Tides of the Tantramar

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NOTE

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Tides of the Tantramar

Chapter I

All the way from Rimouski to Moncton, except for a few excursions to the dining-car, Manon stayed in the comfortable compartment which Pierre Labrette's wealth permitted her to enjoy. She would have liked to walk out onto the observation-platform, but the repressive spell of the Ursuline Convent of Ste. Genevieve de Rimouski still enfolded her.

Still about her lingered the peace, the detachment of the convent-garden and the shadowed cloisters where the nuns' soft footfalls echoed faintly—and the plash of the fountain and the low cooing of the white doves and clear sweet voices singing. The end of four years—years that do something wondrous to a young girl's heart yet leave it still the same, still shyly hungry for the thing that is not spoken of—the love of man. She could still hear Soeur Angelique's parting counsel, administered austerely on the Station platform, to the crowd of girls waiting, bright-eyed and eager, for the Ocean-Limited to bear them southward.

"*Prenez garde, mes enfants!*" Soeur Angelique was tall and bony, her coal-black eyes sunk deep in their sockets, her teeth even and prominent, like those of a skull. "Take care. The devil is a roaring lion, roaming about the world, seeking whom he may devour. Therefore keep your seats on the train. Keep your eyes from straying. Say, from time-to-time, a little prayer, for, ah, there are so many temptations in the world and you no longer have the good nuns or the stout gray walls of Ste. Genevieve de Rimouski to shield you from harm. *Surtout*, speak to no one, especially to no men. They are all things of evil. Men are wolves in trousers who prowl through the world seeking young girls like you to destroy them. God bless you."

Manon knew as little about young men as Soeur Angelique, and the picture of a wolf garbed in trousers, even wearing a silk hat and swinging a

malacca-stick, did not strike her just now as being at all incongruous. Probably men were like those bad wolves. She avoided looking at them, just to be on the safe side. In her compartment, she knew, it was most unlikely that any young man could sneak up on her and devour her before she could press the bell for the porter nor was it likely that the devil in his lion-skin would have much chance of making an entry. But it was lonesome in the compartment after Millicent D'Aigle, the last of her school-friends, had got off the train at Cocagne. There was no one now to talk to. Millicent had been fun. Millicent's blue eyes danced and sparkled. Millicent laughed and talked fast like a machine-gun firing. *La petite mitrailleuse*, the little machine-gun, Soeur Eulalie, who kept the dormitory, had christened Millicent. Millicent did not believe at all what Soeur Angelique had told them.

"A boy kissed me once," confided Millicent, the blue eyes wide, the words rapid, rapid. "It was down by the great dike on the marsh near the river. He was talking to me and I was looking at him and I don't know how it happened but all at once he put his arms right around me and held me close and kissed me." She closed her eyes, rested her blonde head against the green plush of the cushion.

"And—and did it hurt?" Manon's white cheeks flushed with the soft pink of mother-of-pearl. Her curving red lips were parted and her eyes, so black, even blacker than Soeur Angelique's, glistened.

Millicent awakened, clasped her knees with her hands and looked over Manon's head with a soft, faraway expression in her eyes. She smiled and shook her head slowly and her lips seemed to hold the memory of that kiss.

"It was like nothing I had ever known. Oh, like what you would think heaven to be. I shall go there, along the dike, down to the river, tonight," she said softly. "He is home now. He goes to McGill and he will be home now."

"He is an English boy!" Manon's eyes were wide and startled.

"Yes. He is English or Scotch. What does it matter?"

"But we are French. We are Acadians and we cannot love the English—"

"What nonsense! That is all forgotten. Or it should be. What if the English did pick up our ancestors and put them on boats and ship them out of Acadia, my little innocent Evangeline! It is all past and gone. It means nothing to us."

"But in our family," said Manon earnestly, "it is not like that. Our ancestors owned the greatest farm in the Tantramar country and, not content

with taking it from them and giving it to one of their own countrymen, the English murdered one of our family and pillaged us and—"

"Oh, forget it, Manon." Millicent laughed. "What fun it must have been for some homely Acadian maiden to be snatched up and carried off by a big dragoon in his scarlet tunic!" She was still thinking, Manon knew, of the Cocagne River wandering through the meadows under the stars and the bloomy shadows of the June night that the great dike would cast along the green carpet of the marshlands. "A kiss is a kiss, Manon. You must forget those things that happened so many, many years ago. Life is beautiful. Life is full of wondrous things."

Manon was thinking of that as the long train puffed out of Moncton. She was nearing home now. Soon she would be passing through scenes familiar and loved. She watched the green fields and woodlands, the low rolling hills of Westmorland. Soon the track would skirt the Memramcook Marshes, then the Marshes of Tantramar, mile on mile, vast, boundless, ribbed by the huge network of the dikes, serpentined by the red-banked tidal rivers. She loved it. She could not see enough of it from the windows of her compartment. She could not breathe here its sweet, salt-laden winds nor feel their wild caress upon her cheek.

She pulled a little red hat over sleek black hair and wriggled into a tweed coat of powder-blue. She looked at herself in the panel-mirror, at her skin so ivory white and the dark contrast of her eyes, fringed by long black lashes. Millicent D'Aigle had bought powder and lipstick once she was outside the convent. Manon closed her eyes. She was thinking of Millicent, of that boy just suddenly putting his arms around her and kissing her. Manon had seen pictures like that. Not in St. Benoit, where she lived, but at the theatre in Moncton when she had gone there to visit her cousin, Chloe Belliveau. But the pictures hadn't affected her. It was thinking of Millicent, of her blonde curls against that boy's shoulder and her blue eyes closed, the long lashes sleeping on her cheek, and her mouth warm and moving against his. Manon shivered.

The train was bowling into the Valley of Memramcook when Manon walked out on the observation-platform and knew again in her being the breath of home, of the marshlands by the sea, and clutched the steel guard-rail to steady herself. She watched the panorama that unrolled behind her, the green carpet of the tide-meadows, the distant hilltops gleaming black against the reddening west. How often she had watched those hills become a sooty silhouette of spires and peaks and lances against a flaming curtain of

sky. She had fancied they were armies marching or fairy cities that at the touch of night grew up from the earth and faded with the dawn.

Now the road from Memramcook West to Pont Lefebvre paralleled the track and far up on the hill a white church, alone and aloof, pointed its golden cross into the sky. Along this road once the redcoats galloped with jingling spurs and clanking sabres, and Grand'mere Marthe had told her how the Acadians fled into the forests and hid there, living on roots and bark, starving, shivering, hopeless, in the cold and bitter weather. Just so had her own ancestors been driven, and still on winter nights when the wind roared across the marshes and the fire rumbled in the chimney, the old men spoke with sad voices of those bitter days of old. Grand'mere Marthe knew, for she was over a hundred and her own grandmother who had lived long past the century mark had been a child of the exiled Acadians and had told Grand'mere Marthe all about it. How cruel and bitter it must have been. Millicent said it were best forgotten, but Millicent had no one like Grand'mere Marthe or Pierre Labrette, Manon's father, or Lucien her brother. They remembered always; they hated, and she must hate too.

So now, watching that winding white road, she saw in fancy the scarlet tunics of the soldiers, the flash of their sabres as they beat with the flat of the sword the flanks of slow-moving cattle; she could hear their shouts over the brazen tinkle of the little bells that adorned the cows and sheep and oxen; and from the forest peering, the faces, gaunt and fearful, of the unhappy peasants, looked out at her as she passed.

"Lovely, isn't it?"

Manon's shoulders stiffened. Her fingers clasped more tightly the iron rail. Had someone spoken to her? She looked slowly around, and her hand moved to her lips. She had not dreamed there was anyone on the platform. The observation-car had been quite empty. But there was someone—one of those wolves perhaps—He was sitting in the corner, his elbow on the rail, a straight-stemmed briar pipe held to his lips, just as he had removed it to speak to her.

She made a movement to go inside. He sat up from his slumped-down position.

"Please don't go," he said. "I didn't mean to drive you away. I should have kept quiet."

"I—you will excuse me, please." Her English was soft, precise. "I think it would be better—"

"No. If it comes to that, I'll go in myself." He stood up, smiling. "After all, though, I dare say you've seen all this before." He waved his pipe stem at the fleeting vistas of hill and marsh. "It's all new to me, and it's rather wonderful. I always thought flat countries were monotonous, but this land of Tantramar has some strange old magic that gets one. Isn't it so?"

Manon tried hard to fix her mind on Soeur Angelique's stern counsel. She tried to believe that this tall young man was a wolf in gray flannel trousers and brown jacket. But it didn't seem possible. He had brown eyes that looked very kind and his face was fresh and tanned lightly, not coffee-brown or brick-red like the faces of the farmer-boys at St. Benoit, nor even like Ludovic's. Ludovic was another Labrette, older than Manon, younger than Lucien, who helped his father run the farm—a soldier, Ludovic, who had asthma since Vimy Ridge, and wheezed, at times, terribly.

"I have seen it before, often," she said. She was thinking of Millicent D'Aigle now, of Millicent being kissed. Wondering if the boy who had kissed Millicent had looked at her beforehand the way this one was looking. Why did he not stop looking at her? She hated him for doing it, and yet—She knew she should go in. Soeur Angelique would be furious, so would her father, so would Lucien, if they knew she talked to a stranger on the train. It was to keep her from this that her father insisted she have a compartment and stay in it. But all their disapproval, all their counsels and warnings seemed not to count when she looked up at him, at the curious intent expression of his face. She tried to pray and could not. She felt her cheeks burn. She wanted to run, but she felt if ever she let go that rail she would fall and then—then he would have his arms about her.

"You will stay, then?" He stood beside her, his shoulder almost touching hers, his head bent, so to see her better. "You'll forgive me, but I was watching you standing there. I could not help it. You—you are very lovely, like no one I ever saw before. You made me think that all this beauty had some special meaning for you, that other people couldn't share."

"I wasn't seeing beauty."

"You weren't—"

She shook her head. "I was seeing blood—on the river and in the dust of the road and on the stone steps of the houses that lay in ruins."

He rubbed his jaw with pensive fingers, looking at her. She was so young, twenty perhaps. What did she know of blood and slaughter? He thought: these aren't her words; they come from ideas planted in that pretty head, where they have no right to be.

"You mean," he said, "what happened long ago? When the Acadians were driven from their lands? Back in 1755, wasn't it? Surely all that has been forgotten?"

"Not by all," said Manon. She turned to him. "I might forget, but I never get a chance to. I hear it all the time. Hatred. Vengeance. In my home I have been taught to hate, told why I should hate and never cease to remember. I am shown the broad lands that once were ours and told how they were taken from us and given to thieves and murderers. My grandmother knows all about it, and my father; and my brother Lucien is writing a vast book about it to prove to the world that in history there is no parallel to the dispersal of our race. It was scattered, you know, to every corner of the earth, persecuted and misprized."

"I know," he said. "I have heard much about it. But it seems a pity that it should have left you a legacy of hate. You are too young and too lovely to hate. Your thoughts should be all of love. It should be your only concern."

Love! Manon stared, frightened, straight ahead of her. Love! That was Millicent wandering in the shadow of the dikes by the shining waters of the Cocagne, Millicent held in someone's arms, being kissed; that was something unlike anything you had ever known, something like heaven. But it was bad. It was frightening. She turned abruptly and looked at him for a moment, though it took all her strength to do it.

"I must go in now," she said. "Goodby."

He held the door open for her and watched her slim, straight, boyish figure sway along the carpeted aisle between the rows of empty chairs. He kept looking through the glass when the door was shut and she had gone. He shook his head in perplexity. Lynn Westcott had known many girls, French girls, English girls and French-English girls, in the cosmopolitan city of Montreal. They were all, he had believed, pretty much of the same pattern. But here was something different, something fine and unspoiled and virginal.

"I wonder," he mused, biting on the worn bit of his pipe, "where she gets off."

She got off at the little Tantramar station of St. Benoit des Pres. So did he.

From her dormer window, bright with rose geraniums and begonia and finely curtained with hand-made lace, Grand'mere Marthe Labrette, whose

eyes were ever young, could look out upon the mighty reaches of the Tantramar. She could see the river twisting and turning and doubling upon its course. She loved to watch the inrushing tide, racing, tumbling up between the muddy banks. She loved it in time of flood when the roaring maelstrom of water taxed the ancient strength of the Flemish dikes; and in the frozen months of winter when it lay white and still or when the ice-cakes jostled each other like enraged saurians in the river; and now when the breeze of nightfall riffled the tall green grass and bent it in rippling waves under the last light of the sun, she loved it.

Grand'mere Marthe's eyes were keen. Far down the road from St. Benoit Station she saw the dust of the speeding car, just as previously she had marked the smoke of the train as it wormed its way over the marshes.

"*Bon!*" Grand'mere Marthe settled herself comfortably back in her chair and straightened with gnarled fingers the fine white-lace cap that those same fingers, young and smooth, had once so fondly worked. "She comes now, little Manon. Lucien drives fast, save when the steam forms on his glasses. I suppose he has made her almost insane by now with talk about his book, his great history of '*La famille Labrette et le peuple Acadien*.' Hé! Hé! The great historian of his people, Lucien Labrette. One day there will be a monument for Lucien and the leaders of his people will come and hang wreaths around his skinny neck. There's something contrary to nature in a Labrette being such a bookworm as Lucien: even those of the tribe who were bishops ran farms on the side and worked with their big hands. And now that poor child having to follow him while he jumps like a monkey from one family tree to another!"

It was as Grand'mere Marthe said. Lucien, hatless, his pale hair parted in the exact middle and drooping down on either temple like faded palm-fronds, his weak blue eyes agleam behind the thick lenses of his horn-rimmed glasses, his voice high with a note fanatic, was telling Manon of the progress he had made with his great work.

"It is a *magnum opus*, my little sister." He spoke in French. He would never speak English, unless in the utter extremity of need, and his English was very poor. "I have traced out the histories of the family founded at Minudie by Anselme Gérard, who came there from St. Malo, and of Etienne du Gast and of Néré Coquillard. I have shown beyond a doubt that the wholesale pillaging and deportation of our ancestors was cold-blooded and basely planned for gain and for gain alone; not, as lying historians claim, because our people were troublesome, not because of their unwillingness to take the oath of allegiance to the English king—a pitiable pretext; not

because the safety of the country depended on the French population's removal—no! It was because our lands were rich and they coveted them."

"Yes," said Manon. "Ah, yes. How is Ludovic? And how is young Louis?"

"They are well," said Lucien impatiently. "I shall be glad of your help in transcribing a census of the inhabitants of Beaubassin; their cows, sheep, pigs and oxen, at the time of the Expulsion."

"Of course I'll help you," promised Manon absently. She was thinking of the young man who had got off the train at St. Benoit. People did not, as a rule, get off the train at St. Benoit. Surely he had not done so just because she—The thought made some frightening heat course in her blood, made her hands tremble. She wanted to ask Lucien if he had seen him, if he knew what the stranger was doing here, but Lucien would at once be suspicious and if he found out she had so much as spoken to that young man, there would be much unpleasantness.

"As you read into my pages and grasp the enormity of what was done," continued Lucien, "you will feel a deeper pride in the race and in the pure Acadian stock to which you belong, and a deeper hatred for the persecutors and assassins who doomed our people to a fate more hideous than that of the Israelites—to be scattered to the far corners of the world, to starve in deserts and drown in angry seas, to be the prey of wild beasts and the sport of wicked men."

"Why can we not forget all that, Lucien? Isn't it all dead and buried?"

Lucien turned his head to her, his eyes wild with furious unbelief. The car was on the edge of the ditch before he saw their plight and swerved back onto the dusty road.

"How can you! How can you!" he said fiercely. "What foolish, woman's talk is this! And from you, from a Labrette! The best of Acadian blood flows in your veins, *ma soeur*. Always remember that. If you had studied that record of horror and misery as I have, you could not speak like that. Let us hear no more of it. Your father, your grandmother, would be bitterly angry and disappointed in you, were they to hear such weak sentiments coming from your lips. You are a woman of the Labrettes, you will marry one of your countrymen and carry on the race and keep it strong."

"I have not thought of marrying anyone," said Manon softly, watching the level marshland that streamed past the car-window.

"But Marcel Vaubin thinks much of it, and of you. He speaks of no one else but you. He is of the purest Acadian stock, his family came originally from the village of l'Enclos in Normandy. He is blonde like the Normans. And he has a fine farm to the west of ours. I wish the land to the east were owned by someone like him."

"But there is no one on that farm. It has been unoccupied for years. I thought our father planned to buy it? He has a mortgage on it."

"He does. Someone is coming here to see him about that. One of the Westcotts, I understand. I wonder if he knows that the deed given to his family was written in the blood of the Labrettes from whom these lands were stolen by his thieving ancestors. I wonder if he knows that there is not a blade of grass nor a grain of earth in all those broad miles that he can rightfully call his own. We had a small farm for years, while Westcotts owned the miles of marshland that we tilled and sowed, and the strong dikes our ancestors built to reclaim it from the sea. Now he comes to sell back to us what is our very own, but it is the last tribute we shall ever pay to him or his."

"Who is this Westcott?" Manon felt a strange curiosity. She had often wandered over the deserted farm that lay to the east of Pierre Labrette's. She had peered through the green shutters of the gray stone manorhouse, built by the English Colonel, Giles Westcott, on the site of the ancient farmhouse of Labrette, that the soldiers had burned. She had seen and loved the giant willow-trees planted as a windbreak by her forefathers, the old well with its balance pole, from which they had drawn water, the stone trough where they once watered their many horses and oxen. And Grand'mere Marthe had told her a hundred quaint and lovely stories of that place, once theirs, that had been taken from them and given to a stranger, but that one day, by God's inscrutable justice, would be restored to them, its rightful owners.

Lucien made no answer to her question. He left her to her thoughts. No one had lived in the old Westcott house in Manon's memory. The family had left the Tantramar and gone to live in Montreal. "Good riddance," the Labrettes said: there had always been enmity between the two families, and Pierre's father, Emil, had once fought Isaac Westcott with his fists over a disputed piece of marshland. And Pierre's father and grandfather had hated the Westcotts as men who love the soil as they love life must hate those who have wrested most unfairly their rich fields from them. Always, it had been the great hope of the Labrettes to buy back again the fields of their fathers. Pierre Labrette held a mortgage which the failing fortunes of the Westcotts

had made necessary; already he looked on the rich meadowlands adjoining his farm as belonging again to his family.

Willows, neither so old nor so tall as those at Westcott Manor, lined the road in front of the farmhouse of the Labrettes and arched above the driveway, throwing deep, gentle shadows on the dust. The house was low and long, with gable windows and huge chimneys. It was built of sandstone, laboriously dragged from the quarries by ox-team, when Manon's great-great-grandfather, Michel, had returned to the land of his fathers and bought the farm with the wealth he had made in Louisiana, whither the first Labrettes had been exiled. Michel had wanted the original homestead, had offered a fabulous price for it, had cajoled and threatened its owners, but Giles Westcott would not sell. Michel then had bought the farm adjoining the Westcotts' property, and between him and them, and his seed and theirs, was hatred—hatred that, to this day, when a hundred and eighty years had gone by, was not extinguished.

Lucien stopped at the low doorway of the farmhouse. It was flanked by high-backed benches where, in summer, the men of the Labrettes and their neighbours sat and smoked in the quiet gloamings, where in the golden Autumn time was many a mug of cider drunk and many a good tale told. The door was flung open as Manon got out of the car and there stood Grand'mere Marthe, tall and sturdy as an oak, smart in her black silk dress and cap of Flemish lace, her black eyes young and snapping with life in her brown and withered face; and there was Jeanneton, the housekeeper, and young Louis, the cadet of the family; and Pierre, Manon's father, huge, brick-red of face, came from the cow-byre, and Ludovic, shorter, wider of shoulder than his father, and swarthy, followed him. And there they all were, the deep hearty voices of the men like the bourdon of contre-basses against the shrilling of Grand'mere Marthe and Jeanneton's cackling laugh and Manon's soft, husky contralto, while Louis' boy soprano sang an incessant, teasing obligato. Strength was there in every face, the strength begotten of generations of hardy toilers, people of the soil. Manon's mother had long been dead.

Manon was kissed and bandied from hand to hand, starting with Grand'mere Marthe and ending with her. Manon was quizzed and questioned. Was she glad to be home? Had she been tempted to renounce a wicked world and cast her quiet lot with the little nuns? "What a pretty nun it would make!" grinned Pierre. "Or what a pretty bride!" Manon flushed and looked at the ground.

