piece of lead and there was a lump in one's throat. "I would not keep you from your work. With Adèle I shall be all right. Then—then there is Tony Brossard and—"

"Surely!" Marcel encouraged her. "You'll soon forget about me. After all, my job is that of official guardian, which is purely a business matter."

"Yes, monsieur." If he wanted it that way, she thought sadly, let it be that way. She would try to forget him. She would join in the dancing, the fun, the laughter. She would put away a lot of little hopes that had come like young flowers into her life. She wouldn't encourage them any more nor further try to nurture them. She would plant new ones—a lot of them, bright, gay ones that would grow up into lush gorgeous blooms. But it would be hard. Looking at him, she knew how unbearably lonely she would be without him. But one met these things in life. Adèle had forewarned her. Adèle had told her just how she would feel—as if the bottom had dropped out of things, as if she didn't care to go on living. And one recovered. Yes, surely one didn't go on forever feeling like this.

Adèle was waiting for them when they returned to Jeanne Mance Street. Adèle pointed to the telephone and said, "It just rang for you, Simonne."

It was Tony Brossard. She felt Marcel's dark eyes upon her as she talked, as he and Adèle passed her on their way into the living-room. "Yes, I can go tonight, thank you. Of course I saw you, and heard you. I was startled to hear someone call my name right in the middle of the city. Yes, I was glad to see you. No, I did not forget you."

He said, "I'll count the hours until this evening. I wonder if the time will seem long for you."

"I will tell you—this evening. Goodby."

She went into the living-room. Marcel was gazing out at the window. Adèle, sitting on the arm of a chair was talking about Pete Rosson. It struck Simonne, coming upon them suddenly, that Adèle's eyes were sad when she thought no one was looking at her.

"Tony asked me to have dinner with him tonight and afterwards we go some place to dance."

"Good!" Adèle looked at Marcel for approval. He nodded, smiling with his lips only. "It will be all right. One can trust Simonne to be Simonne, *n'est-ce pas*?"

"I think so," said Adèle. "You are never anyone else but yourself, my child, are you? You haven't yet learned to dissimulate, to laugh when your heart is breaking, to be cool when there's a bonfire inside you."

Simonne had learnt a little. She had put her first lessons into practice during the luncheon with Marcel. Even now she was dissimulating. She wasn't happy. She knew that these two were not happy. They were pretending, all three of them. Her happiness was in Marcel Bernard's keeping. He didn't know it or, knowing it, did not believe it. Where lay Adèle's happiness? Perhaps in Marcel. Perhaps Adèle was glad that she was going with Tony Brossard, that Marcel didn't bother with her.

He moved abruptly away from the window. "I'll leave you now," he said, "much as I hate to go. I have things to do." He bent over Adèle's hand. Simonne's he pressed lightly. "You are a good dancer," he said, smiling. "Do you remember the evening we danced at—where was it?—Petit Rocher?"

"I remember it, *monsieur*. I haven't so many nice things to remember that I could so soon forget that."

"In time you will forget," he said and a shutter seemed to drop over his eyes. "One does forget, you know."

He went. Adèle shrugged. "He was always like that—just out of reach. Sometimes you think you have him; he's warm, responsive, human, then like a flash he's something else and you can feel yourself being thrust away out of his life. I would say he was afraid to love if I did not know better."

"Then he has loved?"

"Child!" Adèle looked at her pityingly. Simonne flushed at what she saw in Adèle's eyes.

"Maybe," she said defensively, "it was not love—not really love."

"*Ex ora infantium*—out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! Maybe it wasn't, but it was what passes for love, anyway. Who shall say what love is! Have you any idea?"

"I—yes, I think I have."

"Those are growing pains, Simonne. You are just at the age where love is the only thing in the world. You will grow out of that, just as soon as you

find there are a lot of other things."

"I shall hate to grow out of it then."

"Your eyes look positively starry, my darling infant. I envy you what I know is in that warm little heart of yours—or do I? It's heaven, isn't it? Well, it's hell when you find out the reality and compare it with your dream."

"Don't!" Simonne's lips moved and in her eyes golden flecks danced in the blue-green depths. "I hate it when you talk like that. You want to make me think that everything is a lie, that I should uproot every good thing from my heart and throw it away. What else would I plant there? I don't want to have a mind like yours, Adèle. Perhaps you are right about love, about everything, and I am wrong. I think I'd sooner be wrong."

Adèle nodded slowly. "Yes. It's nice to be wrong sometimes. Well, don't mind me. I won't bother you unless I see you making too much of an idiot of yourself." Her smile took the sting out of her words. She put her arm about Simonne and shook her gently. "You won't with Tony Brossard anyway, I'm sure. You'll have fun. And that's what you need—fun. Convents are all right, I guess, but the good sisters aren't much on streamlining."

"There are things that don't change, Adèle."

"Surely! A model T Ford and Marcel's Sunbeam run on the same fuel, but—! Well, don't bother that pretty head about it. What have you for an evening gown—something with whalebone in it, I'll bet."

"I have none."

"*Mon seigneur!* Come on then. We'll see what we can do in one short afternoon. With that hair and those eyes and that golden skin, you should be an easy subject. We'll make young Tony's eyes pop when he sees you."

Tony held up his hands, palms outward. He goggled. He said: "Madonna by Schiaparelli!" He lowered his hands, shut his eyes and bowed. "You are adorable, Simonne. But my present surrender can be no more complete than was last night's. Mlle. Mercier, I felicitate you on your ward—you and M. Bernard."

"It is praise, indeed." Adèle carried on in his own stilted, joking vein. "See that you take good care of our handiwork."

"Oh, the very best. Promise!"

They rode away in Tony's car, the top down, for the evening was sultry with heavy white clouds massing above the height of Mount Royal and a threat of thunder in the air. Tony looked at her happily. She returned his smile. It wasn't so nice as riding with Marcel, but she had to admit it was pleasant. Tony had ceased chattering. "There is a place out on the river-shore, le Club Maturin, where there is good food, better music and a view surpassing both. I want to see you against the background of silver water and dark green forest. Most women lose out in such a setting. It brings out the artificial things in their makeup. With you it will be different—you will belong."

"Yes, I belong to the woods and the rivers. I have begun to miss them." She had tonight a home-sickness, a feeling of being lost, out of her world, here in this teeming cosmopolitan city, a place of two distinct personalities—the staid and superior English, the vehement and colorful French, a city whose streets were thronged with characters who seemed to have stepped from the pages of Honoré de Balzac. She did not belong. She could in time belong, perhaps. But did she want to? Tonight in Memramcook there would be a moon over the marshland and on the white road your shadow would walk with you and the church-spire and the housetops would look like places of Fairyland in the blue and silver light.

"You are lonely," said Tony. "I can see a far-off look in those eyes, little Acadienne. Surely not pining for your grim old forests and wretched salt-marshes, not to mention the gibberish tongue of your peasants."

Simonne sat up. She did not see Tony's mischievous smile. "Our forests are greener, lovelier than yours, *mon ami*, and our marshes are beautiful always with the river running between the dikes and our people speak the old French, purer, better, than it is spoken today in France. Here in Montreal—bah, it is unintelligible. It sounds like nothing I have ever heard."

"Bravo!" Tony pounded on the wheel, "*Vive l'Acadie!* You are a loyal daughter of the land, Simonne."

"You were trying to make me say that, M. Brossard."

"*Monsieur!* I am still Tony. Of course I was. I had an idea that you Acadians had rather a low opinion of the Canadians."

"We merely reflect their opinion of us, I suppose. I will not argue with you."

"Good. One would be worse than insane to spoil this night with arguments. There is the Club Maturin, out on that little point that juts into

the river." He pressed down on the accelerator, the car went like a rocket. He drove as Marcel would never drive, heedlessly, careless of the thousand emergencies that might crop up. She loved to feel the wind on her cheek and hear it rushing past her ears, but her heart was in her mouth when Tony turned in on two wheels at the Maturin's white gateposts. He grinned at her. "Who rides with Tony Brossard needs to have lived a good life, Simonne."

She nodded vehemently. "I am in a state of grace."

"That is a challenge." He helped her out of the car. They walked across the drive carpeted deeply with pine-needles and up the wide steps of the long one-storied log-structure, its roomy verandah projecting out over the placid waters of the river. A waiter found them a table in a quiet corner. The diners were not numerous. People spoke softly, the music of the dance-band sounded good in the quiet evening. They ordered. "We'll dance while we wait, Simonne." His eyes were eager. "I have so much wanted to dance with you again. All night I danced with you in my dreams."

The grey-green eyes looked full into his, and his did not waver. They were very earnest. She looked away. They drifted easily to the music of a waltz. She could close her eyes and dream—dream that it was Marcel whose arm held her so tenderly, so strongly, whose cheek brushed her hair, dream that it was blue Chaleur instead of broad St. Lawrence and that it was the little inn at Petit Rocher rather than this palace of the rich.

"Dreaming?" Tony's voice was soft in her ear. "Dreaming of what, Simonne? Surely not of a far-away land and a far-away lover! Why waste time on dreams when the reality is here! Why dream of love when—I love you."

He felt the straight boyish back stiffen in the circle of his arm. She did not look up at him. "You must not love me then," she said.

"I cannot help it. I am not then the first to tell you that?"

"There was one other."

"Not Marcel Bernard."

"Never Marcel Bernard."

"Ah! I am relieved to know that. He would be competition, indeed. Of course, he is too old for you and he's too worldly wise and weary. If he ever marries it will be Adèle Mercier."

"How do you know that?" Her eyes were wide, wondering, but they looked only at his lapel.

Tony shrugged. "*Un qui aime, un qui se laisse aimer*—one who does the loving, one who lets himself be loved. It is that way in all love affairs. There is never a balance—a balance would destroy the love. In this case it is Adèle who loves, Bernard who is beloved. One knows that in Montreal. It was because she couldn't stop loving Bernard that she and Ludger Prévost were divorced. Ludger was the one who did the loving in that match. He wearied. All of which brings us far away from what I started with. I said I loved you and you told me I must not. Why?"

"Perhaps because you would be the one who loves, I the one—"

"You do learn your lessons fast, young one. But I have so many more to give. Perhaps even before you have completed the course, you will learn to love me, your feeling for me will change." His bantering tone became one of boyish seriousness. "It must change, Simonne. I want it to so much. You will give me a chance to try to make you care for me?"

She moved away from him so as to look up into his eyes. "But yes. Why not?"

"Sweet!" he whispered softly. "All lovely and soft and warm and there are little gold gleamings in your hair and there is the mystery of old jade in your eyes."

"*Sapristi!* You too are a poet, Tony!"

"I!" He looked amazed. "I am a bond-salesman. It's just because I am near to you that I talk like that. You act like hashish, Simonne; you make me capable of things I never dreamed I was up to. Usually, I'm a pretty prosaic sort of person. But I breathe marijuana from your hair and for a while I am a god."

"*Eh bien!* Your goddess is hungry."

"Frenchwomen are at once the most romantic and most practical in the world," sighed Tony. "Fancy thinking of onion-soup while talking of ambrosia."

"It is very filling, the onion-soup." She shrugged the golden brown shoulders above the ivory satin of her gown. "We had it on Wednesday nights at the convent with brioches left over from the last time, but good nonetheless—oh, excellent."

"Onion-soup!" Tony made a wry face. "I can think of nothing more destructive to romance than onions, in soup form or any other form. Must you?"

"Well, monsieur, I—"

"Here I have managed a special moon, a fine night, music fit for the angels and you order onion-soup."

"I will just eat a little—just some few spoonfuls then."

Tony roared. "Eat all you want, infant. It becomes a food for the gods just because you eat it. Will you drink a cocktail tonight?"

"You are stimulant enough, I think—and the moon and the music and the night."

"You are intoxicated with the glamour of it all?"

She leaned forward. "I do love it, Tony. I was lonely at first this evening. Now I am glad. I was thinking of a hilltop high in Acadie tonight, a place from which one can look down on the world. I dreamt of sitting there among the daisy heads and clover and having a poet sing to me. And I closed my eyes and I found that here it was the same and that you in your fashion are a poet."

"Oh, I dare say all men in love are poets of a sort. How fortunate they don't all write verses. Who is your poet in Acadie, Simonne?"

"Pierre—Pierre Gay. He is the schoolmaster at Memramcook where my home is."

"Long hair, I'll bet."

Simonne smiled a very little. Sometimes Pierre's hair was long, but that was not a matter of temperament so much as economy. "You would like Pierre, Tony. Like you, he is young and like yours, his soul sometimes shines up in his eyes."

Tony looked at her, startled. "You're something of a witch, aren't you? Or are all women given the wisdom of a Sybil at birth? My soul in my eyes—yes, I dare say it was. You make me feel very juvenile, all angles and awkwardness, and I'm years older than you are. Still, years don't signify much, I suppose. *Voyons!* Our dinner gets cold."

They danced on the porch under the round white moon that lifted itself up from its couch of silver in the river and dripped silver and reflected it all about. Music and talk and laughter, the tinkle of glasses, the popping of corks, the glowing tips of countless cigarettes, the white arms and backs of slender women, the fragrance of the pines, the pungent spruce-trees, overcoming the odors of scent, of smoke, of food.

"'Night of stars and night of love'"—Tony gazed down at her as they danced. "Happy, Simonne?"

"Yes. It is very lovely, this." They drifted dreamily, now in sooty shadow, now in silver light. It was like a dream. She tried to forget about Marcel, forget about everything and give herself to this opiate beauty. Perhaps, even, if he spoke again of love to her, she would listen. Such nights as this were made for love, for tender whisperings, for heart beating close to heart. But he did not speak except with his eyes that adored her, with his arm that clasped her lightly, firmly. He was quiet, for him; subdued. She would like it better, she knew, if he were not so serious. She was afraid. There was something here that she did not like. She did not want him to fall in love with her and she could read worship in his every look and gesture.

"We must go soon now, Tony. It has been wonderful—"

He seemed to awaken. "Wonderful? Yes, more wonderful than I thought it could be. Simonne, I—I want to have many nights like this—as many as you can give me. If you are a little bit happy with me, why then give me the chance to make you happier."

She could not refuse. It would be foolish, unkind, to tell him she did not want to go with him again. Perhaps after a few more times, she thought, he will weary of me. But perhaps I am being foolish to want to be rid of him.

At Adèle's door he did not linger. He took her hand and lifted it to his lips without affectation, in a manner simple and gallant that made her heart beat faster, that made her lift her face to his. Then swiftly, lightly, he kissed her lips. It was not like the consuming, passionate, unforgettable kiss that Marcel had given her in the Governor's Garden, but for all that it burned upon her lips and something of its beauty lingered there after he had gone, after she went into the house.

She was not angry with him. She knew she could never be angry with him. But she did not want it to happen again. Somehow, it tried to spoil the memory that was so perfect, of Marcel's arms about her, of Marcel's lips on hers. But it would pass away—yes, a thousand other kisses would rest only lightly, momentarily on her lips, would go no further, while his, that had touched her deep heart, would be with her always.

Adèle contributed a page of smart gossip to a Toronto monthly magazine. She was writing this now in a little nook off the living-room. "Anything to report for the month's doings?" she called. "I am short a paragraph. Do you want me to say you were seen stepping with Tony Brossard?"

Simonne, in the doorway, shook her head. “No, please. But it was a lovely evening. We went to the Club Maturin and we dined there and danced. There was a moon over the water and the music was so lovely—”

“And Tony?”

“He was kind. He is nice, Tony.”

“In love with you?”

Simonne shrugged. “How does one know? A man may tell you a thousand times he loves you. It becomes easier with each repetition. Another may forbear a thousand times from saying it and for him with each refraining it becomes harder to speak. Yet one may love as much as the other.”

“You are not becoming cynical, surely! Perhaps it is contagious. But that is a good observation. I may use it on my page. Oh, by the way, M. Maurice de Haerne called you on the telephone. He said he would call later. It is another dinner and dance.”

“I do not know—”

“Oh, he is a fascinating fellow, Maurice. It will be good for you to go with him.”

“We shall see first if he asks me. Yes—yes, maybe I would go with him.”

She was curious. There were some things she wanted to find out from de Haerne—things about Edmond. She had tried to forget her brief conversation with the Belgian, but it would not be forgotten.

“No one else called?” she asked without thinking. Adèle glanced wisely up from her scribbling. “No one else called.”

Simonne hid her disappointment. She had hoped he would telephone. All evening that hope had stayed with her. While she danced with Tony and loved the beauty of the night, the hope had still been there in the background. Somehow, the evening was spoiled, incomplete. But Marcel had said, and there had been finality in the way he said it—that she would see little of him. He had done for her what he had to do. It was a task completed. Perhaps he regretted the one episode of those brief days that she had most loved—the night at Quebec when he had held her in his arms.

“Tomorrow we go to Val Morin,” said Adèle. “I have a cottage there. One can ride, swim, sail. You will be away from the city. It stifles one now.

You will like that. Of course, it is no great distance and you can come and go as you please. All my friends come there. You will be happy there."

"Oh, yes, I am sure I will like it, Adèle."

"In the morning we will do some shopping. You need a swim-suit, shorts, slacks—a thousand other things. I have a boat. Monique, of course, comes with us. She is slightly more pleasant among the trees. One is usually on time for meals. Are you going to bed soon? You don't look tired."

"I am going to write a letter to Pierre."

"Pierre, who writes the poetry? That will be nice. But you have not much to tell him."

"He will like it all. He is alone there in Memramcook."

"And lonesome, no doubt."

"Yes, I am afraid he will be lonesome. Other summers I was so much with him. We went for long walks, we swam, we had picnics. It was fun. I miss it even with all the wonderful things I have here; and he—has nothing but his garden and his pipe."

"And his poetry."

"Yes, that will console him."

She wrote to Pierre. A simple, straightforward little letter, telling of the places she had been, the things she had seen, the people she had met, telling him of Montreal, of Adèle, of this evening's excursion to dine and dance. And Pierre reading of all these things in the quiet of his garden, where the honeysuckle was all gay and the roses amassed in banks of color, found it hard to picture her among the places and scenes she described. "She was of the hills and the marshes and the river," he muttered. "Streets would stifle her and the city would do something to her spirit. Because all these things are new to her, she has not found how empty, how little worthwhile they are. But she will learn and when disillusionment comes I will be waiting for her." And he went almost gaily to his desk and worked through the long, sunbright hours and wrote and re-wrote and when sometimes, rereading what he had written, he found something that he knew was beauty, his heart exulted and he forgot that it had ever despaired.

Simonne was glad of the move to Val Morin, happy to exchange the fumes of petrol, the dust of the city, the simmering heat of the pavement, for

the pungent fragrance of the conifers, the cool gleamy water, the stars in the blue night sky. The little chalet, perched on a hillside among tall cedars, was airy and spacious. Adèle's friends were legion and almost every day there were new faces. Tony Brossard came often and took her out to dine or dance or both. He did not again try to kiss her and he did not need to speak of love. To her, to everyone, it was obvious that he adored her.

"It is a conquest complete, my little pigeon," said Adèle. "I never thought there could be such a change in Tony. Just since he met you he has grown up. And his seriousness sits well upon him."

"I wish he had kept on laughing. I think he had much more fun as he was. I do not want him to be serious—over me."

"Why not? Don't you care for him at all?"

"I like him, yes. But—"

Adèle dived neatly off the float, swam back and said, "Marcel has quite forgotten us, I assure you. With him, a woman is only a woman, but a good aeroplane is something to go up in the air about."

He had not been to see them for a long time. He had telephoned once when Simonne was out. Maurice de Haerne had telephoned, too. He would be out of town for a fortnight but hoped she would give him an evening when he returned. She had promised. She was piqued at Marcel. More, she was bitterly lonely. The first few days, what with swimming and boating and new friends and Adèle's perpetual parties, she hadn't minded so much. But as the days passed and he did not come and did not even telephone, she found herself roaming restlessly about the house or in the woods, hoping, always hoping that he would come. And each time her disappointment was deeper. Adèle saw that she became each day quieter, more withdrawn, and guessed the reason but wisely said nothing.

But he will come, Simonne assured herself; he has to come. And one afternoon, returning from a solitary ramble in the woods, walking listlessly, with only faint hope in her heart, up the steps to the verandah, she saw him sitting there. He stood up. She ran to him, forgetting everything in the joy of seeing him again. She flung her arms about his neck and clung to him, almost sobbing with joy, with the relief of loneliness. Then she felt his fingers on her wrists and her arms were gently but firmly removed. For a moment, stunned, she looked into his eyes. She found nothing there. She hung her head, shamedly, like a schoolgirl caught in some grave misdemeanor. "I—I am sorry, M. Bernard. I forgot myself. I did not think —"

"It is nothing, Simonne." His voice was strangely gentle. "I am glad to see you, too."

"You—you do not seem glad. You—you let me—" Her mouth quivered, shook, the tears brimmed to her eyes, flooded. "I think I hate you, M. Bernard! I think I never want to see you again! I—" She turned quickly and ran into the house and up to her room. There she flung herself on the bed, her face hidden in the pillows. There she stayed until she heard Adèle and the others returning from their swim. She got up then and bathed quickly and dressed. Adèle had given her lessons in the use of powder and lipstick. She had acquired skill. And Tony Brossard was coming to take her to dinner.

She wore the white satin evening gown, almost backless, with a sheath-like effect at slender hips, a skirt foamily bouffant. Against the ivory white her skin showed smooth and golden, the arms and shoulders so firm, so softly rounded. She knew when she came out on the verandah where they were sitting, drinking cocktails, that she was a sensation, that Marcel, who had been talking to Adèle, stopped abruptly and stared, that they all ceased to talk.

Tony, big, wide of shoulder, swift of movement, came quickly to claim her. "I am sorry, *mes amis*"—He looked around at the company, his laughing gaze lingering for a longer instant on Marcel Bernard—"but I must carry off the prize of the evening. I am taking away your sun." To Simonne he murmured, "You are adorable." Then he swept her away to his car. She waved to the group on the verandah as they drove away. She did not look up.

She felt an angry triumph in her heart that still beat erratically, tumultuously. Perhaps this would show Marcel that he was not God. She felt herself grow hot as she thought of the utter humiliation of that moment on the verandah when he had put her away from him. Thinking of it, she tensed in her every muscle and her mouth was bitterly sullen. He, the Don Juan, the man of so many loves—he casually put away from him the poor gift she had to offer. All the hours of loneliness, of waiting, of dreaming—he knew nothing of them; he would not care if he did.

"*Monsieur* my guardian," she muttered. "Merely that. And I must go on forever adoring him in silence, saying, 'Yes, *monsieur*', and 'No, *monsieur*'. Acting the little convent-pigeon whom the great Marcel Bernard, the hero of the air, so graciously took under the shelter of his mighty wing. Bah, I am a little marshmallow, a little clam! I have moaned and mooned over him since the night he stopped his car beside me as I carried *maman's* dress back to Ste.-Ursule. He kissed me and told me to forget all about it. Like a little fool,

I fell in love with him; now I am told, without his having to utter a word, that I am to put all that away from me. That I am not to dare think of such a thing. I am just a mean subject, depending for favors on the king's grace—"

"*Mademoiselle* is very, very silent." Tony, grinning, glanced sideways and down at her. "And very stormy looking and very lovely. When I first saw you I thought, Here is just a little girl, so timid and shy; tonight you burst upon me, upon us all—and you are radiant."

"I am so glad you like me." Yes, this was salve for her wounds. Tony was a man who knew women, even as Marcel knew them. And these were not just words. She had quickly learned how to play this game, how to match half-truth with half-truth, how to thrust and, more especially, how to parry.

"You did not have to ask your official guardian, Bernard, for permission to accompany me tonight?"

"I ask him nothing!"

Tony's brows lifted momentarily. She could not see the amazed look in his eyes. "You are not so friendly with him then?"

"Not at all. I despise him."

"Ah!" Tony nodded. "I did not ever guess that. I thought it was rather the other way—a case of hero-worship. Well, Simonne, you know best and to me it does not matter how much or whom you hate"—He covered her hand with his—"as long as you love Tony. I haven't spoken of love since that night at the Club Maturin. I have waited, giving you time—waited for an hour when I hoped perhaps you would listen to me—"

She looked up at him, bravely yet frightenedly and her voice was husky as if fighting a reluctance to say the words. But she managed them —"Perhaps, Tony, that hour has come."

Chapter VII
DEFIANCE

Tony's hand tightened on hers, his fingers meshed with hers, their pressure for a moment fierce and hurting. She wondered if the trembling of her body was transmitted to him, the quickened heartbeat, the tumult of her breast. She knew what he had taken from her words. She saw in his eyes eagerness, expectancy, desire that burns highest when near the time of fulfillment. And she had given him this hope. She had let him think that she was ready—

Why not? He loved her, wanted her. He had loved her from the moment he saw her. And she liked him. Perhaps she loved him. Perhaps love as she had thought of it did not exist, was only a lie, a delusion. One was a fool to feel the way she had felt about Marcel. A few moments had proved that to her—those few moments when his fingers encircled her wrists and removed her arms from about his neck. Thinking of it, she grew hot with shame. She hated herself for having let him see so nakedly what was in her heart, for having spread the page so openly before him. She hated him for the way he had read it.

Well, if he did not want her, if she meant so little to him, it would be only a kindness to free him of the necessity of looking after her. Tonight she felt reckless, careless of what might happen. Nothing mattered much since what had mattered most had proved itself only a snare and a delusion. Tony was talking. She aroused herself to listen to him. She wasn't going to let herself think these dark thoughts. Life was good, life was gay, life was far too short for one to waste it in loving someone who didn't want to be loved.

"We'll go again to the Maturin," Tony was saying. "And we'll dine there and dance as before. But tonight it will be different, better. Tonight is ours, Simonne. Let's make it ours and let nothing spoil it. I love you, Simonne—love you with all my heart."

Dear words, dreamed-of, longed-for words. Why did they not thrill her, quicken her heartbeat, send all her thoughts spinning? He meant them. There was fervent earnestness, burning intensity, in the way he said them, in his sudden, quickly checked movement towards her. "One goes so slowly!" he muttered, though she was afraid to look at the red needle on the dial as the

car hurtled along. He drove like a madman. It didn't matter to her. Even the thought of destruction and death was not so significant as the consciousness of her own disillusionment and defeat.

"Tonight we will drink champagne," he said when they were seated in the Club Maturin. "You will not refuse tonight?"

"I will not refuse." It would be good to drink champagne, to do anything, anything, that would help to drive away her anger, her misery, that would relieve this sense of humiliation and bolster up her pride. How could she face Marcel Bernard again? Her cheeks flamed at the very thought of it. She never wanted to see him again, but as long as she stayed with Adèle they were sure to meet.

"What is bothering you, Simonne?" Tony's hand captured hers, held it palm up as if he would read their destiny in its lines. "Did you have a spat with your overseers?"

"No." She shook her head. "I don't think you'd call it that. Or maybe it was a spat I had there and a battle with myself. I don't want to talk about it."

"That suits me. Let's talk about us and make it a closed-shop. Here comes the bubbly. We shall drink to our happiness."

Happiness! Simonne wondered. She would have to form a new idea of happiness or seek it in other places. She tasted the sparkling amber wine and returned Tony's smile through the mist of its effervescence. It was good. It helped. She found it easier to laugh. It was nice to dance, to feel his arm about her, his cheek against her hair. In the shadows of the verandah he put both arms about her and kissed her. She closed her eyes, trying to find in his kiss some of the rapture she knew a kiss could bring. It wasn't there. She loosed herself from his arms. They danced dreamily. She was so glad to have someone strong, someone who cared for her, someone who could make her forget. She felt absurdly grateful to Tony.

"I adore you," he whispered. "I can't let you go. You're going to marry me, you know. I hate to think of losing another day out of life, and without you all days are lost. Say you'll marry me, Simonne!"

"You—you think we would be happy?"

"As in Paradise." His arm was tight about her waist. She looked up at him, searching his eyes—those blue reckless eyes. His hair was so blonde as to be almost white. He was just a boy, an eager, impetuous boy. He was Youth, and she was Youth. For a while she had been tangled up with older things, older ideas, which did not belong to her.

"Listen, my darling." His voice was low, compelling, his lips brushed her ear. "I'll get the marriage-license, the ring, tomorrow and I'll come for you tomorrow night and we'll ride away and get married. You're not happy where you are. Oh, I dare say Bernard is kind to you and Adèle is the best ever, but you need someone who really loves you and who can understand you because he loves."

"I—but I would have to have my guardian's consent and—"

"Forget about it! Once we are married, who cares about his consent! Don't tell anyone." His tone altered ever so little. "Certainly don't let Adèle know. Oh, I don't mean that they'd try to stop us or anything like that, but after all it's our own business, our own secret and I hate to share it with anyone, just as I hate to share you. I want you all to myself—always."

Why not?

The music they danced to was dreamy, languorous, breathing of nights of silver moonlight on mystic waters, of two drifting in a gilded barge down magic waters to a sea that was always calm, of a world apart from this one, a lovers' world, where nothing sordid or base could ever intrude, where there were flowers that never faded and music that never stilled. The night air was scented, warm, seductive, and the stars hung low over the spired cedars and the whispering pines. She felt for a while at peace. One could be satisfied with such peace. Better—perhaps it was better than love, which seemed to mean longing and denial and hope deferred and in the end despair.

Why not?

He loved her. His eyes, his fair head bent so close to hers, his lips that touched her hair, the pressure of his arm, the possessiveness of his embrace—these belonged to love. It was a good thing he offered her. And if she refused him she would have nothing. She thought fleetingly of Pierre, but only fleetingly. This need she felt was a present need. She had to vindicate her pride—had to show Bernard how little he mattered to her, how little she respected his authority. He had humiliated her and she must do something significant, even spectacular, to restore her self-esteem. And here, to her hand, was the chance. But if love was a cheat and a lie, marriage, she realized, was very real, and it was for life.

"Tomorrow night, Simonne." His voice was pleading, urgent, wooing her, soothing her doubts, dispelling her fears. "I will make you happy. You will be always happy. There'll never be a shadow on your face as there was tonight at Val Morin. There should always be sunlight on your face. Say you will come with me!"

"I—I do not know what to say. Please—please do not ask me any more."

"But I must. I can't go on like this, wanting you, loving you. Why do you hesitate?"

"I do not know. But I cannot answer you now, Tony. Oh, forgive me, but I just cannot." There was something that held her back from this easy step, something that prevented her uttering the word that was right on her lips. Tomorrow—she would tell him tomorrow. Perhaps it was a faint, unadmitted hope that something would happen in the meantime, something that would bring her again close to Marcel. Vain, foolish, groundless hope.

"Tomorrow I will tell you, Tony. I promise."

"Oh, tomorrow." His eyes looked sullen. "Why not tonight? Tomorrow is such a long way off. And will things be any different tomorrow? I'll be the same, so will you, but this—this that I feel and that you feel too, I know—it will have passed."

"If it is love, it won't pass." She knew how foolish this was and unmeaning and contradictory to all she had learned and experienced. She had loved Marcel Bernard, and now if she was thinking of giving herself to another man, love must have passed. But, "Tomorrow," she repeated with finality and he saw it would be of no use to urge her further. He dropped his seriousness, his petulance. He laughed and was very gay. He drank a lot—too much, she thought, and would not drink with him. There might be release from sickness of mind in that sparkling wine, but she felt sure it was such release as to make later imprisonment harder to bear.

"I will wait for tomorrow, Simonne," he said when they stood in the shadows by Adèle's cottage. "And I will hope. Tell me you will not change towards me, that you'll let nothing change you."