"Let the child be," commanded the ancient dame, her bony hand on Manon's sleeve. "Ah, my pretty, in your gay *chapeau rouge* and fine blue coat! What a lovely flower to spring from the red rough clay of the Tantramar! The Labrettes have always been noted for the loveliness of their women and the ugliness of their men. Come, *ma belle*, upstairs to your room. Jeanneton, cease gaping, and make yourself busy about the supper. The fowls are burned by now. I smell them! I smell them! Don't you all smell them!"

No one else did, but everybody nodded and fat Jeanneton trundled off to the kitchen.

"We have some work to finish," said Pierre. "We will see you at supper, my girl." He looked approvingly at his only daughter. He was proud. Ludovic, silent, slow and awkward, grinned at her as he followed his father towards the gloomy door of the cow-byre. Rich with the hoarded wealth of years, the men of the Labrettes still loved their work, still looked with pride at their bronzed and calloused hands. To them work was life—the only life they could understand or enjoy.

"Louis, imp of Satan, you carry Manon's bags up to her room and stop pinching the cat. She has no life with you, poor little beast." Grand'mere Marthe reached out a quick hand and tweaked Louis' ear, making him howl boisterously and squeeze Lizette, the black cat, so hard that her wail sounded like a death-cry.

Grand'mere Marthe and Manon went up the creaking wooden stairs to the long hall where the spinning-wheels were and the loom, on which Grand'mere Marthe and Jeanneton still wove the native homespun. The wood of floor and balustrade shone with the black patina of age and even the shadows there were old.

"They kept you at your weaving, those good sisters at Rimouski?" demanded Grand'mere Marthe suspiciously, laying a gentle hand on the great wheel that had marked with its revolutions the wholesome years of her active life.

"Yes, Grand'mere. And they taught us the methods of dyeing that the Quebec people use."

"Idiotic Quebecois!" grunted Grand'mere Marthe. "Chattering monkeys! What do they know that is as good as our own methods?"

"But they said that we Acadians could only dye blue and green and could never make red."

"Hah! What need had we of such dye? We had blood to make our red—good honest Acadian blood. Ask Lucien. Didn't he tell you that blood made our red dye? Didn't he tell you about his great history of the Labrettes? How it is going to set the whole world right about what happened to our people? How it will confound those lying men who say we were a troublesome lot? Hah! A gentle people like us troublesome! Did Lucien not tell you?"

"He did indeed. But—but don't you think, Grand'mere, that nowadays we shouldn't feel the way Lucien wants us to feel? It is hard to hate people for what their great-great-grandfathers did and—"

"Manon!" Grand'mere Marthe wheeled and stared into the clear black eyes of her grandchild. "Do I hear such talk from a Labrette! You would give up your heritage of bitterness! *Ciel!*" She threw up a clawlike hand. "What hope is there for the race if our children will forget the outrages visited upon their fathers! Surely you must be the first of your family to utter such dark treason!"

"You are not angry with me, Grand'mere Marthe?"

The old woman clasped Manon's slim figure close to her shrivelled bosom and smoothed the black waves of her hair. The old eyes glittered into hers with unknowable wisdom.

"I am not angry with you, child, but be careful how you speak. Pierre, your father, would disown you. Next thing you know, you will be falling in love with an Englishman. Eh! Eh! Eh!"

Old Marthe felt the sudden stiffening of the slender body whose youth she could feel and rejoice in. She pushed Manon to arm's length and stared at her with piercing, searching eyes.

"You have not done so, Manon?"

"I know no Englishmen," laughed Manon, not quite easy in her heart, not quite knowing why she could not bring herself to speak of the tall youth, the Englishman, she had met on the train. "I assure you of that. What do you think? Can Englishmen scale the twelve foot walls of Ste. Genevieve de Rimouski and come down into the convent-garden and steal our hearts under the very eyes of Soeur Angelique and Soeur Eulalie and a dozen more? I think not."

Grand'mere Marthe grinned. She caught sight of young Louis standing watching them, open-mouthed, Manon's bags at his feet. She routed him and left Manon alone to bathe and change her clothes. She went back to her window, did Grand'mere Marthe, and sat there and gazed out over the

marshes, glimmering now in the fading day. Pale little stars, tiny silver flowers in a world of blue, popped out here and there; the river shone with a different light and its seaward rush seemed to slow, but did not.

"There will be a moon this night," muttered the old lady. "The owl will cry and his wing-tip brush the face of the night-wanderer on the marsh. And the grass by the Great Dike will glisten with dew and ghosts will walk the Tantramar. They'll come with the flood of the silver tide and vanish with its ebb—ghosts!"

Marcel Vaubin, whose farm, on the west, adjoined Pierre Labrette's, walked over after supper. The Labrettes were just rising from the long oak table. Grand'mere Marthe, leaning on her stick, paused in the act of taking her wonted seat in the high-backed rocker and looked from under bushy white brows, first at Marcel, then at Manon. Grand'mere Marthe's eyes showed green and luminous for a moment, like a cat's eyes at dusk.

Marcel was bred of the soil, like Pierre, like Ludovic. His shoulders were huge and in his deliberate, unhurried movements there was something reminiscent of the oxen he used on his farm for plowing and hauling. He was not such a worker, however, as his neighbours. He had fine blooded horses that he liked to ride and race. His cattle were all pedigreed stock—"as if," Pierre often taunted him, "milk tasted any better from a cow with a family-tree."

He greeted the Labrettes with a slow "*bon soir*," and walked over to Manon and stood looking down at her. He was blonde, a typical Norman Frenchman, his thick hair waved back from a massive forehead and his brown eyes were large and usually void of expression. Now they were eager and approving. How she had grown, this little Manon! How virginal and young she was, with her milkwhite skin and great eyes!

"It is good to see you once more at home, Manon." Her hand, small and pallid, seemed lost in the clasp of his huge, hard fingers. "And this time you are home for good, eh? This time you will settle down in the Tantramar country, among your own people, where you belong. And close to them, I hope."

"Yes." Nervously Manon withdrew her hand. Her cheeks burned. She was conscious of her father's quiet appraisal, of Ludovic's awkward embarrassment, of the grimaces young Louis was making behind Marcel's back, blowing kisses and hugging himself. Grand'mere Marthe was watching the fire. They often had to light a fire for her in the middle of

summer. The cold she felt was not of the seasons, but of age. Now she sat and stared into the glowing caverns and saw there—who shall say what those strange eyes saw?

Manon walked out of the long dining-room into the hall. Marcel stood stupidly for a moment. He had expected her to be shy, of course. One expects that of a girl fresh from the convent. But she had not seemed impressed with him, nor greatly moved by his presence. Most unusual, he thought: girls usually found him attractive. But soon she would change. Sheepishly he looked around; then lunged after her. She was putting on her coat. He stood beside her, twisting his gray tweed cap in his hands.

"I'd like to walk with you, Manon," he said. "Would you like me to?"

"If you wish." She did not look at him. She started off without another word and awkwardly he followed.

They walked through the dooryard, down the drive under the whispering willows. Water poured through a long pipe there by the gate and plashed into a stone trough. It made a good gurgling sound and shone like silver. Polydore Cormier and Calixte Breau, the hired men, were driving the cows out to pasture and the great white and black bodies of the Holsteins swayed ahead of Manon and Marcel, through the gathering dusk, their bells jangling mellowly above the low cries of the herdsmen and the barking of the dogs.

Night glimmered with a velvet softness over the wide savannas of the Tantramar. Manon unconsciously took the lead. She had decided to go out, chiefly to get away from Marcel, from that queer, intent look in his eyes. She feared that look, felt her girl-spirit flee far, far into the deepest caverns of her being, away from it. Then, too, she wanted to be alone. She wanted to wander along the path atop the Great Dike and watch the stars in the river and hear the owl's cry and the lonely call of the gulls. And the low beat of their wings. She wanted to think. You couldn't think with Marcel plodding along beside you saying nothing, yet, by his mere presence seeming to utter a multitude of things that frightened and appalled. She knew what her father and her family expected of her. She was to marry Marcel Vaubin. She was to be given to him, they said, in holy wedlock. Maybe they expected her to marry him at once.

She could not. He was like an ox. So big; his arms like the trunks of trees, his face like the rugged face of a cliff. You would be smothered, lost in his embrace. She shuddered, and ran quickly ahead of him up the steps, grass-carpeted, hewn in the hard clay of the dike. She heard him laugh, and the sound of his feet was thunder in her ears.

Fast as she ran, he was quickly beside her, close to her as she stood looking down at the inrushing waters of the Tantramar, flooding in a silver spate between the high red-clay banks. Moon and stars shed a mystic light over the marshes. Here and there in the rolling uplands, the lights from farmhouse windows shone pallidly into the night. It was still, with a vast, eternal stillness, that spoke of the infinite, of wide, unbounded spaces; the marshes stretching into the sea, the sea stretching across the world; and she on the brink of this immensity. This man, breathing heavily at her side, what had he to do with this? He was the one thing that did not belong—he with his small desires and senseless hunger.

"Manon!" His hand closed on her shoulder and forced her to turn to him. He looked down at her in a silence that for her was freighted with terror, with a shrinking of her spirit. He did not speak. He did not know what to say. He felt something like shame and put it grossly away from him. She was not like the other girls he had loved. He pulled her into his arms. She was like a doll in his arms and he must have realized her lightness, like a reed against an oak. He held her cruelly close and bent to kiss her, his breath hot on her forehead and on her cheek. She felt lost, destroyed utterly. For a moment she had no power to move or think.

She lowered her head, eyes closed tightly. Was it this, a thing like this, that had brought that strange, happy look into Millicent D'Aigle's blue eyes? A look somewhat like that seen in the eyes of a young nun at vespers, that was love, that was paradise. No, this was different, this was ugly and somehow unclean.

With quick wiry strength that amazed him she fought and struck at him with her small fists; beat against his chest that was taut and hard as a great drum; fought fiercely with the strength of fear and wriggled from his arms. To the edge of the dike she ran, and slid down its out-sloping face into the shadows, and ran and ran. She heard him call, afar-off—"Manon. Come back, Manon!" She ran harder, driven still by some nameless dread, as if between her and him there would never be a distance great enough. And now, as she rounded a corner of the great rampart of the dike, running blindly, she bumped full-tilt into someone walking slowly from the opposite direction. They clasped each other, swaying with the impact; clasped each other tightly. She saw his face in the moonlight and knew him at once. It was as if she had been expecting him, for she felt no great surprise; only gladness. She did not want to move. She wanted to stay here and feel the blessed security of his presence. She could have sobbed with relief. Her breath came fast, fast, and her eyes were big with terror. Then she realized

that his arms were still about her and for a moment, driven by something stronger than death, yielded herself to their gentle pressure, then she broke from him and turned and ran back the way she had come, but not so fast, and not with fear or bewilderment in her heart. Presently she walked slowly, thinking. She knew now a little of what Millicent meant; his lips had been so close to hers when she looked at him, and he had smiled down at her.

"He is not like Marcel," she thought. "I do not like Marcel, not—not—well, I did not feel the same when Marcel put his arms around me. It is strange."

As one in a dream she came down the white road to the house. Marcel's giant figure loomed out of the shadows under the willow-trees by the farmhouse gate. She stopped and looked at him, astonished to find that the sight of him affected her not at all. She wasn't angry with him. She felt sorry. She put a hand on his arm. He looked down at her sullenly, scowling. Then he grinned slowly and patted her hand.

"You must not mind me, Marcel," she said. "I hope you are not angry. I do not want you to be angry with me."

"You are young," he said. "You do not, perhaps, understand things yet. The good nuns do not teach you some things. I did not want to go back without you. It was to be settled between you and me tonight. Now there is nothing settled. What answer can I give your father? He expects only one."

"You can give him no answer now, Marcel. Not tonight. I will not talk about it. Come. I am going indoors."

Marcel followed her dumbly into the house. Grand'mere Marthe and her son were playing at cribbage, Louis had his nose buried in a book; in a corner at the big desk Lucien, with stacked-up volumes and heaps of crackly paper, worked away at his mammoth history. Ludovic smoked his pipe, watching the progress of the cribbage-game.

Pierre Labrette glanced up from the board, gazed from Marcel to his daughter, questioningly. Marcel's face was a deeper red. Manon was pale but her eyes shone like stars. Pierre's dark brows were lifted and his lips pursed. He could not imagine what had happened. Marcel did not look happy.

"Play, Pierre!" Grand'mere Marthe did not raise her head from her contemplation of the board. Her bony chin rested on her hand. She loved cribbage.

Pierre played absently, and badly. Grand'mere chuckled with glee. Marcel Vaubin lowered his great weight into a chair and rubbed his forehead

with his handkerchief. It was not a very warm night, Pierre mused, and tried to retrieve his bad plays. He loved winning.

"I hear that one of the Westcotts has arrived in St. Benoit," Marcel said. Pierre again glanced up from the game, scowling.

"Yes," growled Pierre. "Lucien tells me he came in on the train today. He is the last of the family. Tomorrow I will talk to him about buying his farm. His farm. Sweat of our brows first helped irrigate it. These people gave nothing. They took."

"Play, Pierre!" commanded Grand'mere Marthe.

"He will be glad to sell," said Ludovic, biting on his pipe stem with strong square teeth. "These city-fellows have no love for the land."

"He's only selling what belongs to us by right," said Pierre. "One of a breed of curs. The other bled the land and left it. They lost the blood and now he comes back to see what price he can get for the dry carcass, over and above the five thousand they owe on mortgage. *Canaille!*"

"Play, Pierre!" shouted Grand'mere Marthe.

"I am reading an early account of the Westcott family," broke in Lucien, wheeling around in his chair. "Thieves and murderers. They stole our land, the richest in the Tantramar; they murdered one of our family."

"We do not forget," said Pierre. "Do we, Grand'mere?"

"Of course not. Of course not. Play." Grand'mere Marthe's eyes were the oldest in that room, and the sharpest. Only Grand'mere Marthe saw Manon and noted her face as she knelt on the bench by the window, elbows on the sill, and gazed out over the Tantramar, and Grand'mere Marthe chuckled hoarsely, no one knew why, unless perhaps it was because she had won.

The old lady pushed cards and cribbage-board impatiently away from her, moved her chair around to face the room, leaned her rugged chin on her hands clasped atop her ash-stick and gazed upon them all—her son, his sons and daughter and the husband Pierre had destined for Manon. It was long, long, since Grand'mere Marthe had seen in a young girl's eyes what she had thought dwelt in Manon's this afternoon, what now she was sure of. Long since she had seen that mystic light, that effulgence not of earth; but she knew, as all women know, what it portended. She frowned deeply and said in her penetrating voice, making them all jump:

"*Comment?*"

"Eh, what is it you question?" asked Pierre impatiently. The others stared at her, Vaubin most timidly, for it was said in the Tantramar country that she was something of a witch, that she had more than mortal powers, this ancient dame. She gave Pierre no answer. She had been thinking aloud. How —? How could Manon be in love? At the convent one had no opportunity for such folly, the pious nuns being very careful to have a gardener as ugly as Caliban and a porter modelled after Quasimodo the hunchback. Then— Grand'mere Marthe thumped the ferrule of her stick on the floor—then it must have been on the train—on the train today—

"Manon!" she called softly in the Acadian patois, "*Viens 'ci-t!*"

Manon came to her and sat, as the gnarled hand indicated, on the blue hassock at her grandmother's feet. She looked up at the old lady and smiled —a dark madonna's smile that tugged at Grand'mere Marthe's heart strings, that made her think with fierce longing of the long-ago days when she, Marthe Sonier, was black of hair and sweet of face, with a body light and supple as a willow; how on nights like this, in her own village of St. Eloi, across the marshes, they used to sing and dance to the music of the fiddles.

She stroked Manon's hair gently, and in her eyes was a far-off look. "*Chantez, mes enfants*," she commanded softly. "Sing for me."

Young Louis, with an elfin smile, began and the rest joined in without shyness, with gusto and with glee:

"*Je connais une fillette—*
Yup-yup-yup. La-ri-ra.
Qui vaudrait bien la pauvrette—
Yup-yup-yup. La-ri-ra!
O plutot se marier—
Yup-yup-yup. Marie ton gaie
Marie ton gars, quand tu voudras;
Ma fille quand tu pourras!"

Grand'mere Marthe's head wagged, her eyes shone, her toetip tapped the floor and her stick beat time as they sang, oh, so gaily, the folksongs of her people, that for years and years had echoed in this old house, that filled with equal rapture the hearts of youth and age.

"Sing more! Sing more!" called Grand'mere Marthe. "Do you, Manon, sing with M'sieur Vaubin—sing 'Simone and the Curé.'"

Manon began shyly, her voice low and clear, the plaint of the little peasant-girl who loved with a hopeless love the curé of the village, who said

so dolefully when the good priest told her they must separate—"I shall die, *monsieur le curé*!" And he answered, as Marcel sang in accents gravely droll —

> "*Alors il faudra t'enterrer, Simone, o ma Simone.*
> *Requiescat in pace, ma petite mignonne!*"

It was droll, thought Manon, this bit of badinage of Simone and the curé —she singing a question, he answering it. Yet one could die of love—why not? Love was so great a thing, and if it could bring one a happiness like heaven, surely to be deprived of it might cause one to die. But the musical appetite of grand'mere, with its urgent demands, put an end to her musings. With many a ballad and roundelay, with *Frère Jacques*, with *les ponts de Paris*, with *Bon soir, Nigot*, with a score of lovely, lilting tunes, they beguiled the evening away, and until the last stave was sung Grand'mere Marthe beat merry time, and her voice, still full and rich, ran like a thread of gold through the swinging counterpoint. Manon sang as gaily, and Pierre and the studious Lucien and the dark, dour Ludovic—for it is of the essence of these people that they can, at will, recapture the spirit of childhood, and be gay.

Then it was done. Marcel Vaubin said a gruff goodnight and left them. Manon stood for a while in the doorway gazing upon the silver night, on the gleaming, winding river, on the infinite distances of the marsh. From pond and roadside ditch the millions of little peepers shrilled, shrilled insistently, like so many gnomes tapping away with tiny mallets, building fairy ships. Peep-peep-peep—all through the long still watches of the night, while she slept, while the world slept.

"What do you see out there, Manon?" Grand'mere Marthe was standing at her shoulder.

"What is there to see, Grand'mere?" She parried question with question, for one must be wary.

"Life and Death," said Grand'mere Marthe. "Beauty and Ugliness—all are there to see, my young one. Yes, the riddle of life is there for us to read perhaps—most certainly the riddle of love. I saw you gazing tonight, trying to read that riddle, yes?"

Manon did not answer. Grand'mere Marthe chuckled softly. The dry old fingers pinched Manon's cheek lightly and the firm old voice said, "Come, *ma petite*, it is a pity to have to go to bed on such a night—but then there is always tomorrow."

Chapter II

Under the stars, flashing, shimmering, countless little jewels in the blue-black cloak that night throws over the world's back and clasps with the moon, Lynn Westcott walked slowly along the Great Dike towards the lights of St. Benoit. The wind from the sea, salty and cool, caressed his cheek and fluttered his thick chestnut-colored hair. He thought of the heat and dust of the city, and breathed deeper, filling his lungs with freshness. Squat haycocks, like the ghosts of prehistoric monsters that in times long past inhabited the Tantramar country, loomed grotesquely out of the dark and from old, weather-worn barns, bent crooked by the fearful blasts of winter, the owl's hoot came, eery and mournful, and the beat of nocturnal wings winnowed the air above him. Below to the right, the river flowed like a silver serpent, between its diked banks, silent, swift, with its eternal ebb and flow, flooding seaward now to add its quota to the mighty tides of the Bay of Fundy.

He stopped often to gaze about him, to marvel, to let soak into his spirit, into the very core of his heart, something for which that heart and spirit had always hungered. In the cities he had felt that hunger, all through his twenty-five years it had left him with a sense of incompleteness, of not belonging to the places where he lived. It was a spell, some potent magic that this marsh-country wove about those it called its own. To him, it was as a heritage, must have been, for he had never before seen the Tantramar. But many of the Westcotts, his forbears, had walked here beneath the stars, gazed upon the same river and marshland and breathed the keen sea-savor. And they had loved it and the beauty of it all had entered into them.