She put her hand on his arm. She was tempted now to give him his answer, to tell him she would go with him. There would be nothing to change her, nothing to affect her decision. It was a senseless postponement. Tomorrow would come; with it this same uncertainty, this hesitation, this reluctance to take a step that once taken could never be retraced. But she said only, "It will soon be tomorrow, Tony. We must wait for it."

Then they said goodnight. He kissed her once, lightly, and said, "I love you."

She hoped Adèle would be sleeping, but Adèle was sitting in the dim starlight in the sunporch overlooking the water. From where she sat she could see the driveway. Simonne wondered if she had heard Tony's voice, if

their secret was known. But Adèle was not curious about her and Tony. Adèle said, "Well, Pigeon, I'm glad you're home. You looked like a little storm-cloud when you left here with Tony Brossard. I was afraid you might keep on going."

Simonne started. Yes, that had been her idea all right, when she turned her back on Marcel—to keep on going, to leave him forever behind. And she hadn't done it. She had been weak, undecided, when one word would have settled the matter. "What made you look like that?" asked Adèle. "Or am I supposed to know? As for Marcel, after you left he said only one word, and that was goodby when he went home. Surely you weren't quarreling with your guardian!"

"Hardly that. I—" She couldn't tell her misery, her humiliation to Adèle. She couldn't say, "I ran to him, I was so glad to see him. I ran to him and put my arms about his neck. And he—he took them away and put me from him as if I were a little dog with muddy paws who might dirty his nice clean suit."

"I suppose it's none of my business," said Adèle cheerfully. "Don't talk about it if you don't want to. It was just that I hated to see you unhappy."

"And you hated to see him upset."

"Quite." Adèle's voice was cold. "I did not like to see him upset."

"Have you made a god of him too?"

Adèle laughed softly. "Ah, the 'too' explains it all, Simonne. But if you made a god of him, what ever made you angry at the deity?"

"Perhaps it occurred to me that he was a false god. After all, he has loved many women. You, yourself, said so. He has been wild enough from all accounts and—"

"And now because he is aloof and chooses to act like a Capuchin, you are angry at him. Simonne, O ma Simonne! You are quite as illogical as all your sex."

"*Eh bien!* I was illogical in—in letting myself think he was something he could not be. I—oh, I do not want to talk any more about it. He does not care for me, anyway. I am just some stray pup, some little one, who happened into his life and he thinks he has a duty to look after me."

"If he has authority over you, Simonne, I sometimes wonder why he does not exert it."

"How? How would he exert it?" Adèle could almost see the green fires there in the starlight.

"He could spank you, darling. Tonight I wondered at his forbearance."

"He would not dare to touch me! If he did I—"

"Yes, yes." Adèle was gentle. "He has spoiled you, I fear."

"Oh!" A mist blotted out the green fires now. "You are all for him. You —" She sobbed. She hated Adèle right now. What did Adèle know of how she felt, of how she had felt when Marcel turned away from her. Adèle's sympathies were all with him. They always would be, no matter what he might do.

"I did not like what I saw in his eyes tonight—when you went away with Tony. What does Tony mean to you, Simonne?"

"Much more than M. Bernard, if you would know it. He, at least, is kind and does not treat me as if I were a child and look at me with disapproval and—"

"*Pauvre Simonne!* You are tired. Better go to bed now and sleep it off. In the morning everything will look different. Maybe, even, your god will be back upon his throne again. Who knows?"

"I know. He will never be back there for me—never."

"'Humpty-Dumpty sat on the wall,'" chanted Adèle and switched on the lights. She looked at Simonne's hot face, at her eyes swollen from weeping. Then she went to her and, putting her arms about her, kissed the flushed cheek and laid her own, so smooth and cool, against it.

"Did you—did you ever cry—over a man, Adèle?"

"Once, Pigeon."

"Was it worth while?"

"That I will not tell you. It's something one learns for oneself. And after all, there are men and men. And speaking of men, I come to the volatile and fascinating M. Brossard. You say you think more of him than you do of Marcel. Well, I do not know how much you think of Marcel, so that tells me very little. But be wary of Tony."

"Why should I? Tony is—"

"Oh, I know he's gay and charming and most charming when he's serious. But there have been other girls—"

"I do not want to listen. I will go to bed."

She went up to her room, taking Adèle's lifted brows, her half-angry, half-amused shrug of lovely shoulders, as a goodnight. They were both against her, Adèle and Marcel. They did not want to see her happy. It was Tony now. What had Adèle against Tony? "It would be the same with any other man who liked me. Adèle would find out something about him, would try to separate me from him. I suppose it was M. Bernard, my stern and serious guardian, who whispered in Adèle's ear. 'Don't you think, Adèle, that it would be better perhaps if Simonne did not run around so much with this young Brossard? After all, she is only a child—' Only a child!" She looked at the unhappy face in her mirror. One must cease being a child. If Marcel Bernard's guardianship did only this for her—made her wretched, angry, unhappy, she would be better away from him.

"Perhaps I will leave him. Tomorrow—"

The day that dawned wasn't the kind to help one make important decisions. It was grey, dismal, drizzling. Water drip-drip-dripped steadily, persistently from the low-hanging eaves outside her window onto the roof of the porch below. In the dark fir-wood across the field some bedraggled crows were flitting about and hideously cawing. The smoke from Monique's morning fire blew low to the ground, touching the sodden tips of the timothy, the drenched daisy heads in the meadow.

Simonne, awaking, rubbed her eyes with her knuckles. One learned that in the convent where one slept so soundly that it was very hard to get the sleep from one's eyes. Today her eyes smarted and were very tired. That was because she had cried so much yesterday. The darkness of today did nothing to dispel the bitterness of yesterday's experience, but the thought of marrying Tony Brossard likewise received little encouragement from the lowering sky and the dreary woods.

Adèle had left for the city when Simonne came down to breakfast. "She said to tell you that she will not likely return before tonight," said Monique. "She would have asked you to go with her but she thought you still slept." Monique regarded sleep after sunrise as a crime against nature.

"It is all right." Simonne gazed miserably out the dining-room window. Raining cats-and-dogs now, beating furiously down on the tumbled, bedraggled flowers in Adèle's garden. What could one do on such a day? She thought of Tony and looked for a moment at the telephone. She had an impulse to call him and give him her answer. It would be no. She felt differently towards him this morning. Last night, it had been the music, the

seduction of the waltz, the glamour of the starry sky. Things that were merely props of a stage-setting for love. This morning the scene was changed, the stage set for misery.

After her lonely breakfast—Monique's coffee grew colder and colder from seven o'clock on—she went to her room and tried to write letters to Hermance Lapage, to Sophie St.-Amende, to Sœur Angélique and to Artemise. She had no heart for the writing. She felt sure they would be able to read between the lines and know that she was not happy. Finally, she tore up the letters, all except the brief one to Artemise. She would write some other day, some happier day, to her friends.

The post contained a letter from Pierre. It was like a bright sunshaft rifting the sullen sky. She almost snatched it from the post-boy's hand. Home—here was something from home. At home she had loved days like this, loved to watch the sheeted rain sweeping over the marshes, the dark, scurrying thunder clouds doing battle over the hills of Acadie. She carried the letter to her room and curled upon the window-seat to read it. Darling Pierre, so strong, so sensitive, so skillful at finding beauty in the drabbest of existences. Pierre who wandered lonely over the fields and on the hills and by the river, finding beauty everywhere.

—"and a deeper silence broods over the marshes since you went away, Simonne, and the world for me is an empty place. Long ago I gave up climbing the Beaumont, for each time I went there I had a foolish hope that somehow I would find you sitting on the ledge among the ferns, that I would see your smile and hear your voice. But when I got there I realized how foolish the hope had been and the solitude made a pain almost unbearable come in my heart. I could not bear to look upon the world below me—the river and the marshes and the four villages in the Valley. I hurried away from there, for in that place where once you were nearest to me you seemed then most remote.

"In the village it is the same. I think I see you everywhere—at the store, at the post office. I have fed on hope so long, and on memories, that I even hear your voice calling to me in the early dusk when I walk in my garden. What do you do there in the great city? What does it afford that surpasses the peace of this lovely pastoral place? Is there any permanence in the joys you find there? The things that are lovely here are always lovely—the wonder of the dawn, banks of rose-tinted clouds edged with gold, the great symphony of the birds in the tranquillity and peace of the long, sun-filled hours, the infinite variety of the sunsets above the dark ramparts of the hills, and the angelus bells at even.

"Come back—come back to me, Simonne, O, ma Simonne. We were happy here together, we would be always happy. I have made many poems to you, *chère*, but none as good as the epic I gave you on the Beaumont the day we talked of Ronsard. I send it you again—'I love you'—and in those three words is all the happiness and hope of my poor life—"

She folded the letter. The rain dripped mournfully, beating out a dirge on the shingles. Never before in her life had she felt so lonely, so oppressed. It was a day for dark thoughts. She tried to drive them away, but they seemed to come back stronger and more numerous. Thoughts of her solitary, wistful childhood in the great old house of the Carons, of the joyous times when Edmond came there, of the hours they had spent together. And Edmond—today she could picture the horror of his death. It was so real, so vivid, that she hurried from the room and went downstairs to sit with the dour and unspeaking Monique.

The hours dragged on into afternoon, into a murky twilight. Soon it would be time to phone Tony. It would be hard to give him that answer, harder still to give any reasons for her refusal. She had no reasons that she could state, but deep in her heart she knew that it was Marcel Bernard's tall spare figure that stood between her and Tony Brossard. It was fear of him or love of him that would make her say no. Angrily she told herself it was not so, that she neither loved nor feared him. And yet—

The telephone rang for the first time that day. Simonne started at the sound. She felt her heart flutter uneasily. She hoped it was not for her. She let it ring again and was glad when Monique, muttering, came to answer it and miserable when she heard the dark one say, "Yes, monsieur, she is here."

She dreaded talking to Tony. She could think of nothing to say to him beyond that single word of refusal. She steeled herself as she picked up the instrument for this ordeal that had to be gone through, but the voice that answered her was Marcel Bernard's.

She felt little relief. It was just as hard today to talk to him. She had not dreamed he would call her up. Was it to make amends for yesterday, to—

"Simonne"—His voice held a hint of concern. "I have something to tell you."

"Yes, *monsieur*." Just the sound of his voice, calling back a rush of memories profoundly sweet, brought a weakness to her that made her lean against the wall and grip the telephone firmly.

"Today, when I returned to my flat, I found that someone had managed to break in during my absence."

"Oh, I am so sorry. Was there—was something missing?"

"That is what I don't know. You see, the only things that were touched were the trunks belonging to Edmond."

"To—to Edmond! But why—"

"It has me puzzled. You recall the day we were driving down to the lawyer's—I thought we were being followed? Well, I have had the same idea several times since—as if someone were watching my comings and goings, trying to find a good moment to enter my flat. Well, they found it, but I have no means of knowing if they got what they wanted. Perhaps tomorrow you could come here with Adèle and go through Edmond's things."

"You know of nothing of value that he would have in his trunks?"

"His papers, plans and the like. *Mon dieu—!*"

"Yes, *monsieur*?"

There was excitement in Bernard's voice now. "It may be that Edmond progressed further with his work than we ever guessed. But someone else might have learned something. But if so, we are only worse off, since we are utterly in the dark. I don't know what to do."

"Nor I, *monsieur*. Edmond left no will."

"Only the one by which he willed you to me."

"A surprise legacy, I think."

"A lovely surprise, Simonne. You—you looked very beautiful last evening when you were going away—with Brossard."

"Thank you, *monsieur*."

"Oh, by the way, I hope you won't become too intimate with that fellow."

"No?" Her voice was very soft, very much controlled. He could not see the rapid twitching of her nostrils, the whitening of her knuckles, the quick dilation of her eyes. "Why not, *monsieur*?"

"I have my reasons. I hope you will do as I ask."

"I will not, *monsieur*."

"I—what do you say? You will—not?"

"I will not. I am—am taking no more orders from you. I am not a child, *monsieur*." The words poured out like a torrent. "Not a child, though you and Adèle persist in treating me as one. I have feelings: you seem to forget it. Tony is the only one here who has been able to understand me, who even tried to understand me. He has been kind and good to me and I—I am grateful to him."

"All that is very well, Simonne." The patience in his tone, the father-to-child way he said it, made her bite her teeth hard together. "Just the same, you will please do as I tell you. After all—"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! After all—after all—" She mimicked him scandalously. "'After all, Simonne, I am your guardian. You are my ward. You were entrusted to my care. I know what is best for you. It is best to kiss you and tell you to forget all about it. It is best to caress you one minute and kick you the next—'" She stopped breathless. There was silence at the other end of the line. The silence maddened her. She could almost see the sternness of his mouth, the kindling fire in his dark eyes. She drew a deep breath—

"I am going to run away with Tony Brossard tonight, *Monsieur mon gardien*, if you care to know. I am going to marry him!"

Panting, she put down the telephone, not heeding a word of what he had begun to say. Immediately the telephone rang. She ignored it. She told Monique, who was staring at her in horror, to leave it alone. After a while it stopped ringing. She called Tony then. She spoke hurriedly, cutting off all his endearments. She said, "Come for me. No, better, meet me at the Mount Royal Hotel at seven o'clock. I will go with you."

In a dark trance of resentment against Marcel Bernard, carried on by her defiance of him and her bold flouting of his authority, she packed an overnight-case and was ready, waiting fretfully, when the station-hack sloshed up the road to the chalet. Monique, as usual, said nothing. There was nothing could stop her now. She was through with this agony of being ward to a man who treated her very much as the sister-prefect used to treat the more recalcitrant spirits among the girls at Ste.-Ursule. He didn't himself care for her, or want her, yet he did not wish her to go with Tony. Well, she was going with Tony.

She wondered, with angry amusement, what Marcel had been saying when she hung up, what he was doing now. Of course he would try to stop her, but he had no means of knowing her plans. When she saw him again, if ever she did, it would be too late for him to do anything. She could picture his consternation. It would be shared by Adèle. For a moment she hated herself and thought it contemptible to repay their kindness in this fashion. But this was best. This would put an end to an intolerable situation. She was only a burden, a bother to them. She had no claim on Marcel Bernard and he had no duties towards her save those wished upon him by a promise perhaps carelessly made long ago to a man since dead.

This would relieve him of all responsibility towards her. What it would do for her she did not begin to think. She liked Tony. Perhaps that was enough. He was kind. He had assured her, oh, so earnestly, that they would be always happy together. "Anyway," she thought, sitting damp and defiant in the train speeding towards Montreal, "I cannot be any more miserable than I was. I cannot be any lonelier, and I can feel that I matter to him, that he really wants me."

The city was a place of grey mist and rain, of shining slippery streets, glistening umbrellas, squelching feet; of clanging trams and madly hooting motorhorns, of policemen looking like Martians in their great rubber coats, directing the tangled traffic. It frightened and bewildered her, all this noise and confusion. It was heavenly relief to walk into the warmth and soft light of the hotel lobby, relief that almost made her sob to find Tony Brossard there, waiting, watching eagerly for her coming.

"Darling!" He held her hand in both his. "I was so afraid you wouldn't come. I watched the telephone all day long, but I resisted the temptation to call you, for something told me if I did call, if I hurried you, my luck would run out on me. But why did you keep me waiting so long?"

She couldn't tell him that, couldn't tell him that the reason for her being here was the fact that she had been forbidden to come, the stark defiance of discipline, the desire to "show" someone, no matter how much the showing cost. "It was hard to make up my mind, Tony. I needed something to make it up for me."

"And something did?"

"Yes, something did. I am tired of being alone, of feeling that I'm just someone's official obligation. I—I—" She bit her lip, the golden lashes quivered.

"Come!" Tony took her arm gently. "We'll get rid of that wet coat and your bag, we'll have a vermouth and something to eat. After that, we will drive to Repentigny. We can be married there and I have a log-cabin in the woods, *ma petite*, where we can be lost to the world, you and I, where there are only trees and a stream and birds all the day long and only stars and the moon at night."

The prospect did not thrill her; rather, it frightened her, but she had gone this far, she would not turn back. She could not now admit defeat to Marcel Bernard or to herself. No, she would do what she had set out to do. She would feel better after she was dry and warm. This was adventure, a glorious adventure. She let him sit close to her in the lounge while a scarlet-coated, venerable manservant in satin smalls, silk hose and buckled shoes brought them vermouth and canapés.

Tony was flushed, bright of eye. He had been waiting here for some time and improving the drizzling hour at the bar. Momentarily, she pictured the long drive over wet and slippery roads, and wondered—Well, she wasn't going to worry, wasn't going to let herself think about dark or dismal things. One could laugh, Adèle said—one could be gay; one could forget the death of an old love by seeking a new. She tried to lift her spirits to match Tony's, and in some measure succeeded. When dinner was over she went almost gaily with him to find his car.

"You will be careful, Tony?" she said when they started out, picking their slow way through the early evening traffic. "You will not go too fast?"

"Simonne, I could drive with my eyes shut tonight." He shot out of a row of cars into the clear. "Don't worry about me."

"But for me you will please drive a little slower, Tony."

He laughed. "Oh, all right. But you can't expect a man to go at a snail's pace to his wedding. It just isn't in human nature. I can hardly wait to hold you in my arms, to know you are all mine, to learn the wonder and beauty of you."

She drew away from him, closing her eyes. She had given so little thought to this that was perhaps the most significant thing in her life—the surrender of herself, her body, her wellbeing, into this man's hands. Tonight, in a few hours, she would be alone with him; shut off from the world, she would be his to do with what he pleased. And did she really know him, really know what his heart was like and what she might expect from him?

She knew he was kind, understanding. He wasn't ever cold to her, didn't ever scold her. Marcel—she thought of what he would say to her if he could find her now; perhaps, as Adèle had said, he would exercise his authority and punish her. She wondered what he was doing now, what he could do. No doubt he had told Adèle, no doubt they were phoning this one and that for word of Tony Brossard's movements.

"They'll never find us now," she thought, and felt no elation. Tony was fuming at the seemingly deliberate slowness of the man at the toll-bridge. Tony had taken quite a bit to drink but the gaiety had worn off now and he was jumpy, swearing once in a while at cars that he thought passed too close to him, pushing down on the accelerator viciously to pass the red eyes that glimmered ahead of him. Once she clutched his arm as the car side-slipped on a curve. He flung her hand away furiously and said, "For God's sake, don't do that! Want to kill us!"

"But I'm afraid. Please—"

"Oh, forget it! I can—"

That was all. From a side road, the marking for which Tony had quite ignored, a huge lorry lumbered out right in their path. Tony swung the wheel wildly. Simonne could feel the car rock from side to side in its headlong course towards a culvert. She screamed, covered her eyes with her hands. Flashingly she could see the horror of shattered glass, of twisted steel, of blood and ruin that waited for them, and she could see Marcel Bernard's eyes with no anger in them, with only pity and forgiveness—

She heard voices afar off, as if she were lying at the bottom of an abyss and, from the clifftop whence she had fallen, people were calling to her. She felt she must lift herself up to listen, to be able to hear what they were saying. She was in darkness and she must struggle to the light. It was an effort that seemed to call upon powers deep, deep in her, that made her feel as if her head would burst, her body break before she could throw off the weight that held her there.

Now she seemed to be lifted, lifted slowly, up an infinite distance. She was coming out of darkness, light was dawning slowly. She could see now a brightness in which all was a blur and confusion. Gradually, painfully, objects, faces came into focus—objects strange to her, faces she did not know, eyes filled with pity and concern gazing down at her. Then, seated at the foot of the bed, she saw Marcel. Her eyes wide, wondering, remained

fixed on his, and they were just as she remembered seeing them in that last terrible moment—

She screamed. Instantly gentle hands were upon her, soothing voices spoke to her. Someone held a glass to her lips and said, "Drink it." She obeyed. She felt darkness stealing over her again but this time there was no falling and the darkness held no terrors. Someone was holding her hand and she knew those strong, slender fingers and clung hard to them. As long as she clung to them, as long as she did not let go, all would be well.

"Marcel!" She spoke his name when she again regained consciousness. He was sitting there, just as if he had been sitting there all the time she slept.

"You're better now, Simonne." His gentleness, the concern in his voice, in his eyes, reproached her, cut like a knife into her heart. She could not bear to look at him. She closed her eyes. "How long?" she whispered.

"Days," he answered. "We were afraid it would be—"

She licked her lips. A nurse held a glass to them. "Tony—?"

No one said anything. Her eyes flew open, stared at Marcel, at the nurse, reading instantly the terrible truth. "He did not suffer," said Marcel. "When you are stronger I will tell you—"

Days later he told her—told her very gently that Tony Brossard had died with another girl's name on his lips, a girl who had a great claim upon him. She listened in silence. For herself she did not mind. She never had loved him, but all through her life she would be haunted by the knowledge that she perhaps was in some way to blame for what had happened.

"It—it was my fault," she whispered. "If I had not—"

"Don't say that!" Marcel spoke sharply. "And for the love of the good God, Simonne, do not reproach yourself with it or let it get into your life that you had anything to do with it."

"But I—"

"You were not to blame. Tell me—did you love him very much?"

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know what love is, monsieur. Growing pains—that is all I feel. I—I am sorry to have caused you all this worry. When I am well, I will go away. I have not done right. I have repaid your goodness in a poor way. I hope you will forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, little one." There was deep tenderness in his regard. "If only," she thought, "he would touch me now, if only I could cling

to him, if only he would let me love him." She stretched out a hand timidly when he was not looking, and almost touched his sleeve, but she remembered what had happened the last time she touched him, and drew her hand away.

Adèle came in then. From her, likewise, were no reproaches—only kindness, a gentle understanding that touched Simonne deeper than scoldings would have done. "You almost flew away from us, Pigeon." Adèle's soft hand smoothed her forehead. "If you had I should never forgive myself for leaving you alone that dismal day. As it is, I blame myself. When you are better I will watch over you more carefully."

"When I am better"—She looked out at the green foliage of the maples in the sunny courtyard, at the poplars quivering in the morning breeze, at the white figures of the nuns on the balcony across the yard—"when I am well again, I will go back to my own country. I should never have left it, I think. Oh, do not misunderstand me, please. It is all my own fault that this has happened. If I stay, perhaps there will be other things"—

She looked at Marcel, trying to read what was in his eyes. Pain, she thought, and feared that she had hurt him, that she was being ungrateful. He said, "Do not worry now about anything, Simonne. You must get well. You have all your life ahead of you and you are far too young to let anything discourage you. You don't want to give up."

"Do you want me to—to go on, *monsieur*?"

"Yes—yes, I want you to."

"Why are you so good to me—it is not just because I am Simonne—?"

He did not answer. Adèle squeezed her hand. Marcel got up presently and said he must go. He stood a moment by the bed, looking down at her. She returned his look bravely, loving him, feeling in her heart the dull ache of a love unwanted, unrecognized, uncared for. When he had gone she turned to Adèle: "Was he very angry at me when—when I ran away?"

Adèle nodded. "I thought he would go mad. And it was not you he blamed, it was himself. He said, and it struck me as very strange, 'First one, and now the other'. I asked him what he meant but he only looked at me as if he didn't hear."

"He will never forgive me for doing what I did."

"He has long since forgiven you."

"But always he is so aloof, so cold, so indifferent—"

Adèle did not reply. She had a picture of Marcel Bernard as he had been when he came to the hospital, summoned there after the crash—a picture she would never forget. She had thought then, as she did now, that it would be sweet to die just to have him feel that way about her.

Chapter VIII
GOD NO LONGER

For a few weeks, made bright by Adèle's daily presence, by frequent, all-too-brief visits from Marcel, Simonne stayed in the hospital, recovering from the concussion, the cuts and bruises she had suffered in the wreck. She was almost sorry to return to Val Morin. It would mean that Marcel would not come so often. It would be as it had been before. She would not see him for weeks on end and when he did come she must hide her joy, must make no demonstration whatever, must say simply, "Yes, *monsieur*" and "No, *monsieur*."

Again it would be intolerable. For a while, during her illness, he seemed to come close to her. There were times when it had seemed he was again the gay-hearted man who had come to Ste.-Ursule and captured her heart and made it firmly his on the road to Quebec. Then he would become aloof, withdrawn, as if some invisible but unscalable barrier had come between her and him. He would become silent, thoughtful, almost forgetting her presence, starting when she spoke to him.

"Is it that you are afraid to like me, M. Bernard?" she asked one day timidly, her pale cheeks coloring with the effort it had cost her. "It seems that just when we are—are happy together something comes and makes you different, as if one came and touched you on the shoulder—"

He glanced at her quickly, a startled look in his eyes. "Does it seem so? I—I think you imagine it, Simonne. No, I am not afraid to like you. From the first moment I saw you, I liked you. I always will."

"But not too much, *monsieur*?" She turned her head on the pillow. Her eyes were tell-tale. She loved him, with a love amounting to worship, but a very human love nonetheless, a love that demanded response, a love that harked eternally back to the night he had given her one glimpse of passion, of the wonder that could be hers.

"It is not well to—to like too much, Simonne," he said slowly. "Not for me. I—" He got up from the chair by the bed and walked to the window and gazed out for a while. He turned to her abruptly as if he were going to speak. But he did not. He left her soon after that, left her lonely and hurt and puzzled.

Could one love so much and not be loved in return? Could she go on forever feeling like this, seeing the bright sun rise when he came and the darkness fall when he went away? Surely he must know what was in her heart for him, surely something of this unbearable longing must make itself known to him. It must then be that he did not care enough. "And I," she thought, "can do no more. I have looked at him, talked to him, in ways that filled me with shame, that must have seemed forward and bold to him. I could not help it. With him, I forget my pride. He has made me lose it all. Well, if he does not care for me, I must try to cease loving him—"

He helped her there. For a week and more after her return to Val Morin he did not come. She was much better by then. She could go swimming, riding with Adèle. She could listen, feigning deep interest, when Adèle talked of her future, of the coming Autumn, of whether she would like to go to college in Montreal or in Quebec. Adèle would not hear of her returning to Memramcook. "There may be more of grief in this life, but there is proportionately more of happiness." She smiled at Simonne's skeptical look. "Oh, you will see—if you stay. If you run from it, of course, you will never know, but, after, you will think and wonder what you missed."

"But if you have no idea—"

"But you will have some idea—you'll hear faint music, in dreams you'll catch glimpses of another life, of bright things that might have been yours, had you kept to the high road, the dangerous road and not strolled down the sleepy lane to your Acadian village."

"I do not know, Adèle." She shook her head stubbornly. "I have been only a little while on the high road, and the way has not been good—"

"You must travel on, Pigeon. Presently it will lead into lovelier places."

"Very well then, I will travel on."

Maurice de Haerne claimed the long-deferred dinner and dance. Simonne went at Adèle's urging. "You are not to bury yourself here. By all means go with him. He seems to be interested in you."

"Well, I will go." She had often recalled her brief conversation with the Belgian, often wondered what were the things he had left unsaid. Perhaps tonight he would talk. There was something—something that baffled and troubled her in all her relations with Marcel Bernard. It might be that de Haerne had the answer.

He was smooth, solicitous for her health. He drove very slowly over the country roads to a quiet inn deep in the Laurentians on the shore of a lake.

He could be very charming, she found, when he wished to be. Through his talk she got glimpses of the ant-hill that is Europe, of the myriad pigmy creatures working incessantly to build up their funeral-pyre. "We are in the midst of all that," he said, spreading his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "We who build and sell aeroplanes. Even here, in this peaceful land where one looks only with idle curiosity at the airship in the sky, we of Europe are not away from it. There is always intrigue, always struggle, always the fear of one's outdistancing the other. Well, we will not bother your pretty head with it, Simonne. It becomes late now and you are not yet too strong. We shall go home."

She was disappointed. He had not mentioned Marcel Bernard, had not spoken of Edmond. She wanted to question him but they were well on their way before she could bring herself to do it. It was de Haerne who, after all, helped her. "You and M. Bernard—you get along well? He is a good guardian, *hein*?"

"I do not see much of him."

"No." The Belgian nodded. "I can understand that. To me, while in some ways I admire Bernard, it seems a marvel that he can look you in the eyes—after all it must be hard for a man to face the sister of the one he murdered."

She stared at de Haerne, lips parted, eyes fixed on his sharp, aquiline visage. Trees, homes fronted by neat gardens, white-painted posts flitted by. Somewhere a deep bell was ringing slowly, monotonously, calling reluctant souls. Simonne shook her head like one coming up out of deep water, blinded, suffocated, lost. This couldn't be. This was some grave frightening mistake. "I loved Edmond." Marcel's words came back to her. She could hear his voice, deep and earnest. How could he be guilty of this terrible thing—

"You—you will please explain, M. de Haerne. I do not understand. I do not know if I heard correctly what you said to me."

"I think you heard, *mademoiselle*." The Belgian's long jaw was grim. "You will realize, of course, that there are other, deadlier ways of sending a man to his death than by shooting him or sticking a knife into him. Your brother, the day he was killed, was a sick man, unfit for any work that required quickness of thought and action. He told Bernard that and was ordered to fly. You know the result."

"It was—was Marcel Bernard who made him do it!" She choked on the words. A thousand thoughts came trailing after this ugly idea that had been planted in her mind. "Can you be sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure. If you doubt me, you have merely to ask Bernard. He will not dare lie to you, I fancy. It is well known in France, this story. It was partly to escape the stir of ill-feeling caused by his action that Bernard made the ocean-hop, that he is staying here."

"And it is to try to atone for what he did," thought Simonne, "that he has been so kind to me." She touched de Haerne's arm. "He could not be punished for what he did?"

"There is no law to punish him. The censure of his fellows, of the press, the bite of his own conscience—if he has one, the scorn that you must feel for him—those things will punish him in part."

"Not enough!" Simonne's mouth was twisted. "Not nearly enough. He is a Judas as well as a murderer. And he was not man enough to tell me this himself."

"For that, Simonne, there may be another reason."

"What other reason?"

"I have said enough. Anyway, I do not know definitely about that. But what I have told you is truth. And I told you because I felt from the first that you should know what manner of man you had as a guardian. Of course, that arrangement was made long before he and your brother had the falling-out—so it stood. But you can break it. No court would expect you to be the ward of such a man—certainly none in France, and the facts will weigh the same in this country."

"Why did my brother quarrel with him? What made them hate each other—since, I take it, they did hate?"

"That I cannot tell you. I can only surmise. Bernard, you may have gathered, is something of a slave-driver. Your brother liked to have a good time. It may have been on that account. Perhaps Bernard will tell you. But do not be too credulous. He told you a lie by keeping you in the dark about the facts of Edmond Caron's death. He would have continued to act that lie."

"It was because of that," she thought, "that he told me I must forget his kiss, that he avoided me, that he took my arms from about his neck. I hate myself, despise myself for ever having loved him. How could he ever hope to make up to me for the loss of my brother!"

Then her heart cried, "Marcel! Marcel!"

She thought of how sometimes his eyes looked tired, his face lined and drawn; of how he would lose himself so often in his own thoughts and all

but forget her presence. Now she understood those silences, understood better his confusion at finding she was not a child—a child who could be won easily and made to forget. Had he made a confidante of Adèle, she wondered. Well, if this was true—Perhaps it was not true, perhaps de Haerne and everyone else was wrong. There was one sure way to find out—

"I fear I have spoiled our evening," de Haerne remarked. "But there will be others. Believe me, I am your friend."

"I believe you, *monsieur*."