Now it enthralled and mocked him. It drove away all the sane and ordered plans he had formulated for his future. Yesterday, even this morning, those plans had been clear-cut and their fulfillment almost certain. A while ago it would have seemed preposterous that anything could upset them. With the six thousand dollars, thereabouts, that was left after the failure of his father's firm, and the money that would remain from the sale of the old Manor and the broad farmlands after the mortgage was satisfied, he had planned to go back to Montreal and start out on his own, perhaps revive again the business whose collapse had hastened his father's death. So he had planned, but things were happening to him here; had happened already.

Some potent alchemy was working upon his emotions, his desires, and eating swiftly away at the sense of values that had made his life what it was. It was all nonsense, he told himself, all the effect of newness, this spell almost hypnotic that had descended on him. True, the place had been the home of the Westcotts for generations; that old gray mansion that he had gazed at so long, set among the whispering, ancient willows, flanked by byres and granaries, and a great orchard pale with blossoms, had sheltered so many of his name, had been the theatre of their joys and sorrows, their births and deaths, their moments of high rapture and deep despair.

But it was only sentiment that caused this stirring of his pulses and brought this warmth to his heart. It was only the vague after-images of a life and time he had never known, with which he had no link save that of blood, and one does not surely inherit the love of a place he has never seen. Granted, his family had once held high place here in the Tantramar, had owned great wealth and been a power in the country, what was it all to him?

He walked briskly, turning his back upon the view, watching the lights of the village. Then, after he had left the dike and was following the footpath in its shadow, he heard, afar off, a voice call, out of the night and the vasty stillness, "Manon! Come back, Manon!" And he stopped and listened and wondered. Something told him that she of the lovely name, Manon, would not come back to him who called; that she travelled with the speed of light. It meant nothing to him—nothing, yet he began to walk faster and at a turn of the path, she rounded the grassy rampart of the dike and she was in his arms.

That girl! She had never really left his thoughts. She was part of the magic spell. He knew her at once; he felt that she knew him. He felt the warmth and slenderness of her, the too rapid rise and fall of her young breast, the swift intake and exhalation of her breath; and her eyes shone as she looked up at him. For a moment they stood there. She seemed to relax, to sway against him, and then she broke from him and ran, like a will o' the wisp.

Manon! He stood, staring after her, into the darkness where she had vanished. So she was Manon. She belonged here. She was of the Tantramar people. Was that what had made her so interesting, so arresting? She was quaint. There was something about her that belied her modern looks, the up-to-the minuteness of her clothes. She was like one who had stepped out of the ages past, with a spirit, strong and bold, yet nunlike, demure, beautiful in its self-containment.

He did not follow her. Useless to follow. As well try to catch the gull on its airy wings. He had been tongue-tied in her presence. He couldn't imagine himself talking to her as to the gay young moderns of Westmount, hard, with their painted lips and tinted nails and metallic coiffures and metallic minds. What would interest them, would be of no concern to Manon. It was from her lover, probably, that she fled. And she did not care for him; hers had not been the laughing, thrilling flight of the girl who runs only to be pursued. Her eyes had been too wide, her breath too fast, her panic real. She felt terror, urgent and complete.

But why be so afraid? Surely, from what one could judge, from what she had said, her family was one of substance. Why should she be fleeing like a hunted thing from the unwelcome advances of some man? If she did not like him, why should she be exposed to persecution? For a moment he was tempted to go the way she had gone and delve further into the mystery, but he knew that impulse for folly.

He walked on to St. Benoit and up its straggling main-street, past the feed-store and the cobbler's shop and the smithy and the general store with its wide wooden verandah. Oil-lamps burned there behind the grimy windows, filled with patent medicines, fly-specked cardboard boxes, buckets of sun-burned mixtures and glass jars of horehound and peppermint sticks. Across from the store, a battered signboard, hung from a bracket which also suspended an old ship's lantern, advertised La Maison Simard, St. Benoit's one and only hostelry. Intended originally for a skating rink, it had size if nothing else, and a rather startling expanse of front from which the brown paint had long since peeled away; with an upstairs verandah ideal for making speeches around election-time.

Some half-dozen rustics occupied the dim-lit taproom, which had an authentic bar with polished brass rail and cuspidors, relic of the long ago when St. Benoit was a racing-centre, when the bloods from Moncton, Shediac and Dorchester had foregathered here to drink success to their favorites. Various little tables were scattered about, at one of which a game of "forty-fives," an enthralling pastime, won by the man who can thump the table hardest, was going on.

Lynn acknowledged the landlord's tenth bow since his arrival. Monsieur Luc Simard did not often rent his best room nor feel the exquisite thrill of saying, "*Oui, m'sieur*, there is a room-with-bath!" The fact that it was merely the room next the bathroom didn't matter at all. Luc had knocked a door in the partition, and it became forthwith, "room-and-bath," and a sign

of "Keep Out" was tacked on the bathroom's other portal when a guest was in residence.

Lynn sat down in a rustic arm chair and glanced over a copy of *La Presse*, three days old. Montreal, with its hurry and bustle, was another world than this where time moved very slowly, even, he thought, stood still. This place, these people, resisted change. Even in their speech persisted the ancient idioms brought across the seas from Normandy and *le pays Breton*, an age ago. Marshes and river and sea, these would never change though men should come and go. Here life was a slow and pleasant pilgrimage, unmarked by great event, from the baptismal font to the tapered altar draped in black. Here the echoes of war and famine, panic and disaster penetrated only faintly and were scarcely heard.

Over the edge of the paper he watched the four men who played and the two who stood watching. Luc, important in his white apron, had soaped the big mirror behind the bar and, with many a feint and flourish, was drawing on it with his finger, pictures of hideous-looking fish and winged creatures of fearsome aspect. For a brief while, in his youth, Luc had tended bar in Boston, in which great centre of culture, he had learned this vanishing art. He finished off with a rather jolly looking sea-serpent, its mouth wide open, over which he wrote "*Bienvenu*" with a brave gesture, and then, "Welcome," underneath.

"It is for fête-Dieu," he explained to Lynn, catching his eye in the mirror and turning to him with the eleventh bow. "W'at you call Corpus Christi. We make big procession in St. Benoit. Grand celebration. People come from all over to see this so great spectacle."

"I have seen the procession in Quebec," said Lynn.

"Ah! That is not so grand as here in St. Benoit. T'ree arches we build along the street and many trees along the way an' two fanfares from Moncton, and all the *Sauvages*, the Indians, and thousands of people. You will stay to see that, m'sieur, next Sunday?"

"Yes. I think I shall stay."

"You will not regret. To see those lovely young girl, all in white, so like angels, and that one, Pierre Labrette's girl, Manon, loveliest of all, like a madonna, who returned this day from Rimouski—*sapristi!*"

Lynn bent again to his paper, but not to read. Without trying he had learned what he very much wanted to know. Labrette! She would then be the daughter of the man who held the mortgage and who had written him

offering to buy the farm. He had often heard his father mention that name. There was supposed to be some feud between her family and his. He was rather hazy about it. He knew that the Westcotts had settled on the Tantramar after the exile of the Acadian settlers, on land taken from the Acadians and granted to the Westcotts by their King. The land was first granted to Colonel Giles Westcott and, after his premature death, went to his younger brother, Peter Westcott, from whom Lynn was descended.

"Manon Labrette." He said her name softly. He loved the sound of it. He loved its suggestion—the vision of those eyes so wondrous dark and the thick tresses that gleamed like jet and the slim contours of her young body and the deep richness of her voice. He loved to think of her, as he had watched her, unnoticed, on the observation-platform of the Ocean Limited as it sped across the marshes. The proud tilt of her chin, the far-off, dreaming look in her eyes, seeing things beyond his ken.

"St. Benoit will not see much of Marcel Vaubin now," remarked one of the card-players. "He will be at Pierre Labrette's every evening."

"Ah, yes," said another. It was Polydore Cormier, Labrette's hired-man. "He came there tonight and we saw him, Calixte Breau and I, as we were driving the cows out to pasture, walking with Manon. She has grown to be the most beautiful girl in the Tantramar, yes, *mes vieux*, in all the world. Soon, no doubt, they will be married. It will be a great occasion that, wine and cognac and no work for days."

"Yes," chimed in Luc over the counter he was polishing. "It is a good match, that. All arranged from the days when Manon was yet in the cradle. Pierre set his heart upon it and so it shall take place, as must all things that Pierre desires."

Lynn had heard enough. He got up brusquely, said goodnight and went upstairs to his room-with-bath. He did not light the lamp. It would, he knew, be dim and smoky and smelly like the rest of La Maison Simard's lighting system. He felt his way across to the window and sat on the wide sill, gazing out at the starry night. The moon was covered by passing clouds. He could not see the marshes, yet he felt their presence. He felt that, had he been this moment transported here, a stranger from some far-off land, he would have known what lay beyond that curtain of night.

But where was the witchery, where the magic, the beauty he had felt a while ago? Where now were all his fine dreams and the shining vision of his family's greatness that had passed, at last, to him? Where was the warmth that, like ichor, had flowed in his veins and transported him to a higher plane

and filled his soul with its richness? Gone now—all gone; and he was Lynn Westcott, young broker of Westmount, in Montreal, here in this dismal country of marshland and dike to sell to some grasping peasant the broken-down and decayed remnant of the home of his fathers.

"I'll see this Labrette tomorrow morning and close with him and get out of this place before I have to spend another night here. I don't know what there is about it. I liked it when I was walking along the dike. I thought it was grand. But now it seems to settle on me like ten tons of bricks. Gives me the jumps. You feel so darned small and helpless, like a fly in a sea of molasses. For a while there, looking at the old house, I had a crazy notion I belonged here and that I'd stay. What would I do here? I don't know the place or the people and I don't know anything about a farm. That was a bughouse idea to be sure—a hangover from the dear old sentimental past."

He lit a cigarette and smoked it slowly, sitting there in the darkness. He thought of Manon, of what he had heard. Going to marry someone of her own people. It was all settled. But if so, why had she run away? Surely it was from this man, Vaubin, that she had fled: they had started out to walk together, that laborer said. The walk had not terminated very happily. Maybe she didn't love this fellow.

"Well, what of it?" he muttered. "It doesn't take me long to get onto the intrigue of the village. If I stayed here long, I'd become Gaffer Westcott and get to wearing a smock and swapping scandal with the oldest inhabitants. Probably I know more about Mr. Vaubin's courtship than those leather-faced lads downstairs. Well, it's her show, I suppose. If she doesn't want to marry him she won't have to. It's no concern of mine. Forget it!"

But it wasn't so easy to forget. Even the magnificent featherbed, which was Luc Simard's pride, did not at once put this guest to sleep. It was not easy to forget her nor to put brusquely away from him the momentary glimpses of beauty he had known when he talked to her on the train, when she had come running, frightened, like a little faun, into his arms tonight. She would be given to some great country lout, some small squire, a lump of insensate clay who would never know the beauty of her spirit, never satisfy the desires of her heart, but who would, in time, with his crudeness destroy most of the beauty of her, leaving only the shell.

He lay awake watching the glimmering, indefinite oblong of light that was the window; and he thought of his own life ahead, of his loneliness, of how in all the world he had nothing to anchor to—no home, no near relatives, no responsibilities. He would work, make money, probably marry

a rich woman, grow fat and pompous, in the natural order of events, die and have his picture and a few columns of empty praise in the *Star* and *Gazette*. And he hated this freedom that he knew he should have rejoiced in.

"I can go back and go into business with Morley Cross, and make a lot of money and—"

It seemed pretty empty and futile, that project, as he thought of it here. Its contemplation gave him no joy. It was just something to do, not something he wanted to do. He was just a sheep, following the flocks of other sheep, grazing in the same meadows, bound for the same oblivion. Well, it was what other fellows did, wasn't it? And when he had got going he would marry some girl and settle down—He had given little thought to the settling down process, none to the girl. There was Alyne Stairs, of course, lovely blonde companion on many a riding-excursion or ski-party in the Laurentians. Always gallant and gay, but, like all her set, utterly self-contained, needing nothing. Then, too, if one were married to her, one could never escape listening to her father's stories, and Sir Roblyn for years had held the lead as the worst bore in Westmount. "Marry some girl and settle down and live and die," he muttered with youthful bitterness. "I'd better sleep it off."

He closed his eyes and made a determined effort to put everything out of his mind, but one face would intrude, the dark, level eyes, with shyly drooping lids would look bravely in his and the soft voice with its quaint, convent-accent say, "I must go in now. Goodby." And he must have said her name the last waking thing he did—Manon—Manon—for it seemed to be still on his lips like some haunting refrain when he awakened to a world of light.

Light! It was as if the floodgate of the sky had been burst as the wild sea bursts a dike and over all the marshland was pellucid light, driving before it, like a golden herdsman his sheep, the rolling, tumbling dawn-mists that lay low over the Tantramar, driving them, scattering them mercilessly, until no shred of vapory fleece remained. And the air was vocal with bird song—lark and robin and thrush in full melodic chorus and outside his window, on a bare pole, a pert woodpecker played the jolly castanets.

Lynn looked and listened and loved, and forgot last night's sense of defeat and disillusion. He created a precedent in La Maison Simard by taking a bath, a cold one at that, at six o'clock in the morning. Only a madman, said Luc, would so imperil his health. Long before seven he was downstairs and doing things to Madame Simard's pancakes and hot rolls and

eggs and bacon, that made that stout and wholesome body feel a glow of pride. Then, smoking the first and most perfect pipe, the one that begins the day, he was off down the village street across the marshes to the distant upland where, aloof, lovely in its ancient, mellow solitude, stood the home of his fathers.

Along the marsh-road the tall grass drooped, heavy with dew, and little air-bubbles streamed to the surface of the dark water in the ditches. Lynn left the road at a gate where faint wheel-tracks showed in the marsh-grass and followed these to the inner dike, which skirted the boundaries of the Labrette farm and his own. Looking back he saw his footprints in the dew. The smoke of early fires rose straight up in the still air. Dogs barked crisply and the slow brazen clangor of bells told of cows waiting by the pasture bars for the milkers. It was like a mammoth pastoral scene in a titanic theatre, thought Lynn: the low, white farmhouses on the hillsides, among the orchards with their rolling clouds of snowy blossoms that filled the air with a sweet and heady fragrance, in which was blended thyme and marjoram and wild honey and amber cider-smell in empty casks. Bleak cohorts of crows flapped from field to field with raucous, croaking cries and wild fowl boomed from the sedgy shores of the river. *Tintamarre*, the Acadians called the wild fowl's drumming.

Below the manor Lynn slid down from the dike and followed an all but obliterated path across the marsh to the little hill on which the old house stood. Up the hill he went, vaulted over a tumbledown stile and gazed curiously about him. It was silent, with the silence of age and desolation. He thought of Wandering Willie's song as he gazed upon it and aloud he said—

> " 'Now when day dawns on the brow of the moorland,
> Lone stands the house and the chimney stone is cold.
> Lone let it stand, now the friends have all departed,
> The kind hearts, the true hearts that loved the place of old!'

"But no," he continued. "It seems still to wait, to watch from its shuttered windows—perhaps for Wandering Westcott's return."

This was the stable-yard, surrounded on the three sides by barns and granaries, built of massive timbers that time seemed only to have hardened. There a door sagged on its rusty hinges and there shingles were ripped away; the house, built of freestone, low and long, with huge squat chimneys and red roofed gables and shuttered windows, stood defiant and unchanging among the willows that swayed softly above it and seemed to whisper with ancient voices. The driveway, weed-grown rankly and gullied from the

freshets of many years, encircled the house and from the front porch stretched straight down to the dusty white marsh road that led across the marshes to St. Benoit.

Lynn had the keys—old, cumbersome affairs that had lain for years in his father's strong-box. He walked across the stable-yard and along a flagged path almost hidden by grass, to the kitchen door. He used the smaller key on the rusty lock and after a struggle, with many a creaking protest, it turned and the door opened stiffly with raucous protest, when he pushed it. Two steps led down to the stone floor. Opposite him a great granite fireplace, blackened with the smoke of countless fires, yawned like a cavern, and ghostly presences that had slumbered all the long neglected years in the darkness of the inglenook, seemed to rise and stretch and yawn and glide away.

There was a great iron range, bought in later years, and many deep-shelved cupboards with little in them. Lynn's grandfather, Stephen Westcott, had abandoned the place after the decline of the ship-building industry which took his money with it. Much of the furniture had been sold, much taken away. The rooms through which Lynn walked echoed emptily, dust lay thick on everything and the motes danced in the golden pencils of light that stabbed bravely through the chinks in the shutters.

Silence and desuetude, the forlornness that dwells only in a house which love and laughter once occupied and then abandoned. Yet it did not depress him. He stood before the hearth in what had been the drawing-room of the manor. Here long settles were built into the wall and the floorboards were worn from the tread of many feet. Old brass sconces were fastened to the dark paneled walls and in some of them stumps of wax candles stood as if they had been extinguished only yesternight.

"I wonder," mused Lynn, "what was the last scene they lighted here. Maybe it was a farewell party that old Stephen gave to his friends from Dorchester and Sackville; maybe there had been a hunt that afternoon and the men wore gay red jackets and the women plumed hats, and they drank the stirrup-cup and then drank to the passing of the ships which had made them rich and then made them poor."

It was easy to picture a scene like that in this great old room that belonged to a day when life moved at no hectic, enervating tempo, when there was time for talk and laughter and the mellowing of friendship; when men, with equal coolness, could fight a duel in a misty field at dawn or pen a

billet doux by the candle's light. Those days could never come again, but here one recaptured something of their splendor.

He went upstairs and wandered from room to room. Everywhere was dust and the spider's mazy web. In the front of the house was a long chamber with a deep dormer window, a grand room, a man's room. This, he thought, must have been the master's study as well as his bedroom. The great window, when he unfastened it and pushed the shutters back, opened gloriously upon a panoramic view of marshland and river, stretching for many miles to the distant blue haze that was the sea. In the distance, among its chequered fields and plumy willows, was another farmstead which, he thought, must belong to the Labrettes. There was a window, high up on the side of that house. It faced the Manor. Alone in the blank stone wall, it drew his eyes as the morning sun glinted upon it. He wondered if it might be Manon's room, if she were sleeping there, the golden light on her pillow.

"It's nice," he said aloud, his voice echoing strangely in the empty room, "to feel that you are monarch of all you survey, even if it is only for a little while. I wonder how my people could ever bring themselves to leave it. I wonder if it hurt, to part from all this. It must have: they were born here and must have lived a fine and hearty life. Great to eat the food you've produced yourself, to walk on ground that is your very own and have one spot on the earth's surface that you can say is yours and have no one dispute you. All those fields, those orchard-trees, that stretch of river, even, is mine. I could be a feudal lord here. It's a fascinating prospect, a fairy tale of course, but I do like to think about it."

He sat on the window-ledge and looked at the land proudly, possessively. He did not know, nor could he analyze, the emotion that swept him. Power, he felt, and a richness of being, a fullness of heart. The earth love that is in all men, but strongest in those whose body courses with the blood of men who delved and ploughed and sowed and reaped the fruits of their labor, the sweat from whose bronzed brows dripped into the clear water that slaked their thirst; who lived with the strength of their strong bodies, close to the earth, loving it, taking from it and giving to it in equal measure.

That was what came to him now, flooding like a tide into his spirit. He felt content; gone was his restlessness, his unease; yet he had formulated no conscious purpose, had tinkered with no decision. It was as if he had walked, when he passed the borders of his own lands, into an atmosphere that had power greater than those who dwelt in it. As if in him was something on which it reacted; that it seized upon this something and held it.

Lynn turned from the bright vista and strolled about the room. There were shelves where books had been—Shakespeare, no doubt, and Kit Marlow and Dick Steele and Waverley and Pickwick; perhaps Fielding's rollicking Tom Jones and Trollope's hard riding squires. Before the hearth was a long table. Here, no doubt, long-dead Westcotts had sat and penned letters and accounts of bushels of corn, of beeves and sheep, yes, and perhaps a sonnet, perhaps a wistful rhyme to some lavender-scented love.

He could picture the writer—powdered perruque, tied with a black ribbon in a pigtail at the neck, satin breeches and velvet coat, silken hose and buckled shoes. On those pegs by the door had hung a fawn redingote of many capes and a glazed hat with a buckle and in the racks there had been muskets and heavy pistols; aye, and old wine, Port or Burgundy, in cut glass decanters on the table at the writer's elbow, good quill-pens and massive silver ink-stands, and black Perique or fragrant Latakia in the earthern jar atop which his long pipe lay.

Idly, Lynn pulled open the drawers of the table. Dust and emptiness were all that remained of what of beauty, of moment, of ugliness perhaps, that they had contained. The third drawer stuck and he had to tug very hard, until it came suddenly, right out of its slot and fell clattering noisily to the floor.

Empty, too. No, there was a bit of paper, yellow, with faded writing, stuck to the drawer. It was the corner of a letter that had been in the rear of the one above and had been torn off when the papers and letters were removed. He held it gently, it was so old, so sere and dry. Three words were written on it. He stared at them with wondering conjecture; a flood of wild and colored imaginings coursed into his mind. That name—Whose eyes had read this letter? Whose hand had penned it? The name was there and her last lovely words to him—"*Pour toujours—Manon*."

Manon! The name had begun to sing through his life, to flow like the motif of a symphony. Manon! It had been in his heart and on his lips all during his walk from the village. The wind whispered it in the rustling willows. Now, it confronted him here. It leapt out of the past, glorious and beautiful, dripping with some sweet romance, and lay before his eyes in the quaint, pointed scrawl of some other girl who had borne that name. He stared at the desk, at the hearth-stone, at the great door, all about the room as if the answer was here and he could find it. But the years mocked at him, the obliterating years, and there was nothing save dust and emptiness and these few words in faded ink. He folded the little triangle of paper and put it in his notebook, musing on its beauty—"Forever—Manon."

Penned in joy or in sadness—which, he could not know. Perhaps only the past could tell him, and it could never speak. But "forever" could mean in life or in death. And had she spoken truth and had he believed, to whom she had written? Of what tender romance, what dark tragedy perhaps, were these few words the faded memento?

He lingered for a while, dreaming there where the sunlight flooded goldenly in. Then he left the big room and descended the stairs. He unfastened the chain that secured the great oaken front door and the massive bolt that fastened it. With an eery groan the door swung back and he walked out onto the pillared porch overlooking the ruined garden and the overgrown sweep of lawn on either side of the driveway.

"Squire Westcott appears for the first time in his own front door," he said gaily. "Many's the coach and pair that came bravely up the driveway, no doubt, while the Lord of the Manor waited here to give the visitors a good greeting. 'The true word of welcome was spoken in the door.'"

He lingered here for a while, standing motionless, looking out on the Tantramar; thinking of other days, of other people with whom he shared some mystic kinship. Presently, he went in and fastened the door; then, through the dining-hall to the kitchen and once more out into the stable-yard. Kennels and coachhouse and cider-press and brew-house he inspected. They had lived in baronial style, these Westcotts; that was sure. There was stabling for a dozen horses and long rows of benches for their hounds; there were quarters for grooms and workmen, for, it seemed, a small army of them. Through the orchard, its old trees straggling in long rows up the hill like war-scarred veterans garlanded with lovely blossoms, he wandered. The pink and white petals showered down upon him and made a carpet of pearl for his feet.

At the orchard gate he paused for another look, and in that moment he knew. All that strong but unnamable emotion seemed to crystallize, all that vague pride and fullness of heart seemed to become definitely what it was. He gazed upon this land, this place, and knew it for his own. It belonged to him and he to it, irrevocably. It was his; he could never get away from that; he could never leave it to the stranger.

"I'm crazy," he muttered. "Crazy, but I can't seem to help it. I had no idea of this when I came here. Why, I'm a different person in a different world. Perhaps I shouldn't have come. It's got me now, like a fever in the blood, and there's only one cure for it—and a very costly cure, I'm thinking."

He stood, feet apart, his stout brogues planted on the springy turf of the orchard. He saw it all now with the eyes of his soul, of that deep hidden self he had never known. And he seemed to take root there, some magic current seemed to pass from the warm mound of earth into his own heart and they were one, the earth and he. Scent of apple-blossoms, of the salt sea-wind across the marshes; smell of earth, damp and deep, in which life lived and moved. Like a powerful drug, he breathed it in and felt his blood course stronger.

With quick, firm step, he ascended the hill to the marsh-road, through a field path among the waving grass. His wide shoulders were squared and in his eyes was a lustre like a fire new-kindled, that had not been before. So went the young Lord of Westcott to St. Benoit des Pres. A motor car roared past him, sending up a great cloud of fine, powdery dust. It was the same green sedan he had seen at the railway station yesterday, the car which had taken Manon away. There were two men in it now. They did not glance at him.

When he reached the inn, Luc Simard told him that Pierre Labrette had called there a short while before and would return in about an hour. And Pierre wished to see him. This fact the good Luc announced much as if he were the humble page and Lynn the modest subject of that liege lord of the Tantramar, Pierre Labrette.

"You will send him up to my room, then, please," said Lynn.

The good Simard's sooty brows wriggled. His mouth hung open. It was not usual for young men to speak so lightly of Pierre Labrette, the richest farmer in the Tantramar, a magistrate and leader of his people. This young man did not realize of whom he spoke. Pierre Labrette could go to parliament when he wished, though he was content now to send there the men he chose. But Luc, chary of offending an honored guest, bowed once more and said he would show Monsieur Labrette to the chamber of Monsieur Westcott. Secretly he thought it would be more fitting for the young monsieur to come down and wait upon Pierre, but this breach of Tantramar tradition might be laid to the young man's ignorance: was he not from Montreal, a barbarous place?

Withal the young stranger walked like a lord and was a fine-appearing youth, admitted Luc to himself. His family, too, had once been English milords. He it was who owned the great farm on the marsh that Pierre Labrette had set his heart upon. Pierre had told the villagers of his plans, of the vast farm he would have when he bought back from these dogs of

Westcotts the land they had stolen. The old house would be at once torn down and the ruins carted away, until not a stone of it remained to proclaim that a Westcott had once owned it.

"And Pierre will drive a shrewd bargain, Madelon," said Luc, standing beside the kitchen-stove where stout madame was basting the roast. "He will twist that young one about his thick finger and have the property for a song, and, as you well know, Pierre is a very poor singer, with no sense of harmony. They are poor now, these Westcotts, though I heard my grandfather say that it was nothing for them and their friends to come to his inn and buy up all the fine cognac he owned and drink it on the spot. Ah, those were days indeed!"

In the contemplation of this brave feat and the goodly profit that must have accrued thereby to Grand'pere Simard, Luc leaned against the hot-water boiler until a peremptory ringing of the little bell on the office-counter made him jump and scurry off to answer.

It was Pierre Labrette. Bulky, sinewy, in his suit of brown homespun, his face brick-red from sun and wind, a half-smoked cigar clamped between strong yellow teeth, he glared at the obsequious Luc. Pierre owned the ex-skating rink that housed La Maison Simard. Pierre, directly or indirectly, owned most of the village.

"Well, Luc," he said sharply, "our young man has returned, eh? I passed him on the marsh."

"Yes, M'sieur Labrette. He has just now come in and gone up to his room—with bath."

"Hmph!" Pierre sat down with a grunt and looked out the window for a moment, relishing the forthcoming interview, gloating over his certain success. Luc just stood, his mouth opening and closing, his hands moving in gestures as feeble as his efforts at speech. At length Pierre noticed his agitation. He jerked his head around and glared at the landlord. "Well, what the devil are you waiting there for? Are you a fool? Go tell him I am here."

"Pardon." Luc bowed. There was sweat on his dough-colored moon of a face. "He said for me to—to show you up to his room when you came."

Pierre's mouth opened. He held the cigar a few inches from his lips, and glared at Luc incredulously. Then he scowled and nodded.

"*Bien!*" he said. "That's another five hundred off the price."

Luc felt sorry for the young man. What a foolish thing was this to do—to anger Pierre. Ah, Pierre was a hard one. Pierre trod the weak underfoot. Pierre would make mince-meat of Monsieur Westcott. Luc started towards the stairway, but Pierre Labrette brushed roughly past him.

"Out of the way, imbecile! I have not all day to waste. I know where the room-with-bath is. There is only one. I will settle this pup in short order." Pierre's neck, Luc thought, gazing at it in terror, was redder than ever he had seen it and Pierre's heavy tread made the wooden stairway shake.

"It was wrong for that poor youth to expect Pierre Labrette to wait upon him when it is Pierre who does him the favor by buying his farm; not that Pierre will pay him much over the mortgage. Pierre could wait until it came up for sale, as it will shortly when the mortgage comes due and no one would dare to bid against him. It may be he will do that."

And Pierre was thinking exactly the same thing when he knocked sharply at Lynn's door, having first sneered at the "Keep Out" sign on the bath; and vowed to himself not to rent his place another year to a fool like Luc Simard.

Pierre's big shoulders seemed to fill the door as he entered, but the younger man who stood by the window was as tall and almost as broad, and his lean body was hard and rangy; his eyes met Labrette's squarely, cool and undaunted. How many other meetings of the two families had seen this same arrogance and open dislike on the part of one, this same quiet strength on the part of the other. Westcott in scarlet tunic and top boots meeting Labrette in gray frieze and buckled clogs, Westcott in broadcloth and silk stock meeting Labrette in hand-woven tweeds. Here was all that Pierre hated, even as his ancestors had hated it—the gentle smile, the inscrutable eyes, the half-amused, ironic bow, stiff from the waist. Pierre's big hands shut and opened. Words—he hated words. He would like to use his hands on this fellow and shake away some of that accursed coolness. Thus, for a moment, they measured each other, then Lynn advanced and held out his hand.

"Mr. Labrette?"

"Yes." Pierre ignored the hand. He nodded curtly and flung his tan felt hat on the dresser. Lynn, with no clearly preconceived notions about the man he had to deal with, was not overly surprised. He gave no sign of being affected by Pierre's rudeness. After all he was Manon's father. One could overlook much—

"Won't you sit down?" he said. "I'm sorry I was not in when you called before. I had hoped to see you at your house today. It's too bad to bring you

back. I was over looking at the farm. I went through the old house. Lovely old place, isn't it?"

"I shall tear it down," said Pierre. "It's an eye-sore to me."

"Yes?" Lynn's back was to the light and Pierre did not see the gentle smile that twisted his lips momentarily, the quick lifting of his brows—as in an elder day a Westcott would have flicked from his lace-trimmed sleeve the dust of a peasant's insolence. "So you will tear it down?"

"At once. I have arranged already, in fact, to have it demolished. Well, to business, Mr. Westcott. I hold, as you know, a mortgage taken out by your father before his bankruptcy and death."

Lynn flushed at the studied bluntness of Pierre Labrette's words. He said nothing. Pierre continued. "The amount of this mortgage is five thousand dollars. It is really more than the farm is worth to me. The people who lent that amount of money were fools."

"Yet you took up the mortgage—bought it from them?"

Pierre looked at him sharply, and frowned. But Lynn's voice was low-pitched and level; his face inscrutable.

"I took it up, yes. Well, to make short of it; I will pay you three thousand dollars in cash, making the total price eight thousand dollars. If you like, we can go down to Laurent Pitre, the notary, at once, and settle the matter. I have my cheque ready."

Lynn looked at him, at the rugged, sun-baked face, the protruding, arrogant eyes, the pursed-up mouth and heavy chin. Once Colonel Giles Westcott had gazed in much the same way at Michel Labrette, and other Westcotts had gazed thus at other Labrettes through the years.

"You know, Mr. Labrette," he said easily, "you impress me as a very clever man."

Pierre said nothing. As far as he was concerned, the business was finished. He wanted to talk no more about it. Tonight, he would be master of more of the Tantramar than even the first Labrettes had owned, and the last vestige of these English interlopers would disappear with the demolition of the old Manor. The last of a hated breed wiped out, obliterated, and the long feud ended.

"Your buying up the mortgage was clever," continued Lynn. "Your writing to me and telling me you would buy my place was thoughtful and your offer of three thousand over and above the amount of the mortgage is

generous in the extreme. Oh, yes, and I forgot to bring in your thoroughness in arranging to have the Manor torn down. There is just one thing that you neglected to take into account and this omission in a man so able as you, amazes me."

"What is this? What are you talking about?" Pierre's dark brows contracted.

"You forgot to take into account that I might not wish to sell."

"What!" Pierre had tilted his chair against the wall. He let it fall forward with a crash as he jumped to his feet. "What do you mean—not wish to sell! Of course, you will sell. I'll make you sell! I'll—!"

"Make me? Really, sir, this is too much. Make me—I think not. The mortgage is due a month from now. I'll see that it's paid on the dot. And that, I think, is all that concerns you. Also, it settles all the business between us. You recall, you wrote me telling me you would buy the farm. I replied, saying I would come down and discuss the matter with you. I've done that. I'm giving you your answer now: I'm not selling."

"You—" Pierre's big fists clenched and his body trembled. For a moment he could not speak. Here was something, in this flat refusal, that he had never for a moment considered in his scheming. Why—why it was impossible, preposterous! What did this young jackanapes mean? Not sell the place! Not take advantage of his offer! He would be made to look like a fool—he who had boasted of what he would do with the Westcott place, how he would tear down the house and make turnips grow where the lawns had been. Now to be met like this—to be opposed so coolly by a youth, poverty-stricken, alone, but still with his share of the stiff pride of his house.

"You are a fool," he blurted at last. "You are broke, I know. If not, you will be when you settle for what your father owed. What are you going to do with the place, eh? Let it crumble to dust around you? Let the taxes eat it up? Maybe you will become a farmer!"

"Maybe," said Lynn. "Anyway, we'll see. Good day, M'sieur Labrette." He smiled slyly. "It will be nice for you to have a Westcott again for a neighbor, I dare say."

Pierre gave him a look dark with venom. His breath came hard. He snatched up his hat and clapped it on his head.

"You will be sorry," he said. "You had better reconsider. I will give you till tonight."

"You have your answer," said Lynn. "There is only one."

Pierre went out, banging the door after him. If the structure of La Maison Simard shook when he ascended the stairs, it positively rocked now. Luc was waiting below, ready with his obeisance.

"You will have in all the Tantramar now, Monsieur Labrette, the grandest farm—" Then he saw Pierre's face and his words ceased and his mouth hung open until Pierre had crossed the verandah and got into his car. Then the good Simard crossed himself thrice.

Chapter III

Lynn, with a momentary thrill of victory, stood listening to the fading thunder of Pierre Labrette's departing steps. From his window he saw Pierre throw himself into his car beside the same man who had met Manon at the railway station, and drive away in a furious cloud of good Westmorland dust.

Lynn rubbed his jaw and quite unconsciously fumbled in the pocket of his gray tweed jacket for his pipe, which he mechanically filled and lighted.

"Now," he said with the first blue cloud of smoke, "what in the world did I do that for! I'm the chap who was going to close the deal and get out of this place before another sunset. And here I am, signed up for good. Still, it was a pleasure to prick the bubble of Labrette's self-assurance. Phew! What a stormy customer the man is! A bit of a tornado surely! Evidently the little tyrant of these fields, used to dominate and all that. I never before saw such consternation on a man's face. He seemed to want the farm pretty badly. And he was going to tear down my house!"

Lynn smiled at "my house." Yet he knew it was his house and his, not by any right of purchase, but by the right of blood. What he would do with it and with those miles of marsh and upland, he had no idea. That, at the moment, didn't seem important. What was important, he felt, was this taking of a decided step, let the step lead into darkness or into light. When the mortgage was settled, as settled it would be, he would have little more than a thousand dollars to go on.

"That would buy me a cow, a pig, some chickens and a half-dozen packets of assorted garden seeds. And I wouldn't know what to do with any of them. It calls for thought, Don Quixote of the Tantramar—deep and sustained thought. 'Youthful Ex-Broker Heads Back-to-the-Land Movement. Westcott Buys Back Ancestral Acres in Acadia.'" He could picture the amused consternation of his friends in St. James Street, friends who saw before him a bright future in the realms of finance. They'd say, for a certainty, that he had gone crazy. And he wasn't sure that they would be so far wrong, at that.

He went downstairs as the angelus was ringing from the church of St. Benoit, clanging resonantly in the still air, in the hush that seemed to deepen

over the marshes. Fat Luc, still a bit white and shaky, was arranging the little table where Lynn took his meals. It was set in the bay of the big window looking out on the village street. Luc's little black buttons of eyes searched Lynn's face to see if, perchance, Pierre had not blacked his eyes or given him a thick lip, but, to his wonderment and great relief, he found the young *monsieur anglais* smiling and untroubled.

He brushed away visionary crumbs as he settled Lynn in his chair. He straightened the cloth that needed no straightening, arranged the knives and forks and examined the cruets. He was bursting with curiosity, but he could not begin to question, certainly in no direct fashion. He coughed, however, and hemmed a little; then he said, "M'sieur will be leaving us soon, *sans doute*?"

"Not for a while," smiled Lynn.

"I thought now that m'sieur's business with M'sieur Labrette was terminated—"

"Oh, that's terminated all right," said Lynn, scanning the single-choice menu that Luc had laboriously scribbled. Formality was the word at La Maison Simard.

"I'll have the *consommé Julienne*, the roast pork with apple sauce, the *potats au gratin*, the creamed carrots, the buttered parsnips, the blancmange and the tea."

"M'sieur has forgotten the hors d'oeuvres!" Reproachfully.

"Oh, yes, and the sardines and pickles." Lynn put down the menu and stared at his clasped hands. "No, M'sieur Simard, I think I shall not be going away at all."

"Not at all, m'sieur!" Luc goggled. "But Pierre Labrette—he is buying your farm. He has all arranged to—"

"I'm not selling my farm. I like it here and plan to live here myself."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Luc's hands flew heavenward. "It was because of that Pierre looked like a madman. So purple was his face! And his eyes stuck out. *Seigneur!* You will be careful of that one. He is strong and without mercy, and he is shrewd." Luc's voice dropped to a hoarse, conspiratory whisper and he glanced nervously around the empty room. "He owns St. Benoit; scarcely a farmer but owes him money, scarcely one whose roof Pierre could not sell over his head when he willed. And there is one even stronger than he—the old one they call Grand'mere Marthe. She is the great

power, one says Pierre is but the agent. Even this excellent inn is owned by the Labrettes. You are unwise to anger him. He will take your farm in the end and pay you nothing."

"I think not."

"But you do not know, m'sieur. You do not realize—" Luc gritted his teeth and spread his hands tensely. "This land of yours, the Labrettes have always wanted it. They say it was once theirs—that I do not know. Anyway, they have much land now, more than they can use. But always Pierre says, 'I will have that Westcott place. I'll own it. I'll tear that house down and soon no one will know that ever was it there. More than a century and a half we wait for this; now it is come!' And you say, 'Now it has not come.'"

"I say, 'Now it has not come,'" laughed Lynn.

"But what will you do with this so great estate, m'sieur. You will—"

"Perhaps—now that's an idea, *mon vieux*—start a hotel in opposition to yours. I'll call it the Westcott Arms. And—let me see—I could build a golf-course, a swimming-pool—"

"But—" Madelon's voice, shrill from the kitchen, hailed Luc, demanding if he wished his guest to starve. Luc shrugged helplessly and ran. He served the excellent dinner in pensive silence, like a kind-hearted gaoler waiting on one condemned shortly to mount the scaffold and have his head chopped off. But Lynn's enjoyment of the good cooking was not at all impaired. His ramble of the morning had given him a rare appetite and he felt at peace with the world as he drank his tea and enjoyed the accompanying cigarette at the close of the repast.

It was then he saw her, walking down the village street. She wore white, a white felt hat, that drooped over her eyes, a white sweater trimmed with blue, with short sleeves, a white flannel skirt and sandals of black and white. She was so slim and straight, she walked with such swinging ease, her chin held high. He saw a little girl stop her and the child's lips form her name —"Manon!" And she bent and kissed the brown face and stood chatting to the young one, all unconscious of the gladness in the eyes that watched her from the screen of Luc Simard's fine geraniums in their fine tincans with beautifully lithographed tomatoes on their labels.

Presently she walked on, and Lynn was sorry. He could watch her forever, he knew. She was so cool-looking, so delicately strong, like a changeling among these sturdy Tantramar-folk, where the women were, as a

rule, thick of hip and shoulder and stout of ankle. She was a throwback, Manon, to some *grande dame* of ancient lovely France.

"I suppose Pierre would shoot me if I so much as said hello to her. He probably won't be fit to live with for a while and I'd love to know what he says about me. Not that it would mean anything to her. I dare say she doesn't even know who I am."