"If you need help, advice, come to me."

"You are kind."

The sharp black eyes studied her approvingly from under heavy, olive-colored lids. No other man had looked at her in quite that way. It unnerved her, made her hotly conscious of her body, of the swiftly forming contours of womanhood. When he had asked her to dance, she had wanted to refuse but could find no reason for doing so. She was not happy in his arms and she hated the way he held her, the way he looked at her.

"I can understand," he said softly in his sibilant way, "why Bernard would be anxious to put himself right with you. For one so lovely—"

"You are wrong," she answered coldly. "He does not care about my loveliness—as you call it."

"No! You mean he seems indifferent." The Belgian smiled without parting his thin lips. "It is only a pose, that. A sure way to win some women."

"He would not dare—" But he had dared to kiss her. Then he had hated himself. He had kept away from her. That, at least, was to his credit. Perhaps he really did love her and it was the consciousness of what he had done that kept him from her. The thought made a warmth come in her heart and she was ashamed of it.

From a roadside inn she called Val Morin and talked to Adèle. She tried to speak casually. She managed to control her voice when she asked if Marcel Bernard was there. Adèle had expected him. No, he had gone shortly before she called. "He said he was going home. He didn't seem at all happy. What have you done to him, Simonne?"

"I am wondering, *mon amie*, what he has done to me."

Adèle did not understand. She laughed softly. "You are not too happy with de Haerne, I take it. Ah well, it takes all kinds. You will be home soon?"

"Yes, quite soon."

When she returned to de Haerne she said, "I wonder if you would mind driving me to Westmount to M. Bernard's place?"

"You wish to go there tonight?"

"I will not wait a moment longer than I can help."

De Haerne shrugged. "Since you think it necessary to verify what most people in France know for a fact—"

"I must hear it from his own lips." Simonne's cheeks were white under their tan. There was a strange golden gleam in her eyes. "You are magnificent when you are angry," murmured de Haerne. His hands rested briefly on her arm as he helped her into the car. She hated the touch. She moved quickly away from him. He smiled thinly.

At a block of apartment houses in Westmount he stopped the car. "There you are, Simonne. I fear it will not be a pleasant interview—for either of you. I will wait."

Her heart beats were loud—so loud that she felt sure even the lift-boy could hear them. Her nervous fingers made a ball of her handkerchief, rolling and kneading it. She thrust it in the pocket of her wrap. She pressed the bell push with trembling finger. In all her body was a trembling and a weakness, but there was a determination in her heart to know the truth once and for all. Tonight she would have truth from him, and when he opened the door and looked at her, unspeaking, she felt sure she would have it.

He said, "*Entrez*," as if he had been waiting for her. In the big living-room a single light burned beside his chair. He switched on a few more. He was wearing a blue-silk dressing-gown, his white shirt was open at the throat, showing the leanness, the strength of his neck.

"Won't you sit down?" He picked up a review off a chair and moved the cushion. Simonne did not sit down. She kept looking at him steadily as if just by looking she could see what was in his mind.

"You are not surprised to see me, *monsieur*?"

"Not very, Simonne."

"Then you—it is true—true that you sent Edmond to his death! You knew he was sick, too ill to fly—yet you made him go up and because of that he died a horrible death." She leaned forward. "That is true?"

He looked suddenly tired and defeated. "I ordered him to fly, yes. It was his duty."

"Duty! *O mon dieu!* You speak of duty when you can picture that scorched and charred and ruined thing that was my brother! You can—"

"Don't!"

"But I will—I must! How could you then come to me and lie to me—for your not speaking was a lie! How could you let me think you were good and kind! Why, I made a god of you. I could see no wrong in you. I hated you because—because you would not have my love. Now I hate you because of what you did to my brother and to me. You killed him, you took him from me."

"I tried, in my fashion, to make it up to you, Simonne." His voice was quiet. He gazed into her stormy eyes and looked away. "I can in no way extenuate my guilt—" He seemed to speak to himself—"I suppose it is guilt. I told him, sick or not, he must fly. He screamed at me, called me a murderer. Perhaps I am. But I had seen him fly other times when he felt no better."

"Why did you not tell me this at the start, M. Bernard?"

He shook his head. "I came prepared to find a child to whom by long devotion I could make amends for being the cause of all her loneliness. Then I found you—and you were not a child. I wanted to tell you. I postponed it, kept putting it off. Each day it became harder and finally it became impossible. Then—then I knew I must stay away from you, and that I have done. Edmond and I had not been friends for quite a while, but the arrangement we made about you long ago still stood."

"It would have been better, kinder, to have given the task to someone else. You committed another wrong by undertaking it."

"Yes." He walked over to the cold hearth and stared moodily at it. "Yes, I did. But, as I told you, I thought you were a child who might learn to like me enough to forgive me for what I had done, instead of a girl old enough to hate me. Anyway," he finished flatly, "I have done all there is to do for you, Simonne. I will stay out of your life. I would have, anyway. Perhaps, in time you will not think of me bitterly. Believe me, I have suffered."

"You do not know what suffering is, *monsieur*. Hell is the most hideous thing we know and hell is flame, and Edmond—*Bien!*" She turned to the door. "I will go now."

He did not try to stop her. He had been waiting for this hour, dreading it, preparing but never getting ready for it. He could not plead for himself, not even with her. He could not bring in numerous things that might have served to lessen his guilt. The fact was there. His were the orders that had sent Edmond Caron up into the dark and sullen sky that lowered over the quiet Breton *paysage*—the last orders that Edmond would ever obey.

"I have done my best for her, anyway," he muttered, rubbing the back of his hand across his brow. "At least I was faithful to my promise. Perhaps I was a fool not to have taken her love when it was offered. The chance will never come again. Still, she would think much less of me if I had made love to her when she was ignorant of all this. It was de Haerne, of course, who told her the wretched story. Someday she would have found it out, and perhaps better soon than late."

Simonne got into the car beside de Haerne and for several blocks sat with her lips tight-shut, her eyes fixed on nothingness. He was wise enough to respect her silence, even while he burned to know what had passed between her and Marcel Bernard. It had not ended pleasantly, that interview. One could see that. She was going over and over it in her mind. He saw her hands clench and open in her lap, saw her lips move as if she were speaking. At last she said,

"You were right, *monsieur*. Forgive me for wanting to verify what you told me. It was a shock to hear, you understand. Hard to believe of one you —you trusted and set above all other men."

"That I can imagine. Bernard said nothing in his own defence?"

"What could he say? He admitted responsibility for Edmond's being aloft that day, admitted that he knew my brother was ill and not fit to fly."

"He is still your guardian, Simonne."

"Yes, legally he is, until I am twenty-one. It means nothing to me."

"But it may to him."

"How so?"

"He has authority over you."

"Pouf! Let him try to exercise it! Anyway, I do not think he will. I—I do not think he will ever want to see me again."

"And what about you?"

"I shall never see him again if I can help it. I do not know what I shall do now. Perhaps I'll leave Montreal, go back home."

The thought of home was sweet, the memory of the old house of the Carons, of the quiet sleepy village, the peace of the valley, the gentle care of old Artemise, the constant affection of Pierre. In those things was no deceit like this, no unsuspected treachery to come suddenly before one and set the world on end.

"You will think better of that," said de Haerne. "After a little taste of life you will find the country has lost its savor for you. I do not think you were made to bury yourself in a lot of fields and woods. You are too beautiful."

"If I have beauty, I have begun to distrust it. I am just a country-girl; all this bewilders and frightens me. Things seem to have no permanence here—not even truth, not even love."

"That is because this experience of yours has been so unfortunate. But you must not be distrustful of everything just because of this."

She scarcely heard de Haerne's suave platitudes. She longed for the ride to end. At Val Morin she thanked him and quickly said goodnight. She found herself wishing she had never met him. She might then have gone on forever, believing in Marcel, at least believing that he was strong and good.

"It was not a nice thing to see him so," she thought, picturing him as he had listened to what she had to say. She had had the upper hand there, it had been all her own way, but she felt shamedly that it had not been a fair fight, that she had been striking at someone who was defenseless, who had to stand there and take it all and suffer and say nothing.

"But he deserved it, all of it."

She heard Adèle coming along the hall to her room. She wondered if Adèle knew the story. She thought not. Adèle, even if she did know, would defend Marcel. Adèle loved him and Adèle could have him.

Adèle came in and sat wearily down on the bed. Simonne, in front of the mirror, pretended to have but one thought and aim in all the world—a hundred strokes with the brush. For a dozen of those Adèle watched in silence. Then she said, "What happened between you and Monsieur de

Haerne? One could tell when you came upstairs that you were out to flatten someone after first knocking him over. You had a quarrel with him?"

"Not with him—with Marcel Bernard. It—well, it was my fault anyway." She turned briefly to Adèle. "I forgot my lessons. I put my hand into the fire and got my fingers burned."

"I think I see," said Adèle slowly. "I still do not understand. Marcel, it seems to me, is being very, very noble about you for some reason. I think a women hates to have a man go noble on her. There is something terribly unreal about it. Maybe when they wore armor and rode on great white chargers and carried big swords, it was all right, but it doesn't go with the streamline age. You're crazy about Marcel, aren't you, Pigeon?"

This time she faced Adèle squarely. "I am not, Adèle. You were right. It was a case of hero-worship, of being in love with love. It is all over now."

"You really mean it?"

"I mean it. I had my lesson. It was hard when one has to do all the loving while the other complacently takes the love as his due. I am only a schoolgirl to him—and a troublesome one."

"Somehow I thought you were more. But you know best. It seemed to me that something was keeping him away from you, that he was deliberately avoiding us. I may have been wrong. It may have been just that he was indifferent. He is a hard man to figure on, Marcel. Most of them are so transparent. If ever he seems so, that is the time when he is most opaque."

"It does not matter to me, Adèle. He made it clear that he did not want me. Now if he should change, if he should want me, he could never have me. Is it presumptuous for me to talk that way?"

"You are just a child."

"No. You are wrong there. I am a woman now, I think. Perhaps some of the symptoms you noticed were growing pains, as you called them, but there have been others that bit deeper."

"Has the dark M. de Haerne anything to do with this?" Adèle's gaze was shrewd.

"It is all due to Monsieur my guardian—to the great M. Bernard."

Adèle sighed. "Oh, well, one recovers—very quickly when one is young like you. And there is still your poet-schoolmaster in far-off Acadie."

Yes, there was always Pierre. Lying awake in the darkness of her room she could see the sky beyond her window, and the wakeful little stars shining steadily on while the world slumbered. She had cried a little when she first put her head on the pillow, wept for the sudden death of a dream. Now she thought perplexedly about the future. She would impose no longer upon Marcel Bernard or his friends. His kindness, when she had thought it sprung from his love for Edmond, had seemed good and right; now since she saw it as only a means of atonement, of making up to her for what he had done, she would have none of it. She could free herself from his guardianship. He would not try to hold her. Then she would go away from him, from Adèle, from all the associations she had formed here. She felt like an interloper now, a stranger, to whom they were being kind because it was a duty.

Pierre loved her. He wanted her to marry him. Well, why not? Did she love him? That made her smile much as Adèle would have smiled. Did love really matter so much? She liked Pierre. She had been happy in his company. Marriage with him would settle her future, would write the end to this early chapter of her life.

She watched the moonbeams creep about her room as often at Ste.-Ursule she had marked their silvery course. Ste.-Ursule seemed a million miles away now. All that she had known there had an unreality, a nebulous quality in her mind. The little girl who had lived through those quiet golden years, who had studied there and sung and played—that was another girl, another Simonne Caron. And she who lay awake in the bluish-silver light had stepped out of that other creation the moment Marcel Bernard first spoke to her, and perhaps from her now still another girl would spring, one with eyes a little wiser, with mouth a little harder, one who had been born when he took her arms from about his neck and put her lightly from him.

It was cock-light before she fell asleep and the morning sun, showering its warm gold upon her, awakened her not long afterwards. Sleeping or waking, nothing much mattered. She got out of bed and put on the red bathing suit she and Adèle had bought the morning before they came to Val Morin. She hurried downstairs and out of the house and soon the smoothness of the water broke in gleaming ripples as she swam. It would be nice, she thought, rolling on her back, closing her eyes and drifting, drifting, to let oneself go, to float away forever on the bosom of the waters, to forget the pain of love and the cruel reality of death and the power of hate. But one kept on. One walked on the highroad, Adèle said, if one really wanted to live. And yes, there was a purpose, an aim to life. One pictured a shining

goal for oneself and moved towards it, keeping one's eyes forever fixed upon the height from which it shone. She had seen a winged god on a mountain top but before her climb was well begun the sun and the winds and the storms had tarnished him and broken off his wings.

Of Tony Brossard she had never made a god, yet for him she felt a deep pity, a great remorse. Marcel had bidden her to forget that, to rid herself of the idea that she was in any way responsible for what had happened. Perhaps he had tried to absolve himself of all blame for Edmond's death and perhaps, having failed, he knew how much of havoc, what anguish of mind, such macabre thoughts could cause one. She had lived over and over those last hours with Tony, thinking how light-heartedly he had driven into the very jaws of death. Perhaps that was a good way to die, to be snuffed out suddenly, perhaps never to know that this was death one met. But he was so young, Tony, so prodigal of life, so careless of his responsibilities. Life had been his plaything until suddenly it turned into a juggernaut and crushed him beneath its wheels.

She had never seen the girl, a stenographer from the brokerage-house where he worked, Adèle said, who had been with him in his last moments. Sometimes she felt a queer desire to meet that girl, to talk with her, to find out how she had felt towards Tony before his death, how she felt now. If in her heart was bitterness or only regret, only the memory of lost laughter.

"I have that memory—of the living as well as of the dead," she thought. "We used to laugh together, Marcel and I, but all the time he was laughing there was something holding him back and something would always intrude upon his laughter. I told him that day in the hospital that it seemed as if someone touched him on the shoulder and made him remember what he was trying to forget. It was Death that touched him. It will come now to touch me."

Dark thoughts for this glorious morning of bright blue sky and soft white clouds, of sunlight warm and golden—a day for youth, for love, for forgetfulness. "But today I will go home," she thought. "Back where I came from. I should never have left there. I'll find Pierre waiting for me. I'll climb the Beaumont with Pierre tomorrow at sunset time. With him, up there among the clouds, I can forget all this. It will seem like a dream from which I have awakened and I'll reach out and pluck the grass and the ferns and the flowers. I'll smell their green freshness. I'll lay my cheek against the earth and know that what I have is real, that it will not turn to dust in my hand or to ashes in my heart."

She swam ashore. Adèle was sitting on the verandah-steps. She was lovely, Adèle, her red-gold hair piled in glorious confusion, a green bathing suit revealing the beautiful contours of her body. Many men loved her, yet Simonne knew that she had no love to give them in return. Marcel Bernard owned it all even if he seemed to take for granted. "She is a fool to love him so," thought Simonne, looking down at her. "But then I, too, have been one. Perhaps women are born with an aptitude for being fools."

"You look very serious this morning." Adèle surveyed her drowsily through dark lashes. "Did you decide the fate of the world while you were floating out there staring at the sky?"

Simonne smiled and shook the mane of chestnut hair released from the red rubber cap. Adèle loved the lights that glinted in its thick waves. How beautiful, how dewily fresh the child was, she thought. She felt a sudden pang, thinking of the Adèle Mercier of ten years ago, who had been so much like this little one, who had merged gradually into the woman who waited with scant hope but with joy in the waiting.

"I am going home, Adèle. That I have decided."

Adèle sat up, all the drowsiness gone from her eyes. "Going home? But why, name of a name. Have you just now decided this? What has made you —"

"I have learned something."

"Yes?"

"I have found out why M. Bernard has been so good to me, why he has put up with my wilfulness and why, at the same time, he has kept himself so withdrawn. It is because of Edmond, because it was he who—who caused Edmond's death."