In which he was wrong. Manon was in the general store when he entered a little later to buy his tobacco. She was buying thread at the counter near the door. She looked up as he entered, gazed at him for a moment, then quickly turned her head and bent to inspect the bright silk spools the stout lady behind the counter was holding out to her. But Lynn had seen recognition in her eyes, in her pretty confusion. And his own heart sang.

He gazed at her, lost to all else in the world, careless of who watched him and deaf to the store-keeper's polite observations about the weather and the prospect of a good apple crop. He thought, looking at her: "Last night under the stars on the marsh, you were so close to me, Manon. I touched you, held you, and how warm and alive and utterly sweet you were. I could have kissed you. Why didn't I? I'd have at least that to remember always, if —" He could not admit the possibility of there being anything strong enough to keep him from her—not hate, surely; not a quarrel rooted in the past that should be dead.

He lingered, hoping she would be going out at the same time as he, but she stayed, chatting to the woman and not again looking in his direction, until, disappointed, he went away. After all, he had no right to speak to her, to presume upon their chance meetings. He knew what these little villages were for gossip and he did not blame her for seeking to avoid it. Tongues would wag and there would be speculation if Pierre Labrette's daughter were seen talking to this stranger. Everyone knew what Pierre thought of him and his. But it would be so good to have someone to talk to in this place where he knew no one. He was an outsider and probably would be one for years to come, if he stayed. Probably the Westcotts had always been looked upon as outsiders, and had cared little about the fact, neither choosing to be received into the rustic society nor feeling any slight at being excluded. They with their fine hunters and their dogs, their friends from the English towns of Dorchester and Sackville, on the edge of the great marsh, were sufficient unto themselves. But he, without those things, would have a very dull time of it. He began to have doubts. He put them aside. The best thing to do was not to think of the difficulties that lay ahead of him, not to ponder on what he would do with a big old house and miles of ground.

Ahead of him a wooden signboard, gold letters on black, projected over the street, announcing that here was located the office of Laurent D. Pitre, Avocat, Notaire, etc. This was the notary Pierre Labrette had spoken of. It was through this man that Lynn's father had borrowed the money on the farm.

Lynn opened the door and walked in. There was a wooden counter and a little gate, so little, in fact, that Lynn at once marvelled how a man of Mr. Pitre's bulk could ever get through it. Probably, mused Lynn, he used the back door.

Laurent, leaning back in his swivel-chair, was reading *le Soleil* and smoking a cigar. At Lynn's entrance, he lowered the paper and removed the cigar. He looked puzzled for a moment as if he wondered what this tall youth in gray tweeds of city cut could want with him. Then he got up ponderously, opened the little gate with one pudgy hand, stuck the other out at Lynn and said in a thin, squeaky voice, "I believe I am addressing Mr. Lynn Westcott, owner and proprietor of all that parcel or piece of land and buildings situate thereon, known as Westcott Manor."

"The very same," said Lynn. "How do you do, Mr. Pitre?"

Mr. Pitre looked over Lynn's shoulder. "Where is Pierre Labrette? He said he would be here with you."

"He has changed his mind."

"Impossible! He—why he—"

"He would buy the Manor at any cost, is that it?"

"Yes. No. I mean he had decided to take it off your hands. What am I to understand now?"

"I have decided not to sell the place." Lynn watched with approval the look of consternation that transfigured Mr. Pitre's elephantine visage. Slowly, that look faded and the notary's eyes rolled cunningly. "Ah," he said bowing, "I see. You wait for a little higher offer, eh?"

"You are wrong," smiled Lynn. "I am not holding out on Mr. Labrette. I have simply decided that, since the farm has belonged to our family for so many years, it should continue to belong to us. I am not selling to anyone, at any price."

"You are mad!" whispered Laurent. "Quite, quite mad. Come, think! What will you do with the place? And the mortgage which so soon comes due, what of that?"

"I will pay it when it comes due."

"But you are poor! Pierre said—" The notary coughed behind his thick fingers.

"Yes?" Lynn smiled. "Pierre seems to know a great deal about me. He seems, too, to have had everything cut and dried before I came. Well, I have decided otherwise. I can pay. And I plan to live at the Manor myself."

The good Pitre shook his head several times, staring pop-eyed at Lynn. "All this you told Pierre, too, eh? You are a brave young man. A rash one. You must have made him furious. Why, do you not know that he has spread it all over the Tantramar country that he would shortly own the Westcott farm, that at last it was to become the property of its rightful owners? If he does not get it, you make him look ridiculous; that is something he cannot stand. You thwart him, and he is very strong, very powerful. He will have your farm in the end, my young friend. Mark me!"

"I do not see how—"

"You will see. I beg that you reconsider. It may be—it just may be—that I can get Pierre to offer a little more money and—"

"You waste your time. If you would be of help to me, tell me where I can hire a man and a woman. I want them to clean and fix up living-quarters for me."

The notary shrugged resignedly. "That is easy. There is Bonnefoy Gaudet and his mother. They will be glad of the work. When would you like them to come, m'sieur?"

"Early tomorrow morning. I shall be there. This Gaudet is not too young to be of use? I want a man who can do carpentry and the like."

"Eh?" Laurent gaped. "Oh! Oh, no. He is not too young, Bonnefoy. He can do anything."

"Just the man I need then. Well, goodby, Mr. Pitre. And thanks. I am going up to Moncton this afternoon to buy some furniture for my house—a bed and a table, a chair or two, a rug."

Laurent gazed at him sadly, much as Luc Simard had done. In silence. He heaved a vast sigh, the force of which seemed to waft Lynn out the door and whistle mournfully around his ears as he walked back to the inn to prepare for the short journey to Moncton.

He had very little time, Luc Simard told him, to catch the train. It would be necessary to move with all quickness. So Lynn ran down the road to the station, sprinting the last ten yards and boarding the train just as it pulled out of St. Benoit. He stood for a moment in the vestibule of the last car, to get his breath; then he strolled back to the cool comfort of the rear-platform where one could smoke and stretch and watch the receding landscape. He thought of yesterday's ride on the observation-platform; of Manon.

And he saw her, standing out on the platform, just as she had stood that other day, but she wore the white lace-work sweater and white flannel skirt now and the droopy white felt hat.

"What luck!" he muttered. "What great good luck! But I must walk softly. She takes fright so easily, that girl."

He walked through the car, empty except for the radio-operator and a couple of old gentlemen reading magazines. He opened the glass door and stepped out onto the platform. She did not hear him. He watched her for a moment, loving her—the slim beauty of her shoulders, her graceful height, the boyish lines of her young body. Quietly he slipped into a seat corresponding with the one he had sat in—was it only yesterday?

"Lovely, isn't it?"

He saw her start, saw her hands tighten on the rail. She turned her head quickly and looked at him with instant recognition, with something in those velvety black eyes that made his heart-beats quicken. Her mouth seemed to tremble on the edge of a smile, but she did not smile. "Good day, m'sieur," she said.

He got up and stood beside her. She watched the ribbons of steel that unrolled behind them. He looked at her, happy to be thus near to her. Happier than he had ever been. It baffled him, the strange, heady rapture that the mere sight of this Manon Labrette could bring to him.

"We seem fated to meet," he said. "This is three times in less than twenty-four hours."

"You knew me then," she said huskily, "last night by the Great Dike?" The rose flush crept to her cheeks. She thought of the strong clasp of his arms, of his lips so close to hers.

"I knew you in an instant. I learned your name then—Manon."

"Oh!" That familiar nacreous flush deepened and spread; her eyes were averted from the directness of his gaze.

"My name is Lynn Westcott," he continued. "You and I are going to be neighbours. We are going to be friends, if you're willing."

She laughed. Slowly she shook her head and looked at him. Her words were secondary to the beauty of her eyes; their blue-black color seemed tangible, so vivid was it. Still, he heard her say,

"My willingness would have nothing to do with it, M'sieur Westcott. My father would never permit it. He was already your enemy; now he is ten times your enemy. Why did you make him so? Why did you refuse to sell him your place?"

"For many reasons." His voice was quiet, level, conveying by its tone more than it did by its utterance. "I think I could be very happy at St. Benoit." His eyes compelled hers. She looked again at him for a moment, then quickly away, the long black lashes fluttered in unstudied coquetry. Did she know, he wondered wildly, how lovely, how desirable, how maddeningly desirable she was. Or was she just a simple convent girl, naïve, dull, afraid of herself, afraid of him, of life, of love.

"Was I one of those reasons?" The question, so sudden, so direct, answering all his speculations, even while it quizzed him, almost swept his self-control away.

"You were, Manon. And you know it."

"I didn't know it." She hesitated. "I—I hoped it. That is all. It can mean nothing to you or to me. Nothing, I tell you. My father, my grandmother, my brothers—all against me. See—" She smiled quickly, "how I can talk to you today? How I am not—not afraid of you?"

"Are you not?" He moved closer to her. "Look at me."

She kept her eyes down for a moment, then slowly, bravely, raised them. "I am looking at you, m'sieur."

Recklessly he slid an arm about her and kissed her mouth. He felt a momentary response, a warmth, a hunger that matched his own. In that blind, instant caress that neither of them could help, that left each of them somehow cold and spent, something was welded between them, something strong and of all time, something that dwarfed that brief kiss, as the fire a spark has kindled makes nothing of that spark.

Lynn released her, looked at her gravely. "I could not help it, Manon. It had to come. I love you."

She was silent, not looking at him, looking afar off. She was thinking of Millicent. She was seeing the look in Millicent's eyes when Millicent spoke of that boy who had kissed her, and she knew now that the same look must be in her own eyes, and she knew what it meant. A great, flaming beauty had suddenly burst to life within her, a new world opened its colored vistas and beckoned to her—and she could not enter.

"And you?" he said. "I suppose you do not care—?"

Her gaze came back to him, dark, level, intent. "I do not lie to you, as I think you do not lie to me, *cher*; I love. There could be no other name for what I feel. I have never felt it before, but I know what it is."

His hand clamped down on hers, hard, and he smiled down into her eyes. Thus for moments, rich with rapture, they stood while the train clicked on.

"You make me very glad, Manon," he said at length. "I cannot tell you how glad. But you—that man you were with last night, the one you ran away from?"

"That is the man I am to marry, Marcel Vaubin."

"The man you were to marry, you mean."

She shrugged with a suggestion of youthful fatalism. "I shall yet have to marry him. It is all arranged."

"You can't marry him. You don't love him!"

Manon shrugged and smiled with young bitterness. "Our marriages are not all made that way. My father wants it. They all approve. It will be."

"It won't be. I'll take you away from them. I want you myself. I love you and you love me. We can be married now, at once."

"I dare not. I should be afraid. My family would disown me, they would be furious. What is worse, they would do some harm to you. And would you really marry me? You have only seen me three times—twice, for last night you could not see me."

"I have always seen you, gallant damozel," he said laughing. "Throughout the ages we have known each other and loved each other."

"Oh! As ghosts, you mean—spirits?"

"Well, if you insist on being practical, Manon."

"Not that. I was just wondering if you could figure for yourself a way by which we could become spirits now." She was for a moment gay. "We might

meet sometimes then. As it is—I do not know. One thing—" She turned to him with charming seriousness and laid a small finger on his lapel. "When we get to Moncton, you do not know me, and on the train returning, unless I go like this—" She pushed up the tip of her nose—"that is a signal we used at school, to fool the good Ursulines—you must not know me."

"But why? I thought we could have tea together, go to a show—"

"If we even say goodby, Lynn, it may be our last word. My cousin, Chloe Belliveau, will be at the train. I go to buy white silk for fête-Dieu. If Chloe sees anything, she will want to know and some of my family will surely hear—she is such a one to chatter, so like a brook—and then—"

"Why are you so afraid? You say you love me. I believe you. And I love you madly. Why then should we be ashamed of it? Why should we not meet, go together, let everyone see that we are in love?"

"Please!" She held out her hand beseechingly. "Please try to understand. It is not that I'm afraid—it's only that I want to see you, to have you for even a little while. And I should never see you if my father learned that I wanted to. He would send me away at once or lock me in my room."

"You mean, then, that we have to meet secretly, like a pair of thieves!" he said angrily.

"Or lovers," she amended softly.

He smiled, looking gravely at her. "I don't care," he said, touching her eyelids with light finger. "I don't care. As long as I know you love me, that we belong to each other—well, nothing matters."

"I wish it were really so. It is not like that. If you had heard my father today and seen him—*Sapristi!* you might not feel so easy."

"What can he do?"

"Anything."

"But you're not serious! This isn't the seventeenth century. There's nothing that he can do to me. He holds a mortgage on my place. I can pay that. There's nothing he can do to you. We love each other. We have a right to love and no one can deny us that."

She waved a white index finger in front of her, back and forth. "You underrate him. You do not know. You are poor; he is rich. You are young and clever; he is old and—you have no word for it in English—we say, '*rusé*.' Today, he and Grand'mere Marthe and Lucien and Ludovic confer. It is very

solemn. *Bon Dieu*, so solemn! They drink Beaujolais or Port and eat cheese, and they will perhaps, decide to cut off your head, my poor Lynn—that lovely brown head."

"You are a terrible tease, Manon. I did not think you were like that."

She laughed gaily. "Yesterday I was not like that. Now I am happy, even while I feel sad when I think of what is to come. I shall be Madame Vaubin. *Bien!* And why should I not be gay?" Suddenly she was not gay. "The next time you see me, I may be crying. You will not like that."

"I will not have you cry."

"You can do nothing about that. Ah, it is all so impossible. I could cry now; instead I shall laugh. I shall be happy now for I am with you. Am I not a bold girl? Now, come, sit down and tell me what you will do with your great farm, Milord Westcott. If you will be arrogant and haughty, like all Englishmen in the history books, to the poor tenants. If you will keep many servants. If you will go in for mixed farming or raise only thistles. Tell me, M'sieur. I am sworn to secrecy."

Gallic mischievousness danced in the black eyes. She pulled him down on a seat beside her. The spell of her shyness had vanished with a kiss, the years of dreaming in a convent-garden, of gentle repression, were like pent-up waters, released now and flowing sweetly, strongly, through their floodgates. It was another Manon Labrette, one whom Soeur Angelique would scarcely have known, who sat beside Lynn Westcott, chin on hands, elbows on knees, and watched him with sparkling eyes while he talked of what he planned to do: he would fix the place, he would stock it as best he could; he would hire a good man to manage it and advise him. At first it would be nothing great. They would have to do without many things. Always he talked of him and her. But she would like it there with him. She would love it, for they would be always together.

"It is brave," said Manon. "It is very grand." She looked at him fondly. "It is like young Louis, *p'tit Louis*, my brother, a very little boy, telling of the airships he will build and fly."

Lynn grasped her wrist strongly. His mouth was grim. "You do not believe me then! You egged me on to talk only that you might make fun of me."

She shook her head. Her mouth quivered. "I believe and I hope and I love—my Lynn. You know those words—believe, hope and love? We were

taught to use them of God. It is strange. Now I use them of you." Her eyes misted.

He kissed her wrist where his fingers had hurt it and she dropped on his bent head a kiss he did not feel, and she shook away the mist from her eyes before he straightened up and said, "Forgive me, Manon."

"Forgiven. I did not mean to hurt you either. Oh, not for all the world would I hurt you. I would rather die."

They looked at each other in smiling contentment. How quickly, he thought, they had come to the stage where words are not needed, where the presence of the beloved, alone, suffices. His eyes drank in the beauty of her, the flawless skin, the exquisite contour of her neck, sweeping up to that firm, slightly pointed chin. What a heaven to have her always near him, just to gaze at her, to adore her. He let himself be swept on in the rushing tide of his desire, let himself go gladly, far beyond the point of ever returning. This was not the love of a day or an hour: this was of all time, eternal.

"Oh!" He thought of something. He produced a little black notebook from his pocket, carefully opened it and handed her a triangular bit of yellowed paper. She stared at it curiously, and from it to him.

"What is this?"

"I found it in the drawer of an old desk in the study at the Manor, only this morning. It seemed like a good omen. I was thinking of you, of course. And then, to find this away back in the drawer, where it must have been for ages—'*Pour Toujours—Manon*'. Who was this Manon, do you know?"

"Yes. I think I do." Manon frowned. "I have seen this writing in an old *paroissien*—a prayer book—of Grand'mere Marthe's. It belonged once to this woman. She was Manon Girard, who married Michel Labrette. I have heard Grand'mere Marthe speak of her. She married Michel; it would be about 1770. She lived to be over a hundred. She was living when Grand'mere Marthe was married. From her Grand'mere Marthe, who is now a century old herself, learned many things first-hand—things that are in no history book. My brother, Lucien, who is writing a history of our people, is forever consulting Grand'mere. She has everything on her fingertips. She is strong. She is proud. She is like a hawk, so sharp."

"She would probably know then who it was to whom Manon Girard wrote this letter."

"No doubt. But who would dare ask her! Your house, you know, is built on the site of our first homestead. Maybe some of our property, some letters

or the like, fell into the hands of your wicked people. You took my ancestors' lands and now you return to take the hearts of their children. You should have shame, m'sieur." Her hand nestled in his, confidingly.

"It was you who conquered me, Manon—with a single look. I surrendered at once and the surrender is permanent."

"*Pour toujours, hein?*"

"*Pour toujours, Manon*." Her hand trembled in his and his fingers closed on its warm softness.

At Moncton a blonde girl, older than Manon, was waiting for her. Lynn saw them drive away in a gray coupe. She looked back at him, smiled with her eyes. He stood watching until the car vanished into the shadows under the viaduct. He whistled softly, happily, and strolled along, filling his pipe. The sunlight was warm, golden, soaking into his pores, enlivening him like some potent elixir. He had never felt quite so good, so glad to belong to a world so lovely. Could twenty-four hours make such an enormous difference in a man's life? He had passed through this little town yesterday, anxious to reach St. Benoit, to obtain as much money as he could for the farm and get back to Montreal—the Montreal of the Ritz ballroom, of the University Club, of quiet horseback rides up the Mount, of teeming, colorful life. He had been fancy free, with no thought in the world that soon a pair of black eyes would hold his hope of heaven and a little red mouth his promise of happiness.

He found a furniture-store in Main Street and bought there his bed and bedding, his chairs, a rug and some other odds-and-ends. It was fun. Someday, he thought, someday soon, I'll come here with Manon and she will buy things for us. He made little of all her objections, all her doubts. These were just a young girl's timid fancies. Soon she would be his wife. She loved him—loved him. It was a delicious prospect and the salesman spoke to him three times before he came to earth.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Yes. Send them, please, to St. Benoit, on the train this evening. The name is Lynn Westcott."

Leaving the furniture-store he went to the hotel across from the station to write some letters. Not many. There were two or three men, friends and business associates of his father's, who would like to hear from him and who should be told about his plans; there was a letter to Morley Cross, who had hoped to have Lynn as a partner in his brokerage-business. Morley was

a comer. In a few years he would be a big man and Lynn knew that Morley would pull another man along with him. It had been almost understood that Lynn would go to work with him on his return.

"This," Lynn wrote, "is a bigger gamble than the stock-market ever was. But I'm having a shot at it. I'll be glad to leave my money with you, though, until the mortgage comes due. I'll want it then, and I hope this won't bother you. I simply have to have the old house back. It belongs to me and I to it. I've had something like a revelation, down here. I can't explain it to you, for I do not really know what came over me when first I saw the place and wandered through the rooms. It was as if a lot of ghosts welcomed me back and would reproach me if I went away. I hope I haven't let you down, Morley. I know, of course, that there are lots of chaps who will jump at the chance to go in with you, so it won't matter to you one way or another. When I get settled at St. Benoit, I hope you'll come and see me. I have lots of room, anyway—"

Morley Cross, Lynn knew, would never understand. This was really the first time he himself had had a chance to stand off and observe his contemporaries and to see running through their lives the same dull pattern that had started to inform his own. Money was the word. Money, and what it could buy, and what it could do, and how much of it you could get and how you could get it easily. Love, in that life, was usually a stepping-stone to social preferment. Love was calculated as coldly as the likelihood of an investment to yield a good return. It took on something of the nature of a business-proposition and dollar-signs adorned the nuptial trappings.

He posted his letters, bought some magazines and newspapers and went to the railway station, taking a post by the door where he could be sure to see her. There was still a half hour to wait. He kept watching the slow-moving hands of the station clock. He wondered if the thing had stopped. He compared it with his own watch which he put to his ear, doubting its power of movement. She did not come until five minutes of train-time and there were two extra girls in the gray car now.