"You little fool!" Adèle glowered at her, stood up to face her. There was much of the tigress in Adèle. "Just because your brother wasn't fit to do his job—"

"Oh, then, you know. You knew all the time!"

"A good many people know and very few of them besides yourself and Maurice de Haerne, who hates Marcel, anyway, blame him for what happened. He is man enough, or fool enough—I do not know which—to blame himself. Your brother—"

With an effort she stopped talking, held her lips compressed, staring at the ground. She looked up at last. Her face was white with two spots of

angry crimson below the high cheekbones. “I am all for Marcel Bernard, as you know,” she said in a voice entirely changed. “I promised him I would never talk to you of this. I forgot myself. You are free to believe what you will, Simonne; to condemn him if you want to condemn. I can tell you that he went to the convent to find a little girl for whom he was going to do great things. He is a dreamer, Marcel—an idealist for all his hardness and strength. I am sure, if he had known you were a woman instead of the child he looked for, he would not have gone. But once there, once having made himself known to you, he was in for it.”

“It would have been kinder, better, to have told me the truth, then, rather than let me find it out after—”

“Yes, he should have told you. But it was too hard for him. Well, you know now.”

“Yes, I know now.”

“How little you know,” thought Adèle, half-pitying her, half-hating her —“how very little! I could tell you, oh, so much that would open your eyes. But he made me promise I would not and I am glad, glad, that I did promise!”

“And you are determined to go home?”

“Yes, I will go today. I am grateful to you for all your kindness to me. I have not been very good, I fear. You both—you and M. Bernard—have been so patient. He has done more for me than he needed to do.”

“But you will see him before you go?”

Simonne hesitated. She wanted to see him more than she dared confess, but she knew it would make it harder for her to go. She knew that if he spoke even a few words of kindness to her she would cry, she would forget what he had done to Edmond, to her—forget everything except that she loved him.

“No, Adèle. I think I had better not. He will know why I went away. He will forget me. And that will be best.”

Chapter IX
THE PIGEON FLIES HOME

Adèle, too, thought it would be best. She knew how little it would take, now that the truth was out, to bring Simonne into his arms. She knew how those arms ached to hold her, how only some near-Quixotic idea of Marcel's had kept him and would perhaps always keep him from declaring his love for Edmond Caron's sister.

"I feel that I caused his death, Adèle. But for me he would still be alive and this little one would not be an orphan." He had said this to Adèle the day she met the big plane at the end of its ocean flight, at St. Hubert Aerodrome. "Every time I look at her," he said miserably, "I will remember Edmond. My only hope is that I can do enough for her to make her happy. I can never restore her brother to her and all I may accomplish will fall far short of what she has lost through me. But I will do what I can. I will devote my life to her."

"That is more than Edmond did, or more than he ever would do," she had pointed out wisely. "And it's far more than you are bound to do. Devotion—even such as yours, Marcel—too often fails of its object. After all, you were only doing your duty when you told Edmond to take his plane up. If he was jittery, shot with his excesses and his constant dissipation—"

"You must say nothing of that! Nothing, Adèle." He had looked at her fiercely. "It is all beside the point."

She did not see that it was, but she had learned long ago in Paris that it would never do to defy him. Willingly, she had helped him prepare for his guardianship of Simonne and she had been glad to have Simonne in her keeping—yes, even when she saw that Marcel's expiation had brought love with it, that his ward had come to mean so much to him. With Marcel, it was Simonne—always Simonne. When he talked with her it was of Simonne he talked, of what they must do for her, of what the years would bring for her. She saw that he tortured himself with the dark thought that Simonne would turn from him once she learned the truth.

"She will think I have been good to her just because of what happened," he said miserably. "At the beginning, before I came to know her, it was so. But now—"

"Yes." Adèle understood, but loving him fiercely, herself, she was glad that Edmond Caron's ghost stood between Marcel and the little convent-pigeon. While Simonne remained in ignorance of the circumstances of Edmond's passing, Marcel would never make love to her; and once she knew the truth, she would most certainly turn away from him. To her he would be the man who had killed her brother and who had been afraid to tell her so, who had tried to solace his conscience by showering kindnesses on her and assuage his sense of guilt by playing the noble rôle of protector to the girl he had made an orphan.

But Adèle knew he would feel bitterly if Simonne went away without seeing him. Perhaps it was the kindest, the best way to go, to slip out of his life and be seen no more. But could it be done that easily? How much had this girl begun to matter to him? And, after all, no matter what he had done, he was Simonne's guardian, he had an obligation to her distinct from the one he had made for himself.

"I think, Simonne, you had better see Marcel before you go. If you do not, he will be very unhappy. All you have to say is goodby."

"All!" Simonne tried to smile, but her lips began to tremble and she dashed the quick tears from her eyes. "That will not be an easy thing to say. I think I cannot say it, Adèle. Please do not ask me. I will hurry now. There is a train at noon. You can send my things on to me at Memramcook."

"I wish you were not going."

"Somehow I wish it, too, but it was a mistake for me ever to come here and it would be a greater one if I stayed. And, after all—" She put her arm about Adèle's shoulders—"you will have him now. You are the one for him. Watching you, I have learned what love is—how patient, how undemanding, how loyal it is."

"It is that—when it can be nothing else. A woman loves and if she cannot make the man accept her love as it is, why then it changes into those things you speak of—patience, understanding, loyalty. But it is pathetic that it should be so. Have you not noticed that, too?"

Simonne had noticed. "Why then do you go on loving him?"

"Why do you, Simonne?"

"But I do not," she lied bravely. "I assure you I do not. Oh, yes, I feel something in here"—She touched her breast. "It hurts, too, but it will go away. You think it will go away, don't you?"

"In time, perhaps. Anyway, it will cease to hurt so much. I am used to it —like a little cross I have learned to carry."

They sat there for a while unspeaking, two who loved him, the one knowing that if ever he came to her, it would be only a compromise, the other thinking of the distance that would soon be between them, of what, more than distance, would keep her from him.

Presently, Simonne went to her room to pack. It was a dreary business. She sat on the bed, the evening gown of white satin, the first she had ever owned, clutched tightly to her breast. She would not take it with her. She would never be able to look at it or touch it without feeling an agony in her heart, without seeing Marcel's troubled eyes, without hearing the gay reckless laughter of Tony Brossard—laughter that ended in a strangled moan.

She put the dress aside. It didn't belong to her, it was the cocoon from which she had stepped, wiser, sadder, in some way better. In that lovely candent garment she had danced and laughed—and cried. All the things it connoted had gone from her, gone, most of them, forever, and it was a shroud for a lot of perished hopes and dreams and with them it must be laid away.

She finished. She took a last look around the little room shaded by the chalet's drooping eaves, curtained by the bright green leaves of Virginia creeper. She thought of the dismal day of rain and murk, of how the drip-drip had pounded into her brain so that always afterward in that room she could hear it; nights, she had wakened terrified, heart wildly beating, thinking she heard that infernal sound like a drum-beat summoning her to ride over a rain-swept road where Death lurked at every curve and crossing.

She wore the skirt and sweater, the little beret, that she had worn the day she left Memramcook. That was not so long ago, as time is measured, but in those short weeks she had learned of love and death and pain and sacrifice. The things she had learned were not clear in her mind, but there were pictures, scenes, that presently would have meaning and sequence and reality.

She closed the door softly behind her and went downstairs. Midway on the steps she paused, frightened, ready to turn back. Marcel was in the living-room, standing by the wide window that looked out on the valley, his tall figure, his dark head limned against the light. He turned slowly and looked at her. She went down the remaining steps, setting her travelling-case down by the door. For a while they looked at each other in silence. Her heart

was beating wildly, like a captive bird beating its wings against the imprisoning bars. She saw no reproach in his eyes, in his smile. Perhaps, she thought sadly, he is glad that I am going.

"Adèle has told me," he said at last. "I—I could hardly believe it. But I have since been thinking about it all and perhaps you are doing what is best." He paused a moment. "I know how intolerable it would be for you after—after what you have learned. I deserve to have you hate me. All the times I was with you I felt guilty for I was acting under false pretences. At moments, as you know, I would forget, but then the realization would come back. You were right when you said that someone touched me on the shoulder—and made me remember. But you gave me much happiness, Simonne—stolen happiness that I had no right to, that I did not deserve."

"Please"—She held out her hand. "Please do not think that, monsieur. It is I who am in your debt—always in your debt."

"No, child. You owe me only your unhappiness. I can never forget that, much less could you. I hope you will find contentment, some measure of joy, in your lovely homeland. There is peace in those long low hills, in the great marshlands and rivers. And there is Pierre Gay waiting for you, I suppose."

"Yes. Pierre waits."

"Well—he loves you, Simonne, and there is nothing to spoil his love—to turn it into shame and reproach and bitterness—" He shrugged. "*Eh bien*, if you like I will drive you to the train. I have my car here. You used to like to ride in my car."

She did not speak. She could not. Adèle came in, looked from one to the other, went to Simonne and kissed her. "Goodby, Pigeon. You're flying home and I hate to see you go. You won't forget Adèle?"

"I won't forget—anything." Blindly she pushed open the screen-door and went out onto the verandah. The white Sunbeam was waiting there. She wanted to caress its red cushions, to rest her cheek against them. She got in, Marcel followed. She waved to Adèle. Goodby.

"You will not forget," he said after a while, "that I am still your guardian, Simonne. If you are in trouble, if you need advice—anything—you have only to call on me. I started my guardianship on the wrong foot, yet if I had told you the truth the day I met you—well, I might never have had you at all, never have known how sweet you were."

If only now he would speak of love to her, put his arm about her, make her forget everything except that she adored him—but he did nothing, said

no more. At the Windsor Station he helped her with her tickets, her berth and saw her to the barrier. He was not happy. He said, "It is goodby now," and his voice sounded strained, as if it were an effort to speak. "Goodby and good luck and all the happiness you deserve."

"Thank you, *monsieur*." Her eyes were wretched, red with crying. But she could not cry any more. She turned quickly, called "Goodby" over her shoulder and hurried towards the waiting train. Once in her seat she rushed her handkerchief to her lips and cowered there in the corner, utterly lost and bereaved. Not until the train gave the usual spasmodic jerks that prelude departure did she look out the window.

She saw among the crowd on the platform the tall figure of Maurice de Haerne in the semi-formal costume he affected—Oxford grey coat and waist-coat, striped trousers, pearl grey spats. He was talking to a stout man in a grey suit, at whom Simonne stared with sudden interest. It was the man whom Marcel had suspected of shadowing him. She watched to see if they were boarding the train and felt relieved when she saw them shake hands with some others, then leave the platform. She was glad to be quit of de Haerne. He looked like the Belgian police-dog Adèle had likened him to, he looked like one who would relish stamping on the graves of his enemies.

The train pulled out, rolled past the drab grim backs of tenements, crossed the long bridge and sped through the quiet Canadian land—so much like her own country—neat villages, tall-spired churches towering above the cottages of the habitants. In the fields men were cutting hay. She could almost smell its sweetness. At home now on the broad Caron acres, Alphonse would be at work. She thought of how she used to ride atop the mighty loads of hay and play in the great mow, almost drowning in the fragrant grassy depths of the scented timothy and clover.

Tomorrow she would be home in her valley of the stars. She could picture Pierre's joy, his astonishment. He would wonder that she had come back so soon. He would not question her though. He would be so glad to have her with him once more, to wander with her through the green meadows, along the quiet leafy lanes, beside the river.

The old house would welcome her, fold her protectingly to its weathered bosom. She had money now to spend upon it, to restore it to its former glory. But she would be alone, through the long nights, through most of the days. The months, the years, loomed monotonous ahead of her. Boredom, ennui, would come to her and they would beget either bitterness or resignation. Peace—she would have peace. She saw clearly now what Adèle had meant

when she spoke of following the highroad, dodging its dangers and pitfalls, braving its perils, rather than going easily by the quiet ways.

When she passed through the ancient city on the rock, capped by its grey citadel, her heart was near to breaking. It was a golden evening and the slanting light shone on dome and spire and the glory of the bells rolled over hill and river. She thought with an ache in her breast of her first sight of it, when she and Marcel had come out upon the heights of Levis just at this time of day. It had been a breathless, beautiful moment, that, one of a golden chain that ended under the moon in the Governor's Garden.

"How many women of my race," she wondered, "must have cherished memories of that place. I wonder how many there were who found lasting happiness there, how many, like myself, who found only something to think sadly back upon. That night I was there with him, it seemed that there were ghostly whisperings and rustlings all about, that bright eyes were peeping at us from the bowers and the thickets. There were ghosts of other lovers and he said—he said that our ghosts would come there—to embrace in the moonlight, to kiss and vanish. It was too brief and too unkind."

There was no one but old Theodule Ringuette, the station-master, on the platform at Memramcook when the Ocean Limited stopped there next morning. She was glad. There would be any amount of curious speculation about her sudden return and she was in no hurry for the questioning to begin. She rode up the hill to the Caron Place with Prémélite Gauthier, whom she met on the road, on his truck laden with milk cans, the noise of which kept her from hearing most of his questions and him from hearing her answers.

"One is glad to see you back in Memramcook, Mlle. Simonne," he assured her as he helped her down at the entrance to her driveway. "By cripe, *mon homme*, the country is the place to live. We were saying that you will be back. Always there is a Caron in Memramcook. Those Québécois you would not like. They are bad-civilized, one knows."

"Oh, they are not so bad, Prémélite. They were all very nice to me."

"That M'sieur Bernard, that great *aviateur*, one said you would surely marry on him."

"One was wrong then, *mon ami*. He is my guardian *tout simplement*."

Prémélite looked doubtful. In the village and in all the valley it had been sagely decided that Simonne would "marry on" the Frenchman and that

Pierre Gay would be forgotten. This was quite an upset and would call for a general revision of ideas that had become firmly fixed in the rustic minds.

Simonne walked slowly up the weed-tangled driveway to the old house hidden by the green thickness of the trees' summer garb. It was the same—a little more dilapidated, a little more forlorn, a little smaller seemingly, as if it had shrunk during her absence. But there was old Artemise sitting on the back porch with her sewing-basket at her feet and a yellow tabby playing with a spool of mending cotton. And the old dame's embrace was warm and motherly and the tears in her dim eyes were real and there was more joy in this homecoming than Simonne had looked for.

She walked through the house, from room to room, gazing at the faded splendor, the painted faces on the walls, feeling an almost terrifying sense of strangeness, as if she were not the girl who had lived all her early life among these things, but some changeling, some creature from another world.

She stood in front of Edmond's picture gazing at the weak but handsome face of the last man of the Carons, trying to recapture the sensations of long ago, the sense of belonging, of being one with this house and all it stood for. And it came to her that she was an alien, that the Simonne who had said goodby to this place of desuetude and decay had said goodby to herself. She could never again be that girl nor could these things ever again mean to her what so long they had stood for.

"Edmond!" she said softly. "In life you left me alone to eat out my heart, to live a make-believe existence in a world of make-believe; in death, even in death, you doom me to loneliness, you keep from me the greatest happiness I could ever know. You stand between me and him and it will be that way always. I forgive him now, but I know he does not forgive himself. But he was good to me. I hope you know that. He was good and kind always, and if he committed a crime against you, he is paying for it—and I am paying too."

She thought of de Haerne at this moment—of the man who had followed Marcel—the two of them together; of the trunks belonging to Edmond, that someone had rifled. She could make no sense of it. Perhaps Edmond had left something of value that only these people knew about. She had never got to Marcel's flat, as planned, to look through the trunks. Well, if anything had been stolen she would not know. Marcel would send all of Edmond's things to Memramcook, and for her that would end the story. Perhaps there was more to it. She had never learned why her brother and Marcel Bernard, so

long close friends, had become enemies. And it did not matter now. Death has a way of cutting off hatreds as well as loves.