Lynn swore. How he loathed those girls. Why, oh why, couldn't she have returned alone! He gathered that one of the girls was going on the train with Manon. It was too much. It was cruel. Here he had been counting the seconds until he could be with her again, and now—Once he caught Manon's eye, and she shook her head guardedly. Lynn, with his index finger, pushed his nose skyward and looked very rueful. He saw her smile, but that was all. In the train he sat across from them—Manon and a girl she called Millicent, a girl with clear blue eyes and blonde hair, a jolly girl, Lynn

thought, or she would have been if she weren't playing the unconscious gooseberry. She looked at him, appraising him, even while she talked with the rapidity of a *mitrailleuse* to Manon, who gave no sign that she knew him.

Lynn read his papers—tried to. But he could not keep his eyes off Manon. He could not stop thinking. "I love her. I kissed her just a few hours ago. How I'd like to kiss her again. Her mouth seems made for kisses. Yet she makes you feel afraid and unworthy and crude. Makes you wonder if the happiness you feel isn't something lovelier than you're entitled to. It's like something not of earth, too good for earth. What will Labrette say when he finds out we love each other? Anyway, what's it matter what he says? He has to know soon. We can't make a hole-and-corner affair of it. That's not fair to anyone. She can't be so much under his thumb as she says—"

He was wrong about that. Manon was thinking, too, as she sat there, blessing Millicent D'Aigle for being the sort of girl who talks for the delight she takes in talking. Millicent never required an answer. If, by chance, she did ask a question she answered it herself. She knew all the answers. Manon heard the steady stream of chatter as the canoeist, drifting in a quiet bayou, hears afar off the insistent hum of the waterfall. Millicent was rapturous: she had met again her lover. He had kissed her again. He had said they would be married soon. He was wonderful. He was going to be a great doctor. After he was finished at McGill he would go to Edinburgh and to Vienna. Millicent had been forced to tear herself away from him to go visit a tiresome old aunt at Painsec. She would be going back to Cocagne tomorrow. Would tomorrow ever come? She would be with him all summer.

Manon paid scant heed to all this. She was near Lynn. Her thoughts were all of Lynn. How fine and strong he was. How gentle—not like Marcel Vaubin. And how quickly and beautifully his love had been given to her. Of course it was hopeless. It wasn't her father alone she would have to defy: it was the Labrettes, generations of them, scores and hundreds of them, no one of whom had ever married outside of their own race. She could see them all arrayed against her like an army—Grand'mere Marthe who was the head of the clan and ruled them all, who was more powerful and cunning and relentless than any other; Pierre, Lucien, Ludovic, even young Louis, already tainted with their pride and arrogance, their blind loyalty to their own blood and purblind hatred of all outsiders.

She could defy them perhaps, run away from them and into Lynn's arms. Then they would hate her as they did Lynn, and hate him more for having presumed to love one of their women. "They must not know," she decided.

"I must make him see that it will be worse for us both if ever they find out that I even know him. Then I can see him some times, I can have his love for a little while. I must be content with that. And I must be as cunning as any fox. Grand'mere Marthe is the one to watch out for. Her eyes are like gimlets. I know. Last night when I looked out the window, when they were talking of Lynn, she laughed. Such a strange laugh! I did not guess then, but I saw her looking at me afterward, as if she knew. Perhaps she can tell, just by looking at my lips, that he has kissed me. If they find out, I'll go to a convent for sure, or to Marcel Vaubin. They'll make me."

Millicent, as the train drew near Painsec Junction, prepared to depart. Lynn's heart leaped. He could have jumped with joy. He could have kissed Millicent goodby, just as Manon did. Manon walked out to the vestibule with her. Lynn waited eagerly. There was no one else in the car to bother them. They could sit out on the platform and watch that sunset that was a mad mélange of crimson, gold and orange. Manon, Manon, Manon, clicked the wheels over the points. Then the train stopped briefly and Manon came back. Her face was rueful and she looked at him warningly and rolled her eyes and shook her head. Behind her walked a tall curé, in cassock and sugar-loaf hat. His face was stern, his gray eyes very direct and challenging, his hair long and iron-gray. He sat beside Manon in the place Millicent had vacated.

He talked to Manon as to a little child. His French was slow and clear, Lynn could hear and understand. He wished, somehow, that he could not understand. It did him no good, the curé's coldly gentle speech. It angered him. Manon's cheeks were flushed. She was uneasy.

"Your good father," said the curé, "tells me that very soon you will become espoused. It is well. Marcel Vaubin is a fine young man. He will make as good a husband and father, I have no doubt, as you a wife and mother. How fast you children grow! It seems only yesterday they brought you to me to be baptized, now you will come to me to be married."

"*Non, m'sieur le curé—*" Lynn saw her cheeks whiten and the dark eyes flash, "they will bring me to be wed."

"Eh!" The gray, probing eyes of Père Maillet searched the girl's face. "Bring you? What is this! You jest! You come of your own free will, of course, and in obedience to the wishes of your father and your grandmother, who know best. You feel no call to the life of a religious?"

"*Non, mon père*."

"Then it is all right. You will be very happy. It is just some maiden shyness." He patted her hand.

Lynn got up so abruptly that the curé looked at him, thick brows lifted. Lynn bowed and walked out onto the platform. He could not listen any longer. He could not bear to see Manon suffer. Better now he understood her plight. He saw how differently these people looked upon such things as marriage. It was a tradition with them that the parents should have the say. How, they reasoned, could a young girl know her own mind. She might throw herself away on some good-for-nothing. She should be directed to her choice—"of her own free will, and in obedience—"

Lynn smiled grimly. He loved her, that was sure; and she loved him, but the course of their love was not going to be easy. Her family was a fortress which held her prisoner, even while it sheltered her. He had to raid that fortress, he alone, and take her away and guarantee her happiness. And he had little or nothing to give her, except his love.

He stayed on the platform until the train puffed into St. Benoit. He watched the night close lightly down over the marshes, intensifying their loveliness even while it peopled them with rustling shadows, with strange wind-voices and mysteries that awed one. Small and insignificant he seemed, a fly on the edge of an ocean. And his vague dreams, his love, seemed far away.

He felt leaden and depressed. The hours ahead loomed grim and lonely. He waited until the train stopped, then went inside to get his papers. She had lingered behind, gathering up her own few parcels, the curé's rusty black shoulders vanished through the corridor to the vestibule. Lynn walked beside her into that dimness and quickly, then, she turned to him, and her arm went about his neck and her lips sought his with a hunger that rejoiced him and lifted him out of the slough into which he had sunk.

"I love you," she whispered. "Only you. And if you love me—"

"How I love you, Manon!"

"Then be careful. Even now, wait until I am well off the train."

He waited. She was driving away in the car with Lucien, when Lynn stepped down and walked towards the inn, looking at the new stars and loving them and loving life and filled with new hope; no longer lonely, no longer afraid of the hours ahead, each one of which brought him nearer to her.

Chapter IV

Grand'mere Marthe always sat in her room, in her high-backed oak rocker, from five o'clock until Jeanneton struck the gong in the hall below that summoned the family to the evening meal. Grand'mere Marthe loved to watch the sunsets. They were always different, each from the others. She classified them into red and yellow sunsets, blue and gold and fire-sunsets. But there were never two alike.

Never two alike in all the long, long decades she had watched them. They mocked at the sameness of the world over which they shed their wonder and magnificence; they flouted the drabness of men's lives with their gorgeous coloring, but to those with eyes to see—and, oh, how sharp, how seeing were these old eyes that watched them!—they held out a beauty rich in its solace, in its power to uplift the heart and bring it nearer to God. Grand'mere Marthe watched the sunset tonight with loving eyes and as the angelus clanged out from the tower of Père Berthelet's gray stone church, she murmured:

"'From the morning watch, even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord, for with Him there is mercy; and with Him plentiful redemption.'"

This was an angry crimson sunset and against it the tree-spired ridges of the hills above the Tantramar were blackest black. Many a strange and elfin shape were those dark ridges: now a sable host with spears held high, with crimson banners streaming, marching against the wall of flame that was the sky: now a crowding horde of humped and gnomish forms sprawling over the backbone of the world; now a stately city of darkest night with high-flung pinnacles that sought the evening-star, with Gothic tips and many a sooty minaret. Dinner was late tonight. Manon would not return from Moncton until almost dark. Lucien had gone to Cormier Village to study some old letters that a fiddler named Gil Corbeau had found in a chest in his attic. But Pierre was around. Presently, she and Pierre would sit in conference. He was downstairs in his study, writing letters. He had been there most of the afternoon.

Ah, that red, flaming sunset! Pierre's face had been almost as red when, at noon-time, he returned from St. Benoit. He had flung the car-door shut with a crash that almost broke the glass. He had given the house door a harder bang and stamped through the hall like a madman, his mouth

working, his big fists clenched. Grand'mere Marthe knew his rages and his humors; she knew the rages and humors of all the Labrettes. She had seen and known more Labrettes, probably, than any other woman who married into that turbulent family, save Manon Girard, who had lived longer than Marthe, in more rugged times, when it was easier to know people.

It wasn't so easy to know people nowadays. Pierre, she knew, and could read like a book printed in large type; Ludovic, who had fought in the war and had been more silent on his return than before his going, she also knew as well as it is possible to know a man who seldom speaks; Pierre's brothers and sisters, her other children—doctors, lawyers, priests, nuns, house-wives—she knew all of them.

But there was Manon. She didn't know Manon. An old, old woman, she thought angrily, should know a young girl's heart. An old one like her should be able to look into that fresh young heart and have its innermost secrets. Yet into Manon's heart she saw only as through a glass darkly and it was her impatient hope that Time, whose power she knew so well, would shed a clearer light. It was hard to remember what your heart had been like eighty-five years ago. You were a fool, of course, as all young people are. You did the foolish thing more readily than you did the wise one. It had been all settled long since that Manon would marry that big farmer, Marcel Vaubin; even Manon had seemed to understand that it was the fitting thing to do and had appeared to consent. Now there was some funny business afoot.

Pierre would settle it. The old dame smiled wickedly and rubbed her chin and shook her head. Pierre was the one to fix such matters. Of course, he always consulted her because she was the head of the family, because, too, she was rich with the fortune Emile, Pierre's father, had left in her charge until she should go to join him. So Pierre deferred to her. But secretly, she knew, Pierre thought of himself as supreme, and of her as old and finished, even though her mind was vastly more nimble than his own and her thoughts far more comprehensive; even though the farming schemes which had improved the land and made him prosperous had come from her, who once could do a man's work in the fields any day; even though she was tall and strong and filled with the wise power of the years.

Presently now Pierre would come to confer with her. It was only a gesture on his part. He would already have made up his mind and all he wanted was the formality of consulting her. Secretly, she knew, he looked upon her as doddering and senile, and sneered at the awe with which the countryfolk regarded her and the veneration with which they spoke her name. He was the real power, the head of his house; his word, the very last

in all its grave decisions. If he asked her opinion it was only to humor her; if he acted on her advice he did so in such a way as would indicate that she had merely advised what he had already decided upon. All of which made the old lady smile, for anger in her now was a passion that it would take much to arouse—certainly much more than Pierre's petty arrogance, his utter certainty in his own infallible judgment. But she was strong, and she knew her strength. It was greater than his, greater than the combined strength of them all. It could crush them, easily, if need arose.

Jeanneton came in with part of a Stilton cheese in a deep earthenware dish on a tray. The centre of the cheese had been scooped out and filled with dark ruby-colored Port. The old lady nodded her head with approval as Jeanneton set the wine-rich cheese on the table at her elbow. She sniffed it with relish and took a pinch of snuff from her round silver snuffbox and the snuff seemed to be scented with the mellowness of cheese and Port. Jeanneton set down two little bowls, blue-glazed on the outside, one at Grand'mere Marthe's place, one across from her.

"Pierre is coming up?"

"Immediately, Madame Labrette. He has just now dispatched Louis to St. Benoit with letters to mail."

"Ah, yes." The sound of Louis' bicycle-bell came up from the courtyard and Louis' shrill soprano bidding Matta, the white collie, to stay at home or the automobiles would most surely run over his useless carcass. The dog's sharp defiant barking ended in a yelp of pain and Pierre's gruff voice bade him, "Go lie down and cease this confounded uproar."

The silence settled again and Grand'mere Marthe could hear the droning of bees among the clambering-vines outside her window and the slow bells' chime as the cows were driven back to pasture; then Pierre's heavy footfall on the stairs and his burly figure in the twilight at the door, and the glowing tip of his cigar. And she thought of other Labrettes—Michael, Paul, Etienne, Emile—who had loomed there in the dusk long ago.

"*Bon soir, ma mere*." He came in and eased his bulk into the basket chair across from her.

"Well, Pierre?" She rocked complacently, but her sharp eyes watched Pierre as with a big wooden spoon he ladled out wine and cheese into the earthen-dishes. "You didn't get the Westcott place."

"No. Not yet." Pierre took a noisy spoonful of wine. Grand'mere Marthe took little spoonfuls, but three to Pierre's one. "I will have it though." He

wiped his lips with a huge square of handkerchief which he tucked deliberately back into his breast-pocket. "I will most certainly have it. You know what it means, *ma mere*, both to me and to all who bear the name of Labrette. You know how for more than a century and a half it has been a thorn in our side that these strangers, these oppressors of our people, should own the fields our fathers first settled on. Why, our very blood ran in those furrows: Have it—I should say I'll have it. What this young upstart means by his refusal of my offer, I do not know—perhaps some cheap city-trick he learned in Montreal. It will do him no good. He does not know it is Pierre Labrette he deals with now."

Grand'mere Marthe smiled thinly behind her dainty kerchief of fine lace. How big Pierre talked! How great a man he was now—lord of the Tantramar, master of great wealth, of many thousand acres. But to her still he was the blustering small boy, the Pierre who used to turn crimson and rave and weep when thwarted in the smallest detail and this man's-boasting of his was little different from the small boy's headstrong selfishness. How long, she thought, it takes for a man to grow. How, the pattern of his life once formed, he sticks to it nor deviates from it in the slightest. She said, at last:

"You will have it through the mortgage, eh? Five thousand dollars is a lot of money for them to pay, just to keep their farm. It doesn't mean anything to them. It hasn't for many years. And this one, I know, has never before seen the place. He wanted more than you could pay, eh? But you are wise, Pierre. You are like all the Labrettes—*rusé*. You will get the place for a song in the end when he cannot pay the mortgage."

"He says he can pay," scowled Pierre. "And I believe that."

"But why should he want to pay? What is it to him?"

"It's his 'home,' he thinks. He's going to hang onto it."

"Ah!" Grand'mere Marthe reflected. "He's different from his father and even his grandfather. They gave up farming to build boats and when nobody would buy the boats any more they were too soft and spoiled with easy money to work the land. They seemed, those Westcotts, to become weak in later generations. They were spoiled, I dare say, with too much wealth and they lost the art of working with their hands—a bad thing when strong people forget that their hands were made for blisters instead of jewels, Pierrot."

"It has never been so with us," said Pierre complacently. "We have been always strong, and in the end the strong will triumph."

"But this young man," persisted Grand'mere Marthe, "seems to be different—"

"Bah! He is soft—from the city. I know the type. If cocktail glasses and golf-stocks put callouses on a man's hand, why, then, he would have callouses." While he spoke Pierre had an uncomfortable memory of that strong lean visage, of those eyes so direct and fearless, of the twinges of peasant-inferiority that had come to him, enraging him, while he talked to Lynn Westcott.

"This one," continued the ancient dame implacably, "may be one of the old stock—what you call a throwback; the love of the land may be in his blood. I have known that to happen. It may seem to die in one generation, skip another, and crop out, stronger than ever, in the third."

"This one is a fool," grunted Pierre. "I read his letter, you read it too. It seemed to me from the tone of it that he was willing to sell then; as soon as he got here, he changed his tune."

"Ah! I wonder why." Grand'mere Marthe squinted across the marshes. "I wonder why. He had never seen the place before. He sees it once, then he wants to keep it. That's strange, Pierre. Unless it is as I have said, and it is in his blood, this fever of the earth. It is like a fever. You may have felt it; as if some strange power flowed from the ground on which you stood and you had kinship with it. Strange."

"Very strange! I'm sure he—" Pierre stopped talking and ate cheese.

"Eh? Sure he what?"

"Sure he can't make it go as a farm. And he hasn't enough money to live without work. The family is bankrupt. Time has dealt with them. They fired their guns and swung their whips and flicked their riding crops at us. Peasants, we were. Curse them! That's the way this upstart pup treated me today, as if I were a peasant. I, Pierre Labrette. I'll show him. I'll make him sweat blood and sweat out with it all that's left of their stinking, arrogant pride. We have the whip-hand now and we'll make the whip crack and he will jump."

Grand'mere Marthe watched him, nodding her head. He was big, Pierre; strong as a bull; violent of temper. His face was ruddy now and his breath came hard. Peasants, he had said. Yes, they were peasants, all of them, and he, after so many generations, more peasant than the rest. But was it not good to be a peasant? Was it not a good thing, with nothing of reproach in

it? She, too, was a peasant, but her pride was patrician and hers was a nobility sprung of honest blood.

"*Eh, b'en!*" Old Marthe scraped the sides of her dish for the last few crumbs of cheese, the last few drops of Port. "*Eh, b'en*, Pierrot, but if he can pay this mortgage, as you say, and will pay it, as he told you, I see nothing that you can do to keep him from hanging on to his farm."

"No. No, of course not." Pierre spoke perfunctorily, put down his dish and got up from his chair. "Something may happen though, to change his mind. It is a month yet. Many things may happen."

"Ah, yes," nodded Grand'mere Marthe. "Much could happen in a month."

"We want that land. That place is ours. It was never theirs by any right except that of conquest. They took it from us when we were weak and they were strong; now—"

"Ah, yes. Now we are strong and they are weak. It's like the tide of the Tantramar. Low, ebbed-away, down to a little silver thread in the mud, then it floods back. Fortunes ebb and flow like that."

"Our pride has never ebbed," said Pierre. "We have always been Labrettes. They couldn't change that, these domineering curs. We had our blood and our race, and neither whip nor scourge nor the threat of death or exile could make any difference there."

"No," said Grand'mere Marthe. "No, you can't conquer blood, of course —not by spilling it, anyway."

"They tried to conquer ours," said Pierre, "by spilling it, by scattering it like raindrops over the world. They tore our people from their homes, the solid homes they had built, uprooted them, drove them like cattle—babes-in-arms, children, old folk—onto the ships and let the winds determine the places where the exiles should be set ashore. Nothing of the Acadians should remain, not a stone of their building be left upon a stone. But they failed, and the conquered people have survived to become lords of the earth."

"Ah, *oui*," nodded Grand'mere Marthe. "That's so. And you talk like parts of Lucien's great book, Pierre. We have survived, that is the main thing; we have increased and multiplied and possessed the earth. We marry young and live long and bring forth many lusty children. As well try to stamp out dandelions as to destroy our people."

"Manon will be wed in August," said Pierre, strolling to the window, his broad back to his mother, his shoulders blotting out the scene she loved. She prodded him with her stick. He grumbled and moved aside. These old ones —Whatever did she see in gazing at the sun and moon as if she had never seen them before.

"That's soon enough. She has set the date, eh?"

"I have set it. I told Marcel Vaubin last night. I walked down the road a piece with him."

"That should be a good match."

"Of course. Marcel is all right. A bit wild, perhaps. He has one of the best farms in Westmorland and, anyway, he owes me money."

"That is important," said Grand'mere Marthe.

"So he is the one for Manon. She is shy. A young girl's way, you know. She would give him no answer last night. That disappointed me. It was not at all what I expected. I had arranged for it all to be settled at once. It is well for her to marry. A young girl, just out of the convent and suddenly let loose in the world is apt to be like a colt without a bridle. Not that Manon has ever been any trouble to us. She is quiet and obedient in all things. But Marcel was to have her answer last night. It doesn't matter much; there can be only one answer. He probably did not go the right way about it. They walked along the dike and she ran away from him."

"Did he run after her?"

"I don't know. What's that got to do with it anyway?"

"Oh, not much." Grand'mere Marthe smiled slyly.

"I should think not. A man would be a fool to go chasing a silly girl all over the Tantramar."

"Doubtless," muttered Grand'mere Marthe. "Ah, here now comes the train from Moncton. Manon will be on that. Lucien will meet her at the station on his way back from Cormier Village. I dare say he has material for a few more chapters of his famous book."

"It's a great work," said Pierre. "A work of value that we cannot estimate right now. In the history of our family one may read the history of our people. No family is more thoroughly representative of the Acadians than that of Labrette."

"Lucien tired of the law." Grand'mere had a trick, that Pierre imputed to old age, of going off suddenly on a new tack.

"He is doing nobler work in writing this book than he would by defending thieves or contesting wills."

"Not so profitable though."

"In money, no. But profit is not to be measured only in terms of money gained."

"Certainly not." Grand'mere Marthe grinned at the broad back. "No, indeed."

"I am proud to have Lucien at home, proud of his work. He is making a great name for himself among our people. His history will be read by everyone."

"I suppose it will be as good as most histories, at that. Here comes the car. Lucien drives fast."

Pierre stood at the window until the car stopped below. Manon got out. Louis had driven up with them, holding his bicycle on the running board. He followed the car to the garage behind the house. They heard Manon open the screen-door and come upstairs. She looked in at the door.

"*Bon soir, Grand'mere*." She did not notice Pierre; he stood in the shadows to the left of the window. Not until she bent and kissed the old lady did Manon see him there.

She jumped. "You startled me, father."

"You must have a guilty conscience, Manon," chided Pierre, smiling.

She was silent. Old Marthe clutched her hand. Wise eyes glittered up at her. "And did you buy some good stuff for your dress? Open the bundle and let me feel. Do not turn on the light, Pierre," she said sharply as Pierre walked to the door. "I want to watch the sky. Anyway, I can see more with my fingertips than most people can with their eyes, eh, *chere*?"

She reached up. Her fingers touched Manon's lips lightly; by chance, of course. Yet Manon drew away and hurriedly untied her parcels. Grand'mere Marthe frightened her sometimes. All day the old lady had sat there in her chair. She could know nothing of what had happened. She could never guess that Manon's lips still tingled with the first swooning kisses of love. Yet Manon knew those eyes, perennially young and black, were looking at her narrowly and wisely.

Indeed, to Manon, it seemed that all the world must see her happiness, that it must show in the bloom of her cheek, in the brightness of her eyes, in the softness of the red lips that he had kissed so fondly. Yet, all must know that the gates of a heaven more beautiful than that place whose charms the good nuns had so graphically pictured had been suddenly opened unto her, and her life had been flooded with wonder, with rapture. How good it would be to tell them all of her happiness, to have them share in it and be as happy as she. If only they could. If only they would try to understand. But between them and such understanding were barriers stronger than the great dikes of Minas, barriers so old, so set, so utterly formidable, that her spirit quailed and her heart grew faint before them. They would never understand, none of them. They would seek to destroy her happiness. So she clutched it jealously, frightenedly, to her, shutting them all out, resolved that they should never spoil it.

Grand'mere Marthe's long fingers felt the white silk with something like love. "It is good," she said. "And white is a lovely color—lovelier with black eyes and black hair, I think, than with any others. How beautiful you will look, my child, in the procession of fête-Dieu. Beautiful for some lover to gaze upon. Take care—take good care it is the proper one, Manon. Do not be a fool."

"What do you mean, Grand'mere?"

"There! There! I fancy things perhaps; I am very, very old and you cannot expect people who are very, very old to be quite strong in the head. You will know best. You will not do anything foolish, I am sure."

In the hall below, Jeanneton struck the gong. The sound waved through the house. Grand'mere Marthe stood up, straight and strong. She bent and laid her withered cheek against Manon's. Thus stood Age and Youth, in silence, looking at the last thin streak of carmine in the western sky, and Grand'mere Marthe said, "Pierre wonders why I watch the sun and love it so, Manon. He does not understand. I will tell you and you will understand; it is the only thing in life that does not grow dim or tarnished. It is always fresh and young, and looking at it I know it is the same this evening as it was when, like you, I was young and thought only of new white dresses for the feast—and of lovers."

"But, Grand'mere, I do not think only of—of those things." Manon's protest finished very weakly, for she knew it was Lynn who filled her thoughts to the exclusion of all else, even of the new white dress. In St. Benoit it was considered a great honor to be chosen as the one to lead the

procession of fête-Dieu, and other years Manon had wanted it very much. Now it did not seem to matter at all. She would be glad to step aside and permit one of the other girls who so much envied her, to take her place instead. Nothing mattered now except this sweet warmth that permeated her being, that brightened every hour and lent new beauty to the sky, to the grass, to the flowers and the songs of birds.

Grand'mere Marthe put an arm about the firm, slender shoulders, but leant no portion of her weight upon them as they walked out of the room and down the stairs. She could stand alone, could Grand'mere Marthe; even, she could lend support to others. In the hall, at the stair-foot, were Pierre and Lucien, Ludovic and Louis, their faces upturned to watch her and Manon. Her arm tightened about Manon's shoulders for a moment, as if it would give the young girl of its strength.

The low moving mists of morning still hovered over the Tantramar when, on the following day, Lynn left La Maison Simard and started for the manor. The river was hidden by rolling clouds of white, slowly scattering before the fervid onslaught of the sun; the grass wet with the gray dew that beaded on leaf and flower, and everywhere the gossamer had spun its fairy web. The robins piped gaily and the lark's soaring song enriched the beauty of the morning. Good to be alive on such a day; good to have found a finer, better reason for living; good to walk through dew-drenched grass under a clear blue heaven and to feel that one was coming into one's own. For a moment he stopped, closed his eyes and let the sun bathe his face with its warmth and light. "I begin to live," he said. "I begin to see a pattern to living. Strange that I should have to come here to these rustic solitudes to find it—I who have lived so long among those supposed to be the wise ones of this earth."

Half-way across the marsh, a tall figure in a huge flapping black felt hat loomed out of the vapor. It was a man, plodding slowly, a toolbox under his arm. Lynn caught up with him and gave him good-morning.

"Bonnefoy Gaudet," said the tall man. He was old. He was almost chinless. A dullish sort of fellow.

"Good grief," Lynn thought. "If he's the son, the mother must be a hundred. And—well, no wonder the lawyer looked at me when I asked him if Bonnefoy was old enough to be of use."

"Mother is ahead," mumbled Bonnefoy. "She gets around quicker than I do. That's because of the rheumatism."

"Do you suffer much from it?" asked Lynn solicitously.

"Not me. Her. It makes her go fast, she says, as if the devil himself ran behind and prodded her with his fork. She's a great woman, mother."

Lynn felt a touch of despondency. The brightness of the morning above the mists, began to dim. However, he had to admire Madame Gaudet's speed. She was waiting at the kitchen door, sitting on her scrub-bucket when he and Bonnefoy arrived. She bobbed up and curtsied. She was a little round body, with big glasses and wispy hair. She leaned on her broom, her head cocked to one side like an inquisitive sparrow, and gazed up at him.

Lynn opened the door. The dust and decrepitude of years depressed him further. He began to wonder where on earth to begin, when, with the speed of a dervish on a special prayer assignment, Madame Gaudet went into action. Lynn gasped at the spectacle. It was the best team-work he had ever seen. Bonnefoy had the fires roaring in no time. Madame darted here and there. Every receptacle she could find was filled with water and placed on the stove and she, with arms akimbo, stopped now and then to glower with a sort of sneering contempt at the cobwebs and dust. In short order, the scrub-brush was banging against the surbases, the dust was flying out the windows and Madame was singing a sort of triumphal chant as she mopped and scrubbed.

Bonnefoy was opening shutters, mending hinges, straightening barn-doors and swarming over the whole place like a regiment of carpenters rolled into one. By noon-time when Lynn's furniture arrived on the wagon-express from St. Benoit, his room was ready to receive his new possessions. By nightfall, the old house had begun to smile as the grime and grit of years was industriously scrubbed from its face. In a few days, Madame said, it would be all ready. It was a grand house, she added, and grand houses, like grand people, don't deteriorate or get so dirty as the shoddy kind. Always, she alluded to Bonnefoy as "the boy" and kept a pretty close check on him. The work went on apace.

Gradually, as when from some lovely old painting the layers of grime and the film of the ages are removed, the ancient dwelling emerged from the incrustations of time and showed its rare and mellow beauty. Teak and ebony, mahogany and rosewood, brought from far places in the great clipper-ships the Westcotts had built and sailed, disclosed their fadeless hue and finish; marble mantel and glittering chandelier reflected again the light of the sun that so long had been denied them; doorknobs felt the warming

touch of fingers and lintels bore the fall of friendly feet. Life flowed again in the old house, and it smiled and shone in beauty.

Three evenings later Lynn said goodby to the good Luc and fat Madelon and La Maison Simard and slept for the first time under the ancestral roof. After he put out his light he looked from the big window of the long room on the second floor that he had chosen for himself, across the stretch of marshland, at the single window high up in the side wall of the farmhouse of Labrette. It was raining gently, big drops plashing among the willows and touching the pane like soft fingers tapping. He wondered again if that was her room. If she had seen his light. If she was thinking of him. He had not seen her since their ride down on the train, though he had haunted the village. It was Saturday now. Tomorrow he would see her walking in the procession of fête-Dieu. He thought of that with deep satisfaction. Just to see her would be good, just to know that she was always near him made life livable until the time when they could be together for good. He had given much thought to his plans for the future. He felt sure that, with expert guidance, he could restore the farm to something like its former prosperity. At least, it would guarantee him a living. And he would work.

To the eyes of youth it looked attractive. Of droughts and pestilences, of frost and famines, he knew nothing. Here the richest land in the Tantramar belonged to him. It was a mine, from which, by brave digging, he could draw both sustenance and wealth. He saw nothing incongruous in the step he had taken, this step that brought him back into the past, of whose grandeur only the shell remained, of whose wealth and even opulence the ancient springs had long since dried up and vanished. He was Youth, and Youth ignores such things, for it faces a world that has no reality until Youth can view it from the other side—and Youth is Age by then.

Chapter V

The day of fête-Dieu, the Corpus Christi of the Roman liturgy, dawned warm and bright over the Tantramar. No feast so great as this, so loved and reverenced in the hearts of a people who cling with the terrible tenacity of strong, brown, work-worn hands to the ancient faith of their fathers. For weeks the preparations had been in progress: altars being erected and adorned with boughs of fir, spruce and cedar from the forests of evergreen; triumphal arches, beneath which the Host should pass in proud pageantry, taking shape under the pounding hammers and buzzing saws of the carpenters; choirs being drilled in the Latin hymns that should be chanted along the way; little children being taught the great solemnity of the occasion and how they should honor, by their reverent mien and good behavior, the great Father and Protector of their race, so much the Protector of their race that the urchins firmly believed that God was not only a native Frenchman but probably belonged to some of the Acadian townships.

From early morning of the eve of fête-Dieu a ceaseless stream of people straggled into St. Benoit, taxing its every accommodation, filling the shelters that had been hastily knocked together, overflowing into the fields and hedgerows. In the presbytery, Père Berthelet was host to the Lord Bishops of Saint John and Chatham, to the monsignori, the deanery and the rank and file of clergymen, from the outlying parishes and missions. The countryfolk came in ancient carts with sagging springs and mud-encrusted wheels; in noisy flivvers and rarely in a huge and gleaming sedan bought from the generous emoluments of lobster-canning. Indians, in strange and antic garb, civilization warring with the calls of beads and feathers, came on foot, with their patient squaws, their bright-eyed curious young ones. On the roadside banks the weary rested, the hungry ate the rude fare they had brought with them. Sturdy Jacques and buxom Marie and small Pierre and Jeanne and Antoinette and Etienne were there by the hundred, all filled with a happy expectancy, all keyed up in their swift emotional hearts, to the wonder and magnificence of the great Feast of God.

The winding street of St. Benoit was lined with saplings, cut in the woods and stuck in the clay of the gutters. Brave, they looked at first, but soon began to droop and wilt in the sun, like very young soldiers whose enthusiasm for battle wanes after a few hours of drill. The Acadian flag, the

Papal ensign and the Union Jack fluttered across the road from post to post and the great wooden arches covered with boughs of fir and cedar straddled the village street in imposing fashion.

The morning of the feast saw the crowd augmented by a thousand more as the cars streamed in from Moncton, Shediac and Cocagne; and at the hour of the procession the street, along the route, was lined three deep with people and hundreds of motors were parked along the way. The sun beat down, the heat rose in waves from the ground, dust lay powdery and dry on everything and everyone. A reverent hush hung over the mighty throng. Young eyes and old stared eagerly down the bannered route to catch the first glimpse of the procession, ears strained to hear the distant music of the band, the sound of voices singing the Vexilla Regis. The fervour of these thousands seemed to concentrate, to merge into one mighty emotion of piety, so impressive, so profound that even the pagan heart must feel its power, even the agnostic feel its tremendous lift.

Lynn, from his vantage point in front of La Maison Simard, heard afar off the music of the band playing a slow and solemn air; then the voices of girls chanting, and presently up the street the long procession hove into view —girls in white, with filmy veils and garlands of flowers, little tots with baskets of roses, strewing petals along the way, the thurifers with their clanking censers filling the air with the pungency of myrrh. Bishops, croziered and mitred; monsignori in their regal purple and priests in jewelled chasubles and surplices of splendid lace, and the high-priest holding the Sacred Host under the broidered canopy borne on four long poles held in the big white-gloved hands of chosen members of the flock, burly Acadians, stiff and sweating in their best suits and high collars, conscious of the gaze of the multitude and proud of the great honor bestowed on them.

Here walked the pride and flower of the people; here young and old joined in public profession of their love for their Creator and in their veneration of the Sacred Species, that most precious of gifts which God could give to man. Richly the voices welled into the clear summer air, bravely fluttered in the breeze the myriad banners and oriflammes and gentle lovely blossoms lay in the dust to make a carpet for His feet. Slowly, solemnly the great parade wound its seemingly endless length from the churchyard where it had formed, out onto the road that crossed the marsh, and back again towards the village.

Lynn had eyes for none of these wonders. It was Manon he saw—only Manon. Like a heavenly queen, like that loveliest of women to honor whose Son she walked this day, Manon looked to him. Her tall and slender body

was sheathed in shiny candent silk, a long veil of foamy lace hung down from the lace cap on her gleaming dark hair; her face was pale and proudly lovely, the great dark eyes looking straight ahead. So, he thought, must that one have looked who said unto Gabriel, the Angel of the Annunciation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word."

He watched her avidly, his heart big inside him, a queer feeling gripping him by the throat. She was so ethereal, so like some spirit come for a brief while to dwell among mankind. Yet he knew—he wanted to shout, to sing, to cry, to speak about her loveliness, to have everyone share in the ecstasy her beauty brought him. It was as if his look, so fixed and adoring, compelled her own. She turned her head slightly; she faltered as their glances met and held and locked for a moment—a moment long enough for their love to be re-uttered and again confirmed.

Then, with slow step, the little toes of her white satin shoes peeping out from under the long skirt, she passed on; and now he came again to earth: heard the singing, the music of the band, the slow, steady, muffled tramp of a thousand feet in the dust. And just as his own eyes had seemed by their longing to force Manon's to look at him, another pair of eyes drew his own gaze. But these were in the brown, wrinkled visage of a tall old lady, dressed in black and wearing a black cap, who sat in the tonneau of Pierre Labrette's car. Wondrously bright and piercing and brilliantly black were those eyes. Steadily, almost fiercely, it seemed to him, they watched him and gazed at and through him.

"That's Grand'mere Marthe," he thought. "And she saw what passed between Manon and me. Just a glance, never a word, but heaven alone knows what those eagle eyes wouldn't read into it." The car moved off, following the procession, but until it had gone, he knew the old one was regarding him. Even, he could feel the fierce power of her regard, long after she had gone. He pictured himself going to this old woman, the head of her house, or to Pierre, and saying he loved Manon and would marry her, trying to talk with the battery of those fierce, wild old orbs trained upon him—

He shook his head. Not all the eloquence in the world, nor all its logic, he knew, would help him there. He thought of Manon saying that they would have to meet like thieves or lovers, that it would never do for her family to know.

"Now the old lady does know," mused Lynn, moving slowly along in the press of the crowd. "And I wonder what will come of that. Maybe they will

hold a council-meeting of all the tribe and drag her before it for trial and sentence. And that fierce old girl will be the judge—and jury too, I should say, from the look of her. Well, I'm not afraid of them. For a girl like her I'm not afraid of anyone; but what a storm there will be when the family hears about it! It will be the worst hurricane that ever swept the Tantramar. And they look fierce enough to make it a convent or the marriage of their choice for her, and even a knock on the head for me."

The procession came at last to a great field at the end of the village, where stood the high altar embowered in evergreens, smothered with gorgeous blossoms. Onto the soft green turf streamed the vast concourse, there to perform beneath the basilica of heaven the last and supreme act of devotion and to receive God's benediction. There they knelt, heads bowed, in the warm grass, while the celebrant with deliberate tread mounted the altar steps and placed the Host thereon. The gold of the ostensorium flashed dazzlingly in the noonday sun, the tapers wavered yellowly, making a brave showing against the light of the world, the incense rose in vapory clouds and the silvern clang of the swinging censers reached the ears of the farthest in the prostrate multitude, to be drowned out suddenly as a mighty choir of voices burst forth in the Salutaris, tenor and bass and the seraphic soprano of little boys blending in gorgeous harmony. Then the Tantum Ergo and the brief, sung prayer of the priest. Still more slowly then he mounted to the topmost step, genuflected, lifted the gilded monstrance and turning to the people made with it in that tremendous hush on earth and in heaven, broken only by the sweet clang of the bells, the sign of the cross.

As a wave passing suddenly over a calm ocean the heads of the people lifted and a stirring, like the sound of a wave, a swift, rushing sound, moved over the kneeling thousands. The high-priest replaced the monstrance, finished the prescription of the ritual, descended the steps and prayed briefly. The people arose, the massed choirs thundered out:

Laudate dominum omnes gentes.
Laudate eum omnes populi—

And it was done.

Far more quickly than it had formed, the crowd melted away, a mingled stream of motors and horsedrawn vehicles and people afoot pouring over the wide white causeway of the marsh-road out of St. Benoit. A great day, this, in the simple lives of the people, a day to talk about, to recall often and with each recalling feel again some of its mystic beauty, its strength, its solace. Lynn, swept along helplessly, like a twig in a torrent, managed to grasp the stout rail guarding the steps of La Maison Simard, draw himself up and find

for himself among the busy diners a portion of Luc's roast duck and no less excellent trimmings.

That day there was a gathering of the Labrettes that was of the nature of a family council. Aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, to the number of a score or more, invaded the homestead after the procession was ended. There were Pierre's younger brothers, Alphonse, who was a magistrate, and Leon, who was a jeweller; with them their wives and some of their children. They were well-to-do: all the Labrettes were. Good cars they had, and good clothes and good opinions of themselves. Then there were the sisters, Evangeline and Celeste and Jeanne, who had married a doctor, a newspaper-editor and railway-official in the order named. With these three comfortable aunts of Manon's were their well-fed husbands. Cigars were passed freely, gold watch-chains glittered across ample waistcoats, bottles of cognac were opened and drunk by the men, and the women had Port from Pierre's cellar. The children played and wrangled with young Louis and were given milk and cookies by the grumbling Jeanneton.

"This," said Alphonse the magistrate, glass in one thick hand, cigar in the other, "was, in effect, one of the most splendid religious observances that the Tantramar has ever witnessed." He looked from face to face with sharp legal eye to see if any should be inclined to dispute him, but, by a nod or a murmur, all agreed. "Yes—" He cleared his throat—"it has been a *fête par excellence* and, in the fine old tradition, it was a Labrette—a Labrette, who, of all those beautiful maidens, was easily the most beautiful. In Manon, my friends, we have a kinswoman to be proud of, and you, Pierre, have in her a daughter who does you great honor."

"She is a good and obedient girl, Manon," said Pierre with a smile that said clearly, "It would go pretty hard with her if she dared to be otherwise."

Two young priests, Père Remi Morin and Père Noe Gautreau, distant kinsmen of the Labrettes, arrived with their shining ruddy faces and rusty black frock coats and were greeted with humble condescension by their affluent relations. While it was an honor for Pierre Labrette's table to be graced by representatives of Holy Church, it was likewise, Pierre thought, and the others with him, quite a break for the representatives of Holy Church, especially these hungry young *petits vicaires*, to be allowed their fill of the fine Burgundy and the richest viands, not to mention the society of such a splendid family as the Labrettes.