She did not go out until it was almost sunset time, and the shadows of the tall cedars were lengthening on the overgrown lawns and ruined parterres. She went then through the fields behind the house, crossed the brook, now dwindled in the summer-drought to a mere trickle of water, climbed over a stile and walked swiftly up the Beaumont in the ruddy golden light.

At first she did not see him sitting there on the ledge, so high the ferns had grown and the wide bladed grass. She stood there gazing down on the valley, on the wide river winding smooth and somnolent between its dikes, curving this way and that like some mammoth serpent; on the roof-tops of Memramcook, the spire of St. Thomas Church across the marsh, the white cluster of buildings that was the Convent of Ste.-Ursule. The same, but not the same for her. She could never again look at it with the same unclouded eyes, never again look upon it without seeing the place on the road to Pont Lefebvre, hard-by Ovide Lebrun's farm, where on that June night Marcel Bernard had overtaken her and life had begun. Once she had thought she belonged to this place beyond ever being able to separate her identity from it, once it was her little universe and beyond its hills was only a vague world about which she had little curiosity. But now—

"Simonne!" She thought it was fancy, just an echo of her name so often spoken there. But she heard his footsteps in the tall grass, its swish as he walked through it. She turned to meet him, hands outstretched, searching his face with eager eyes, seeking to find there an answer to some great question that could never be put in words.

He took her hands, held them firmly, stared into her eyes with no question, with knowledge and belief, in the darkness of his own. Love—yes, she knew love now. It was love she saw in his rapt look, and heard in his half-whispered words. "I heard you had returned. I have been here for hours and I think they were among the happiest hours I will ever know. For I knew you would come. Then I watched you standing there. I was watching you all the time, and I could not speak for fear it would break the spell and you would vanish. It is so hard to believe that it is you—really you, Simonne. There were times when I feared you never would come back to me."

"You are the same, Pierre." She had been looking at him frankly, without self-consciousness—at his face burned to a deep tan by sun and wind, at his black hair unruly in the breeze that blows eternally across the Tantramar and

the Memramcook Marshes, at his thin strong body, at the sturdy hands that held hers as if they never would let go.

"And you," he said, "are the same? There were moments there as I watched you that you seemed like an alien—something in the way you stood, in the set of your mouth. It must have been fancy or the sunlight or both, for you are Simonne with all Simonne's beauty and mystery and wonder."

She shook her head. "No, I am not the same. You were right, Pierrot. Your fancy did not play you false. I felt that sensation of strangeness, of being an alien when I walked through the house this afternoon. I felt it again just now when I looked down on the valley. Everything here is the same, unchanging, unchangeable, but I—I am not the same."

"Then what has changed you?" He frowned, looked away, slowly released her hands. "I can see in your eyes that you have been unhappy. I can tell that you have cried. Why? Who has made you unhappy? It was this man, Bernard!"

"It was not. He was always good and kind to me. But I was at times unhappy, yes. And it was to get away from unhappiness that I left Montreal and came back home. I have things to forget—that I must try to forget. I do not know how well I will succeed, for some of them are more real here than they were in the city."

"*Pauvre Simonne!*" He was smiling at her fondly now. "Your wings were clipped before ever you could take flight. By what, I wonder. Yet if you do not wish to tell me then it is all right with me. It is more than all right, since you have come back to me. Will you come to see my cottage and my garden? I have been working hard. I—I had to work hard. It was so lonely after you went, I thought I should go mad. But I assured myself you would be back. Each night I said to myself, 'She will come tomorrow' and each morning I said, 'She will come today'. And you did come."

They walked slowly down the hill as often they had walked of old, not speaking, hand-in-hand, looking now at the magic tapestry of river and field and hill and sky, now into each other's eyes with an understanding that required no words. But here again, for her, there was something lacking; rather there was present something new, intangible, elusive, something that kept her from complete abandonment to the quiet beauty of this time, some tug of memory, some threads that bound her to distant scenes, that would not be broken.

The last roses were lingering in Pierre's garden, their white, pink and yellow blooms lovely in the dusk, their fragrance drenching the evening with beauty. He had built an arbor over which the ramblers sprawled in lovely confusion and he had made a little waterfall in the brook and a pool in which it fell. He had painted and furbished his cottage until it was like a white and green jewel in an emerald setting. And she knew that with each stroke of the brush, each blow of the hammer or push of the plane he had thought of her, for now his eyes sought wistfully her approval and there was eagerness almost pathetic in his voice that asked her how she liked it all.

"I love it, Pierre," she said quite honestly. "You can make poems with brick and wood and with flowers and a brook."

"What does this poem say, Simonne? You are right, it all is a poem to you. Do you know what it says?"

She plucked a pale pink rose already touched with dew and held its fragrance to her nostrils. Yes, she knew. She was beloved. He loved her utterly, completely. She filled his thoughts, his life, his work. Even absence had done nothing to this love unless to strengthen and ennoble it. Beside this love of his, Tony Brossard's had been only a poor passion; what Marcel Bernard's love might be she could not know, for it had never been given to her, never shown to her beyond a single kiss—and she would never know it now.

"I know what it says, Pierre. I have always known."

"And the answer—the answer, Simonne!" He took her hand in both his and lifted it to his lips. His kiss seemed to burn upon her fingers. "Can you give me the answer?"

"Perhaps soon, Pierre"—Oh, why not now! Such love as his, so constant, so true, so patient, should not be treated lightly. "Perhaps now," she whispered. "It was to you I turned when all else seemed to fail me. And you were here, you were always here, had it been years instead of this short time, I would still have found you."

His arms were about her lightly, his cheek against her hair. "Then—then you do care, Simonne—care enough to—!"

"Yes." It was a mere whisper. She closed her eyes beneath his kiss that rested lightly on the lids, that found her lips with passion that she tried to answer only to find in her heart the cruel knowledge that he sought to possess what he never could, what she could never give him. But he must not know. She would never let him know. At least, she could be happy with

him. She could rejoice in the knowledge that she brought to him a bliss outmatching heaven. She listened, smiling gently, while he talked of their future, of the happiness that would be theirs. They sat in the rose arbor until the moon came and made a tracery of twigs and trellis across the white of his blouse, across the tan of his cheek, across the black of his hair.

In that magic of moon-arabesque she closed her eyes and thought traitorously of another moon, of flowers silvered by the moonlight, of velvet shadows in an ancient garden, of ghostly whisperings and rustlings, of half-heard footfalls on the flags, of a single kiss that had in it something of eternity; of a loved voice saying—"And lovers wandered here under the moon and whispered things that were only the echo of things whispered down the ages—"

Chapter X
WINGS OVER THE VALLEY

The little sunbeam that awakened her was like an old friend. It crept slowly across the pillow. She reached out her hand and let the bright golden thing caress it. "You are little brother to the ones who used to come in the dormitory window at Ste.-Ursule, are you not?" she said. "Oh, you are a prettier sunbeam than those of Quebec. I think you came purposely to welcome me."

She clasped her hands at the nape of her neck and gazed about the little room. This was home. Today she felt less alien, today it seemed as if she had never been away, as if all that had happened were not real, merely something she had seen in a dream. Here all about her was beautiful reality. Through the open casement she could see the little houses on the far side of the Memramcook Valley, with the smoke of the breakfast-fires rising straight up, grey-blue, into the pellucid air. She could watch the dark green marching hosts of the conifers on the ridges, like a great army of mighty spears. The air was fragrant with the sweet scent of the marsh hay and she could hear the wagons creaking through Memramcook Proper and the teamsters shouting to their horses. Cow-bells tinkled in the morning stillness as the stolid Jerseys and Holsteins sauntered back to their pastures. Below-stairs, old Artemise was making a great clatter with the stove-lids. This morning there would be buckwheat-pancakes and *croissants*, as only Artemise knew how to make them.

Pierre had told her he would be up to greet the dawn of this day, this most memorable day, the first after she had given him the greatest happiness of his life. Thinking of those hours in his garden, she closed her eyes, trying to recapture what had been said and done. She had consented to marry him. She had seen rapture in his eyes, had found in him a tenderness, a gentle strength that humbled her even while she rejoiced in it. So confidently, so proudly, he had talked of the years to come, until she pictured a wide road that ran always through flowery meadows by a silver stream. And they would traverse that road hand-in-hand.

She had listened to his rhapsodies, believing in them, feeling quite sure that he had it in him to make all his dreams into realities, that his power of accomplishment was great, knowing that she should be proud and happy in

his love, hating herself for lacking the fire, the passion that such love should evoke. It was not there, it might never be there for him. Her loyalty, her tenderness, her life's devotion, all these he could have, but the flame and fire that is love burned not for him in her heart.

"He does not know," she thought. "He will never know. In my life I have been selfish, wilful, headstrong, now I can think of someone else, now I can forget myself and seek only to please him and to make him happy."

They would be married soon. Pierre had insisted and she had agreed. She was swept along by the tide of his love. She could not deny it. Now there was no reason for making him wait longer. He was making more money and she had, anyway, sufficient for them both. He was working on a book. He had read parts of it to her in the lamplit cottage. She loved it. A book such as only Pierre could write, sentences that dripped beauty, imagery rich and powerful, a pageant of colored dreams. It left her breathless, wondering, marvelling that such things should come from this shy and quiet Pierre she had known so long.

"It was my love for you," he said simply, putting down the closely written sheets. "It was too much to store up in my heart—so I poured it out in this writing and it was like an exaltation, a prayer—"

It was sweet to be loved like that, yet it made her fearful, brought doubts to her that troubled her this morning, doubts of her own worthiness, her own ability to match his passion with one as great. "He has made an image of me in his heart and it is a perfect, flawless thing and I am not like that. I am one who sits with him in a rose-garden at dusk and listens starry-eyed while he reads poetry to me—but I am likewise the one who must keep his house, prepare his food, mend his clothes. He is all poetry, and there is so much prose in life—"

Very little of prose in the days that followed. The long hours with Pierre were filled with sunshine and flower-fragrance, with the crimson glory of the sunset, the pastoral beauty of the Acadian land. They were sanctified, these hours, by the love, the worship in his eyes. High up on the Beaumont they would sit on the little ledge among the bracken that had been their trysting-place so long. Pierre would write, his curly head bent over the pad on his knee, his pencil flying busily along, and ever and often he would stop, looking up at her as if to be sure she was still there, and smile and go on.

But sometimes when he looked up her own gaze was fixed upon far-off, invisible things, on something far, far beyond the rim of the valley and he would be looking at her moments on end before she became aware of his

regard. Then it would be a troubled regard and she would catch a dull glint of pain in his eyes.

"You know," he said once, arousing her from those dreams he did not share, "I think sometimes you have left a part of yourself in the life you came from, that you are not all mine. Perhaps there is something of you that never can be mine."

"Foolish Pierrot," she said then quickly, earnestly, fearing the truth in his words. For it was so; there were remembered things, loved things that he could never share, there was a place in her heart that he could never enter, a shrine, a sanctuary where there would be always fresh flowers and tiny deathless tapers.

"But I want you, all of you, Simonne," he said. "And I hate these times when you are lost to me. You sit there near me, your body is there, but your spirit takes wings and flies far away from me. And where does it go and to whom? Oh, I know I am too greedy of your love, too demanding. You must forgive me."

She touched his hair gently. "You have never done anything that asks forgiveness. I am proud of your love, Pierre. It is so good, so fine, that it makes me feel unworthy. What am I to be so loved?"

"You are Simonne," he said quietly. "You are my sun, but sometimes I see clouds coming between my sun and me."

"They pass, if there are any. You must not fancy things. I am your sun. I shine for you alone."

But he knew in his heart that her light went further. He fretted at something in her aloof, unattainable, something that the more he tried to possess it, the further receded from him. This was hard and cruel. His love of her was all in all to him, such a love as finds bewilderment and pain when all that it demands is not given to it.

"But in time," he thought. "In time she will come to me entire and these images will fade and vanish from her heart. I love her and my love is great enough for us both. I will make her forget everything else, I will love her so."

And in St. Thomas Church on Sunday the mouths of the good peasants hung agape and their eyes grew wide with wonder when old Père Berthelet announced that there was a promise of marriage between the last Caron and Pierre Gay, the schoolmaster of Memramcook. There was a great buzzing and shaking of heads among the groups that clustered about the church steps

after mass, to bask in the warmth of the sun and the satisfying luxury of the week's gossip. After all, it was decided, perhaps it was better that she should marry one of her own people rather than this man from Paris, a very wicked city. But then, again, she was a Caron, one of those who wore silks and ermine, one whose ancestors had held the first *baronnie* in the Acadian land; while he was only a fustian schoolmaster who spent half his time dreaming along the dikes or scribbling a lot of nonsense in his garden.

But Pierre walked proudly among them, conscious of the power of his dreams, the truth of his vision. He loved the people but he knew that their eyes saw not beyond the hills that rimmed the valley, that light shone not deeply in their spirits, that in them was something stolid, placid, limited, as in the stolid animals that grazed their meadows. This one saw in the slow, deliberate movements of the men, in the great ox eyes of the women in which was something bovine, something that prevented their ever looking deeply into things. "And it is as well perhaps," he thought, "for the deeper one sees the more confusion one finds, the more one speculates and torments one's self with questions that defy answering."

He was thinking then of Simonne, thinking that it would be well if he could take her without too much thought of love, without consulting too deeply her own desires, without wondering if she was fully his, without fearing, dreading, things he could not name. This Sunday, as she sat beside him in the church, as the banns were published, he had looked at her and had seen or fancied a wistfulness about the lovely, parted lips, in the depths of the grey-green eyes, in the quiet way she sat. He had touched her hand lightly and then a slow smile, gentle, tender, curved her lips and made a dimple come in her cheek, but in that smile he read resignation, submission. He could not read in it what he wanted to read and his spirit was darkened, saddened. He thought again of those times he had climbed the hill alone and felt now, with her sitting so near to him, pledged to him, that same awful feeling of solitude, of loneliness, as if her hand were withdrawn from his and she had gone away forever.

But this was foolish fear, he assured himself, and it would pass. She would come closer to him, their lives would have that oneness, that complete identity that was his prayer and his dream. As he was all hers, she must be all his. He hated the idea that any of her thoughts should be of another. His was a love all-possessive, all-exacting, demanding everything or nothing.

She wrote to Marcel briefly, to Adèle at greater length. She wanted them to know she was happy. She told Adèle about Pierre, about his garden, his book, about all the wonderful things he would do. "And it will be a joy for me to help him," she wrote, "as it is to share in all his dreams, his visions. When I sit there in the evening with him and close my eyes as he reads to me, I am content. One should be glad to be content, *n'est-ce-pas*? One should not greedily ask for more than that—"

Thus she tried to assure herself that she was getting from life as much as any girl should want. She would be loved, sheltered, cherished. What more should she ask? If there would be no high, exalted moments, no times when she was lifted to the clouds on the wings of a soaring passion or joyously blinded by a great light, she would have a steady measure of happiness, of quiet contentment. Adèle Mercier smiled almost sadly over this letter, seeing with wiser eyes that this was the girl's effort to make the best of things, this was the metamorphosis of the glory that is love into those virtues of patience and loyalty and faith. And when Marcel Bernard said, "Simonne is happy now," she did not answer him.

Edmond's trunks and boxes arrived from Montreal and were hauled from the station by Alphonse and carried to the attic. Simonne went there the day they came. New locks had been put on some of them. She could see the marks where the old ones had been pried. Pensively she looked at them. There were trunks there she knew—old ones that had belonged to her father, to others of the family. There was an antique affair that Edmond had always prized since it had journeyed back and forth over the Atlantic and had once, they believed, gone to French Indo-China with an adventurous Caron. That trunk—She went to it first. It had always been the storehouse of Edmond's boyish treasures—his marbles, his books, his playthings. There was a queer bottom to it that once in an expansive moment he had showed her, claiming that the Caron who had been in Indo-China had hidden there the jewels taken from an ancient temple. Perhaps in that secret compartment she could find something to dispel the mystery of the attempt made to pry into Edmond's effects, of the vague allusions de Haerne had made—It was like opening a tomb, she thought, and had no relish for the task. But it must be done—

The days passed quickly now—almost too quickly. She had her wedding to prepare for, only a few weeks away. She went busily about it. Artemise and Madame Plourde went swimming in a sea of silk and satin, lace and tulle, but often when frantically they sought her to try on this or that, she was not to be found, but would come back hours later, flushed with the sun,

weary from long rambles on the hills or across the marshland. Each evening she walked with Pierre or sat quietly in his garden listening while he read to her what he had written through the day, listening dreamily to the musical flow of words, feeling the emotions that animated him as he wrote, and gradually as the story unfolded she began to see into his heart, to live in his ideas, to see her own place in the scheme of his life, to understand his love for her. And she heard there too, like an overtone, some note of sadness, of bitter unhappiness, some questing that brought no reward, some longing that was balked of fulfillment. And at times her eyes misted with tears conjured up swiftly by his magic and she wondered, seeing clearly what he meant, if he knew himself whence sprung this plaintive, minor theme that was like a wail and a crying in the darkness.

"It is what I deny to him," she thought, "what I cannot give to him because already it has been given. He knows it, something in him knows it, though he does not seem to show it or even realize it himself. He seems content with such love as I can show him. He seems to think he owns me—all of me, that I am utterly given to him. Does he know there is something of me that can never be his, because it has already been given and can never be recalled?"

Seemingly, he did not know. He never questioned her love, never again alluded to her moments of abstraction when forgetting him her mind ranged afar to the distant Laurentian Hills, to Quebec, to the city where Marcel Bernard walked alone. She tried to forget the things that had been, but there was no forgetting. She had tasted of a fruit that, once tasted, forever after piques the palate. All through the years with him she would remember it and perhaps long for it and the thought that her longing must go unsatisfied made her sad at times and unhappy—unhappy more for Pierre than for herself. He deserved the best, to be loved without reservation, to be shown an affection, a passion, as fervent as his own. And she could not—could not —

He walked home with her under the stars, walking slowly, prolonging the time before he had to leave her. A warm wind blew across the marshes tonight, rustling the leaves of the poplars, the great elms that made a dark canopy overhead. "Only a few more nights, Simonne," he said at parting, "and I will have you always." He lifted her hand and pressed it against his cheek. "So long I have waited, wanting you, all of you. And it seemed too great a happiness for one man to have, as if I asked too much of God when I asked for you."

"I am nothing, Pierre. It is your love that makes me desirable to you. Your love endows me with a thousand virtues, a thousand splendid qualities that are not mine. I am just Simonne, just a girl, so like a million other girls. Once we decided, you and I, that love was greater than the lover or the beloved. It is a force like a great sea sweeping humans along on its waves. We have no say about it, no control over it."

"That is so." She saw the gleam of his dark eyes in the bright stars' light. "We can make no laws for it. We cannot expect it to do what we wish it to do. We cannot say who shall love or who shall be loved—"

Un qui aime, un qui se laisse aimer—one who loves, one who lets himself be loved. She recalled Tony Brossard's words. Was it so in all loves, or could there be two who would bring to their love the same degree of passion, of longing or was it the way of life that two such must always be kept apart?

He kissed her and said goodnight. She walked slowly up the drive. She would be alone tonight, for Artemise was with the sister of Alphonse, who was dying, and would not return until tomorrow. She did not mind being alone: she had been in her short life so much alone, thrown upon her own resources.

A letter from Marcel had come today—a brief, kindly letter. She went into the library where she had left it and sat down wearily in the ancient leather chair that had been her father's, to read it again. Was it fancy or did she detect in those brief lines something of longing and regret, in those honestly-expressed wishes for her happiness something of pain and renunciation.

She touched the letter fondly, loving it because he had touched it, because in it there was something of him, of his gentleness, his strength, his quiet charm. She would always see him, always dream of him as he had looked that morning in the grotto at Ste.-Ursule, with a dawning wonder in his eyes at the knowledge that she was Simonne—

She dropped the letter. She jerked erect in her chair, her eyes staring with a wild fixation beyond the zone of bright light cast by the reading lamp. Her hand flew to her lips, stifling a scream. For moments she sat like that, her heart ceasing to beat, then beating thunderously and a chill succeeding the heat of fear, prickling her flesh. Then the shadowy figure in the library door moved forward into the light and stood above her, staring down at her with a twisted grin.

"Edmond!" Her lips shaped the word. There was no sound.

"Yes, Edmond." His voice had a sullen note. "You thought I was a charred stump too, eh? I might well have been if I had flown in the rotten crate. Instead, my dear little sister, I went to England and got drunk and stayed there."

He grinned again at the wide eyes and breathlessly parted lips. She got up and put her arms about his neck. There was little response. He was like a stranger. He even looked different, his face so hard and lined. He put her away from him.

"Why—why did you not tell me—why did you let me think—"

"Oh, it was luck for me. What they found in the wreckage of the plane was once a fellow named Huguard. He happened along that day and I let him fly her. No one missed him. He had no one. I was just as glad to be dead, so I stayed dead till now. I was pretty sick, anyway."

"But why? Why?"

"Oh, reasons. One was that I might have gone to gaol if I stayed alive. There were some thousands of dollars missing from the company's treasury and Bernard had been riding me pretty hard and—"

"You—you mean you stole—"

He laughed. "Call it that."

"But—but the money you left me—all that money—"

"Money I left you!" It was he who stared now. "Is it likely, after, as I just told you, I—"

"Then he—Marcel gave me his own money. He—he let me think it was yours. He let me think you were a man, Edmond; he let me hate him and say rotten things to him and blame him for your death."

"He was always a plaster saint," said Edmond carelessly. "Even his reputation with women was a myth. He's a beastly monk. He played the fond guardian for you, eh?"

She did not answer. She could not. She looked with loathing, with horror and contempt she could not conceal at this creature that had once been beloved. She could see where drink, debauchery, a dozen kinds of vice had run their course. And it was for this man Marcel had suffered and sacrificed and denied even love. And she—that was her guilt, her folly—

"My trunks," he said, scowling at her, resenting the way she looked at him. "I'm not going to stay here you know, Simonne. Bernard faked-up an

inheritance for you; there's nothing I need do. But there is something I must get from my trunks. Where are they?"

"In the attic. I'll show you if you like. But your trunks were broken into while they were at M. Bernard's."

"I know. That fool de Haerne and his henchmen. They couldn't find what they looked for, even though I gave them directions." He hurried out of the room. She heard him go rapidly upstairs, heard the trap-door of the attic bang back against the floor. She did not move. Her mind raced madly, thoughts tumbling, jostling each other, making a chaos, a terrible confusion. Edmond had done a hideous wrong, yet he could laugh at the very ones he had caused to suffer. She thought, with an ache intolerable in her breast, of Marcel Bernard, of what might have been for her and him. Too late now—too late.

Edmond came into the room, his face grey and ghastly, his teeth bared like an angry beast's, his fingers curved. He stared at her wildly, in a near-frenzy. "He screamed at me—called me a murderer." Marcel's words flashed on the screen of her mind.

"Gone!" He said. "They are gone. They lied to me—that foul snake de Haerne. They found my plans, do you hear? They stole them—years of work—gone—"

"It's not gone."

"What do you mean—not gone!"

"I found the papers you had hidden in the bottom of your play-trunk, Edmond."

"Oh, thank God. They mean a fortune to me, to us. I'll see that you get plenty, Simonne. I've been pretty rotten I know, but now—"

"I sent them to Marcel Bernard."

"You—" His pale lips hung open. The dark pupils of his eyes were wide, wide. He tried to speak and could not. He took an ape-like step towards her, hands held out as if he would strangle her.

"I read some of the papers," she said. "You worked for Marcel Bernard's company. Your work was their work. You stole from them, cheated them; then when you found something good you tried to sell it to a rival concern, rather than let them share in it as was their due. You know Marcel Bernard will treat you fairly. He is honest. He makes me ashamed to think I have to call you my brother. If you are a man at all, go to Montreal, go to him—"

"Go and crawl to him! I'll see him damned first, and you with him, you meddlesome little brat!" He flung out of the room. She heard him go upstairs and shut himself in a bedroom. In the morning when she went there he was gone.

She did not regret his going. She never wanted to see him again. The very thought of him sickened her. She wondered what he would do about his precious plans. He wasn't likely to let all the profits slip from him just because he hated Marcel. He had said in his braggart way that he wouldn't crawl to Bernard, but she had an idea he would do that very thing.

"For me he is dead—even more so than he was before. He succeeded in killing a lot of pleasant memories and fond illusions I had about him. It would have been better somehow if he had died."

He had trampled down some flowers in her heart, flowers of his own planting that had grown there since childhood, that the false report of his death had brought to lovely bloom, that memory would have kept alive. Gone now, and in the place where they had been the flower that was her love for Marcel Bernard stood beautiful and alone. She could love him now without fear or reproach. He was all that she had ever thought him. He was a god with wings untarnished, but like a god he must be adored from afar. That morning she stayed with Artemise and Madame Plourde and was very gay when she tried on her wedding-dress: sometimes one can be gayest when one's heart is breaking.

That night in Pierre's garden she told him of Edmond, of the cruel deception put upon her, of the sad awakening to the fact that the brother she had once idolized had turned into a knave, into a man lost to all sense of honor and decency. "I truly believe," she said, "that Edmond is dead and this one who came to me is another, an evil spirit, wearing Edmond's body. Yet even that body is different. I tell you, Pierre, I shuddered. I was terribly afraid, the way he looked at me after I told him what I had done."

She trembled now, thinking of that moment, of the berserk look in Edmond's eyes, a look of madness. "And then, Pierre, I must restore to Marcel the great sum of money he gave me and to which I have no right whatsoever. Why, think of it, I had no right to any of the kindnesses he did for me. I can see that for years he covered up Edmond's crimes and his excesses and that he would have gone on providing for me just because he felt it was an obligation."

"Are you sure just because of that? For no other reason?"

"For—for what other reason, Pierre?" she faltered.

"It is clear he loves you, Simonne. No man would do what he did just from a sense of duty. He loves you! And you, why did you go away from him?"

"It does not matter, Pierre—not now." She laid her hand on his. "There is only you and me to think of now. All the rest of it is over and done with. We will be happy, you and I, here in the valley. You will write your beautiful things and read them to me, each day will be lovelier than the last, the roses will fade and die, but there will always be another spring."

"Yes." He nodded. "There is always another spring—for the roses—"

She thought then, as he was thinking, of a song—"For the broken heart knows no second spring."

That was truth. Once she had attained a height of happiness that she would never reach again. Once she had had a glimpse of another realm where was that magic thing called love. Once she had been in his arms, her heart beating close to his, her life and strength seemingly concentrated in the kiss so eagerly returned. To think of it now was pain, was ecstasy ineffably sweet and poignant. Bitter to reach the high mountain and gaze over the clouds, then to plummet down and know that you can never climb again.

She awoke from her day-dream, blushingly, guiltily conscious of Pierre's brooding dark eyes. He sat on the grass at her feet gazing up at her. There was a book of verse open on his knee and she saw that it was the poems of Ronsard. He had read them to her so often that she knew many of them by heart.

"Sometimes, Pierre," she said lightly. "I think you are a reincarnation of Ronsard."

"Sometimes I think so myself, Simonne." He closed the book and studied the lettering on the cover. "The thought does not make me happy, for you see, if I am Ronsard, I must make a ballad to you who are my love and —it could be like his—

> "'Ah! dreary thoughts and dreams are these!
> But wherefore yield me to despair,
> While yet the poet's bosom glows,
> While yet the dame is peerless fair!
> Sweet lady mine! while yet 'tis time
> Requite my passion and my truth,
> And gather in your blushing prime
> The roses of your youth!'

"Ah, yes. But I think of the first part of that song, Simonne, O ma Simonne. Well, it is only fancy. Away with it!" He put the book aside. "I am not Ronsard, I am Pierre Gay, and you are Simonne, and I love you. This is love, is it not? This burning, this pain, this agony, this rapture—!"

Wild and strange he looked and the fire in his eyes did not match the jester's words. He stood up, took her hands and drew her up to him. "That is love, Simonne, is it not?"

"Yes—yes, that is love, Pierre."

"Have you known it, Simonne?"

"Yes,—I have known it."

"I know you have, little Simonne. After one has known love, one is never again the same. But I keep you late, so near to your wedding day. Come now, it is time. You will have so many things to do to prepare for your marriage."

"Oh, lots and lots of things." She tried to be gay, to shake off the depression, the pain that had come into her heart when he spoke of love. Yes, she had felt love, she knew what it was—this burning, this pain, this agony, this rapture. But it was acting a lie not to tell him that it was for another she had felt it—not for him.

"But I will never tell him—never. I would not spoil his happiness. Though I do not love him as he would be loved I can give him loyalty and understanding. And that will do, that must do."

Up to the eve of her wedding she sewed with old Artemise and Madame Plourde, sewed busily and made a hundred tasks for herself, just to keep from thinking. For now the far off voices called louder and distant scenes beckoned more urgently, and she could not look upon the King's Highway where it swept through Memramcook without thinking of the places it led to, without feeling an urge to arise and go—go before it was too late.

But she knew she would never go of her own volition. She would linger here in this quiet backwater out of the turgid, on-sweeping stream of the world, and she would find here a measure of happiness.

Here, sitting with Pierre in the little garden of his cottage, on so many nights like this; here, growing old, the short bright visions of youth fading gradually, losing whatever little of reality they had once held.

"Tomorrow I will be your wife, Pierre," she said suddenly. "I will try to be a good wife to you."

He bent to her and kissed her. His lips were trembling. She thought his eyes looked queer. She thought how proud, how heroic was his head, how there was something of the sublime about him and about his quiet, secluded life. A village-schoolmaster, yes, but some divine fire burned in him. The ruddy sunlight was on his face, molding its fine, priest-like lines, throwing a glory into his eyes.

He was looking at the sunset, then he turned and gazed up the valley to where a small speck like a gull or a hawk appeared in the far distance, grew larger and larger, heralded by a drumming as of mighty wings.

A white plane glided easily down onto the new stubble in the meadow below the cottage. Pierre said, "I have to run up to the village for a few minutes. You will wait here for me?"

"But—"

He smiled at her—an odd, unhappy smile, and walked out of the garden. She stared after him, frowning. It was not like him to—

She turned and gazed at the meadow where the thing like a great white bird had come to rest. She saw a man crossing the field, climbing the fence at the foot of Pierre's garden. Life seemed to go out of her then, only to flow back with a great rush and power.

Marcel!

He came to her. Without a word he took her in his arms, hungrily, strongly, and looked into her eyes with only one hope, one wish, in his. Her own reflected what she saw there, then his lips were on hers and all was a great wonder, a searing ecstasy, a response that left her weak and trembling. She had forgotten Pierre, forgotten her wedding day, forgotten everything.

"Simonne! Oh, Simonne!" He was laughing down at her. "You did not need to send me any message. When I learned about Edmond nothing could keep me from you—"

"Message—I sent no message."

He drew a telegram from his pocket. She read it. There was only one word—COME—and her name.

"Pierre!" she whispered. "It was Pierre. That is why he left me when he saw the plane. We—we were to be married tomorrow. I was ready. I thought —"

"But you love me, Simonne. You must love me. You—I have wanted you—"

"I love you, yes, *monsieur*. But he—"

They waited. He did not return. When, late, he did come back, the little garden was empty and forlorn, the volume of Ronsard lay open on the bench where they had sat. He picked it up idly, seemed to weigh it in his hand—

> "Old tales are told," he said softly, "Old songs are sung,
> Old days come back to memory;
> You say, 'When I was fair and young,
> A poet sang to me!'"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Valley of the Stars* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]