Lucien reported progress on his book to the admiring circle of aunts and uncles and cousins. Suggestions were made by the newspaper-editor as to printing and binding and distribution. Clerical references were commented upon by the two young priests. Histories of elder Labrettes who had attained eminence in Church and State were recounted and their pictures, remarkable mostly for the amount of whiskers, were proudly displayed. There was Serge Labrette, Lucien's great-uncle, who had been a noted doctor in Paris and had lectured at the Salpetriere; there was Armand, this man's cousin, who had been a high officer on the staff of MacMahon himself.

"No other Acadian family, I think," said Pierre complacently, "can lay claim to so many men of eminence and distinction among its members, not only in the past but in the present. We have kept the strong racial strain throughout the generations, and our children will continue to perpetuate it." Pierre looked at Marcel Vaubin, recently arrived, who had been one of the four men bearing the canopy in the procession. The aunts and uncles looked at Marcel too, and there were smiles and whisperings.

"I remember so well the day I was married," said Evangeline. The others did too, since she brought it up faithfully at every opportunity and never a gathering of the family but heard again that tedious history. "I was all of three-quarters of an hour late for the ceremony and poor Romeo waiting there all that time at the church. I've often wondered what he thought during that time; if he began to fear I had changed my mind and run off with someone else at the last moment. There was a someone else, too, waiting and eager."

No one knew who this vague someone else was, but he grew in mystery and menace each year, until the good little doctor, her husband, had really begun to think a desperate rival had trailed Evangeline to the very steps of the chancel, and that he was a decidedly lucky man to have got her—an opinion which no one else shared. He was bald and rotund of body now and Evangeline was thin and scrawny-necked, but on that long-ago day she had been a white princess and he a lord in splendid raiment. He looked fondly at her even now, poor man, and still saw beauty. "It was a lovely wedding, Angie," he said, "and my fears, as I waited, were just what you have said. I was a lucky man."

"Well, Vaubin," boomed Alphonse, "it would appear that any man who marries a Labrette—I won't say any woman—ha-ha—is lucky, *hein*?"

Marcel grew redder still and shifted uneasily in his chair. He was hot and uncomfortable. He owed Pierre money and probably these people knew it.

They gave him a sense of inferiority, making him feel, and at the same time resent, the great honor they did him by allowing him to be one of their august company.

"When is it to be, Pierre?" asked Hormidas Guay, the editor, who was taller than Pierre and very nice in his frock-coat and striped morning trousers.

"Very soon. You will all be receiving your invitations shortly. Manon is a little shy, I think. Girl-like, you know."

"Ah, yes," put in Leon, the jeweller, who was a great authority on the romance of gems, could tell you offhand what stones la Pompadour wore on state-occasions and whether or not she preferred pearls to diamonds. Under the pen-name of Paul d'Amours, he wrote poetry which he rather fancied was quite up to Baudelaire at his best, and had it printed in the Moncton *Tribune*. "It is, for a young girl like Manon, a tremendous step—so tremendous that she alone can vision it. She stands, this child, alone on the threshold of a great mansion, in which she knows not what she will find. There are bright salons in that mansion, filled with delights; there are dark dungeons filled with pain and terror. She gives her little hand into the strong hand of her chosen and he leads her in—It is a tremendous step—tremendous."

Everybody looked as if they were quite sure it was tremendous. Leon began to think of writing an epithalamium to present to Manon and Marcel as a memento of the tremendous occasion. He had the first two lines already and began to long for solitude, for pen, ink and paper. He felt that he could turn out something pretty good right now, something that would knock Hormidas Guay's doggerel verse into a very decrepit cocked-hat, and incidentally knock the sneer off the editor's patrician face.

Manon, still in her lovely silk, came into the room now with Grand'mere Marthe on her arm. In each of them, the one so young, the other so old, was the same proud carriage of the body, the same fearless glance of bright black eyes. It had been rumored that there was Gipsy blood in the Sonier family, from which Marthe had come. The eyes of these two argued for it. Manon had heard some of the conversation as she walked across the hall. The color blazed in her cheeks and she clung tightly to her grandmother, conscious of the looks and whispers of the assembled Labrettes and their wives and elder children. They seemed to fill the room with faces—fat faces, thin faces, lean faces, pretty faces—all about her, all grinning or moving their lips in motions of speech.

She bowed to the faces. She was tired. The sun had been hot and the dust had choked her. She saw Marcel Vaubin sitting by the window with her uncle Etienne, who was a railway-official, who wore a white waistcoat and had a black ribbon on his glasses. Marcel's brow shone with sweat, his wavy blond hair was shiny too. He smiled slowly at her. He was watching her and not listening to Etienne, who was telling him what the farmers ought to do. Manon smiled mechanically and looked away.

She hated this. The room was stuffy despite the open windows. It seemed hard to breathe. Lucien was haranguing Doctor Romeo and Hormidas Guay, the journalist, about family history. Lucien's voice was sharp and insistent, like water from a hose beating on a lot of tins. It never seemed to stop. Family pride. Family strength. Family tradition. The old stock. The pure Acadian blood.

From childhood she had listened to these same voices saying the very same things. The tune never changed. It probably never would change. She wondered idly if it had ever really mattered to her, all this talk of race and family and tradition. She wondered at natures like theirs, to which it could mean so much. Surely these must be poor lives wherein figured so strongly the doings of one's great-grandfather and the connections on her mother's side of grand-aunt Phelonese. It meant nothing. Today it meant less than nothing. Today she had been happy and miserable. To see Lynn there on the edge of the crowd, to let her soul speak out to his through the darkness of her eyes, to give him for a moment her complete surrender—that had been ecstasy. She had prayed with all the fervor of her young heart for him and for her, for that happiness which she thought too great for her ever to be worthy of it.

Now, to return to this—this smugness, this silly peasant pride, this state of mind belonging to the dead ages—depressed her terribly. It was nonsense—nonsense. She wanted to call for silence and tell them all it was nonsense. What did people nowadays care about stock or blood or who your father was or who your mother. They were all crazy, setting store on such medieval things. Family pride was well enough in its way, and in the old land of France, but it had no place here, in this new country. "Anyway," she thought, staring almost angrily at Lucien, "we were peasants; we're still peasants. Breton peasants. Grand'mere wore sabots. I would be wearing sabots if our people wore them now. We were farmers and hewers of wood and weavers and herdsmen. Lucien is a fool."

Lucien's glasses shone, his eyes danced behind them, his hands moved rapidly, the twin halves of his straw-textured hair hung down on each cheek.

The doctor and the editor were joined by the jeweller and the magistrate. They all listened approvingly and with deep attention. It made them feel good to hear again what a fine family they belonged to, whether by blood or marriage.

Grand'mere Marthe's three daughters surrounded her and Manon, admiring Manon's dress, asking her if she would be having many at her wedding, where she would be going on her honeymoon, getting into an argument over the rival virtues of Niagara Falls and Atlantic City. Manon listened to them with dull resentment. She sat for a while beside Grand'mere Marthe, until Aunt Jeanne's voice in her ear gave her a headache; she excused herself then and went up to her room. It was cool there and quiet and what a blessed relief to be out of that buzzing bedlam downstairs. She stepped out of the white silk dress which was warm and put on a yellow blouse and a brown skirt. She sat on the window-ledge and looked across the marshes at the Westcott place. A curtain blew from a wide dormer window there, fluttered white in the wind. She had seen a light in that window. She knew it was Lynn's room and long after her own light was out she had sat right here watching it, thinking of him, alone in that great old house, wondering what he was doing, wondering shyly what it would be like to be there with him.

The thought of the way he had looked at her as she walked in the procession made her cheeks burn. No man had ever before regarded her with a look like that, nor had she looked at any man seeking it. But Lynn's eyes—so fond, so intent, so hungry; as if his arms ached to hold her, as if he craved her and was starved for her.

She moved restlessly, her white fingers intertwined, clasping and unclasping. Wasn't it so? Wasn't she starved for him too? Wasn't it hard to think of anything but him? She had gone about for days in a sort of trance, brought up sharply now and then by her father's asking her what in the world she was thinking about and then smiling wisely as if he knew; brought up too by Grand'mere's shrewd and searching look. But Grand'mere couldn't know. Nobody could know what she was thinking about; how Lynn filled her mind every hour of the day, and by night walked in her dreams; how the world had become a different place since she met him; how, it seemed to her, the train that brought her from the convent stillness of Ste. Genevieve had carried her into another plane of life that was incomparably more lovely, more beautiful than anything she had ever dreamed.

No one could know her dreams, her hopes. No one could understand. Certainly not that crowd downstairs. The buzz and hum of their talk came

through the open windows below and rose up in a wave and dinned in her ears. Of Lucien and his book, her father and his thirst for land, for spreading his dominion; and his intolerance and hatred when one opposed him; of Pierre's brothers and sisters, her aunts and uncles, every bit as bull-headed, arrogant and stubborn as Pierre himself, of the men Evangeline and Celeste and Jeanne had married and dominated and turned into mere echoes of themselves.

With what horror they'd turn on her if they knew where her love was placed. Grand'mere Marthe would stand like a tower of wrath and raise her stick on high and perhaps strike down this sinful and undutiful daughter of the Household of Labrette, who dared to love a stranger, an alien, even one whose family had been for centuries the enemy of her people. Her thoughts were much like Lynn's: the Tantramar would tremble to its nethermost reaches, the dikes would burst and there would be chaos and destruction.

"Let there be," she said, frowning darkly, with something of old Marthe's gipsy fierceness. "If he wants me, he is a man: let him come and take me from them. I'd like him to walk right through them now, right past Grand'mere Marthe and my father and Marcel and Lucien and all the horrified aunts and uncles and cousins and come right up here and pick me up in his arms and carry me out the door. I'd put my arms tight around his neck—so tight that they couldn't pry us apart. Talking about my wedding, planning for it, never asking me if I want to marry or not. It makes you feel as if you were in a prison. Their wills are like iron bars holding you in, and you wonder if you are strong enough to burst them, if even love is strong enough."

Chapter VI

From Montreal, Morley Cross wrote to Lynn: "I've heard of some bughouse things in my young day, but never anything quite so crazy as this. Why in heaven's name a chap like you with a fine knowledge of the market and a chance to make a fortune in the mining-boom that is sweeping the country, should choose instead to play nursemaid to a lot of cows and hens, is something I can't dope out. I refuse, in fact, to believe it. Better come back here and go to work with me. I'll send you your money, of course, but I'd strongly advise that, instead of using it to free the ancestral acres, you spend it on a first-class alienist and see if you can't get fixed up before you do get your feet stuck permanently in some of that red marsh clay.

"P.S. Or if it's a girl, marry her and bring her along."

Lynn smiled over the letter, which Bonnefoy Gaudet, who was more or less permanently employed at the Manor, had brought him, along with the morning milk. Madame, Bonnefoy's mother, came each day to prepare the meals and generally to "do" for Lynn, whom she considered insane, a notion shared by the rest of St. Benoit's bucolic population. It was inconceivable that this young monsieur, who had no money but was a great success in the big city of Mo'real, should come to the Tantramar to dwell in a moldy old ghost-ridden house. There were the usual whispers, of course, about pots of gold, treasure, hidden deep under the cellar by the Acadians before they were exiled from their fertile meadows. Perhaps young Westcott was seeking this treasure. Bonnefoy's mother supported this idea strongly, basing her contentions on what Monsieur Westcott himself had said once when, driven by her famished curiosity, she had no longer been able to refrain from quizzing him.

"Monsieur," she said this morning, as she swept his room, sending the dust up in clouds like a Sahara sand storm, over table, chairs and bed, "is it that you really plan to stay, to make your dwelling here in St. Benoit des Pres?" She stood in a billowy cloud of dust, leaning on her broom, like a witch in a nimbus.

"Yes," said Lynn gravely. "That is what I intend to do, Madame Gaudet."

"Ah! But why should you? Is there perhaps something—some treasure —some gold?"

Then, to the old dame's gratification, he grinned and smacked a fist against his palm. "You have said it. You have guessed it. It is—some treasure—some gold—gold that could never be found in the market place."

"So," concluded madame, to Julie Leblanc, Phelonese Martel and Jeanne Belliveau as they sat drinking tea in her kitchen, "it is quite clear that this young man is here to dig up the treasure of the Acadians."

How true! Since Manon was the pride and treasure of Pierre Labrette's heart. It would be hard to wrest this precious thing from him; impossible, no doubt, to make him yield it up. Manon, the dark, the superb, the passionate, the virginal; Manon, his only female child, who must marry one of her own race and perpetuate strongly the sturdy strain of Labrette. Had Pierre for a moment suspected the nature of that treasure which, in the village and from his hired men at the farm, he heard Lynn Westcott had come here to seek, he would have run amok. For one of those dogs, those thieves, those usurpers—for the very impoverished last of them, to cast his ugly looks on the pride of the Labrettes—he would tear that man apart with his own great hands.

But he did not guess. His lips twisted in a sneering smile when Calixte Breau told about Lynn—about what he had said to Bonnefoy's mother—they always, in St. Benoit, called her "Bonnefoy's mother."

"Treasure! Gold! He comes here on a treasure hunt!" cried Pierre, chewing on his cigar, making his fierce dark eyes glower at Calixte and Polydore Cormier as they worked on the tractor. "This is fool's talk or, if there is anything to it, Westcott—" he spat the name—"is a bigger fool than it would seem possible. Treasure—pots of gold louis, I suppose; bars of gold. If there were such wealth concealed at the Manor it would be ours, it would belong to the Labrettes who would have buried it there—not to those pauperized and raggedy-breeched English curs. A great treasure he will find, I'm sure."

But, after he had strolled away from the spot where his two henchmen toiled to repair a broken drive-shaft, his stubby fingers rubbed his red jowl and his thick brows gathered, porcupine-like, down over his eyes. Treasure. Maybe this Westcott was smarter than he thought; maybe he had got wind of something—

"But no! *Baptême!*" swore Pierre. "He could know nothing. He is just a fool and will end where all fools end—with his head stuck in a slough and his feet waving in the air. And, in the end, I shall have that land probably far cheaper than I could have got it. There is nothing he can do—nothing we need to do—right now. He will be starved out. He has no money."

Pierre went over in his mind the contents of the letter he had received, in answer to one of his own, from Paul Frenette, his legal adviser and agent in Montreal. "This Westcott," Frenette wrote promptly in reply to Pierre's questions—a most efficient agent, Frenette—"has no money beyond a few thousand dollars, since, like a modern Don Quixote, he insisted on paying back every cent of money his father's firm had lost for its clients. He beggared himself to give back to a lot of fools the money they gambled with. One admires him here; yet one despises a man so soft. He might have been quite well-to-do, but for that. Also, again, there were girls of wealth, notably Miss Alyne Stairs, daughter of the great financier, Sir Roblyn, who would have been his wife for the asking. But he did not ask.

"So, my friend, is it at all curious that a youth who has done such mad and senseless things, should even wink an eye about establishing himself with nothing on a great Tantramar estate, in an old house fit only for the abode of ghosts and ravens?"

Well, mused Pierre, perhaps it wasn't at all curious. Obviously this young Westcott, one of a race of madmen—of reckless gamblers, hard riders, hard drinkers and hectic lovers, was the maddest of the crowd. But it takes money to be mad, if the form of madness is a big old house with miles of ground around it. Even madmen must eat and drink and clothe themselves and keep warm. All of which takes money.

So Lynn was thinking. Morley Cross's letter, good-humored though it was, acted as a cold douche, showing him how the world at large, especially his own world that moved around the exclusive homes of Westmount, the University Club, the Ritz, would look upon his newest venture. Of course, they had always considered him a bit mad—paying a lot of people who, they said, didn't deserve to be paid, showing himself indifferent to a girl like Alyne Stairs when, as Sir Roblyn's son-in-law, he would be at once transported in a golden lift to the topmost pinnacle of wealth.

And now, on this morning of low rolling mist, with the moss-covered eaves of the manor dripping dismally, with the grass gleaming and sodden and all the world soaked to its spirit, he sat alone in his huge, empty room, monarch of all he surveyed, but finding at the moment no vast consolation in the fact. Of course, when the sun shone and the birds, muted now, piped up, and all the world was light—it would be different then.

He put on an old fawn trench-coat and battered gray felt. He had found an ashplant in the cupboard in the hall—a sturdy, Westmorland stick, its crook polished by the firm grip of many a forgotten Westcott; and this he

carried as he walked through the dripping orchard where the wet from the grass clung and beaded on his woolen stockings and the air smelt wet and close and green and earthy. He liked the wet wind on his face. He walked in a shower of sodden petals from the frail apple-blossoms, torn and driven by the breeze.

He climbed to the top of the great dike and walked bravely into the gray shroud of the mist that opened before him softly and closed catlike behind him so that always he moved in a core of mist. What did he think or hope to find in all this grayness? It seemed to hold no promise of beauty, it seemed to isolate everything of brightness and warmth. Yet he hoped, and he found her he was seeking. Like a wraith she came out of the blanketing fog, Manon, straight and gallant, the moisture jewelling and beading on her night-black hair, brightening the sheen of her jet eyes, enhancing the pallor of her skin.

They met, stood face-to-face, for a moment said nothing; just gazed and gazed, finding a thousand things. How dear, how wonderful, how mysteriously lovely, she is! How her eyes glow and are glad! How her lips part, how red and soft they are. And she: How tall he is and strong! How pleased he looks. How strange I feel, my body all a-tremble; my legs with no strength in them and all my powers seeming to dissolve into nothing! And how mad, how unwise this is—for me to seek him, to wish his presence here! But what is there for me to do!

"Manon!" He stepped close to her. She did not move. His hands gripped hers and stilled their trembling as if the tremor of his own neutralized it. Warm was their clasp and through her arms, through her body from fingertip to toetip coursed and flooded and raged a river, an ocean, of madness that drove her hard into his arms, her body straining against his, her lips asking and taking and giving, moving against the hard sweetness of his mouth.

"I love you, Manon! Love you! Love you!"

"Hold me. Hold me close. All of me. Do not let me go. Oh, do not let me go."

Were he to let me go, she thought as in a fevered dream, flashingly, I should perish. I should go from the earth. I should never find again this beauty, this ecstasy that is a world to itself or that is paradise. With him and in him is all I want, all I shall ever need.

They swayed, so close-locked in each other's arms that their bodies seemed fused as were their spirits. Sanity returned to her and she knew this madness for what it was. It was of this that the good nuns and the curé

spoke, this burning of the flesh, this all-consuming desire that fought like a wild thing for its satisfaction. Yet they had told her wrong, for they said it was bad and ugly and soiling. And it was not! It was not! It was holy. It lifted the soul high, high, higher than prayer could lift it, for it was the most perfect prayer, the prayer of prayers, the song of songs—it was love.

"Now—" She released herself lightly from his arms, from his kiss. She looked at him with different eyes, happily, proudly. She adored him with her dark eyes, and before that wonder of her regard, he felt small and humble; he felt abashed and afraid and unworthy. And—

"I am unworthy, Manon," he said. "I—I cannot tell you—" He caught her to him and kissed her again, lingeringly. "You are everything. You are my world—all I dream of or ever hope for."

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes. I know. To me it is the same. Nothing else matters—nothing. But why should it be so—like this. A few days ago we did not know each other, did not dream—"

"Why should we try to explain it, sweet? It is; and that is all that counts."

"All?" She shook her head. "You do not know. But what am I to do?"

"You are to marry me," said Lynn boldly. "Now—today—" But caution, reason, a hundred dissenting voices in him cried, "How?" How could he marry her? How could he give her even a decent living? How could he turn her whole family against her; make her an outcast, a pariah? Suppose he failed her?

She did not think of that. "It would be hard—so hard, I fear, as to be almost impossible. I—I have felt I could leave them all—my people—and turn my back on their love and forget their teachings. I thought I could be the first woman of the Labrettes to give up my birthright for a stranger—for love—"

"And can't you?" He was suddenly on the defensive. "Isn't love more than all those things?"

"I do not know. How can I know?"

"Your heart should tell you the answer. If you love, nothing else matters. Manon, I tell you I can make up to you for all—" He stopped, "Fool," he muttered, "how I rant and talk; and I'm nothing. I have nothing. The last of my crowd and a poor one to uphold their name, a poor knight to take from the strong enemy their jewel and their treasure."

"But you are not poor," she said loyally. "And your people would not be ashamed of you. I heard my father tell them at home of what you had done —of how you had given all your money to pay debts that were not yours, of how you—you would have none of this rich woman—"

"You heard all that!" Lynn stared at her in consternation. "Good heavens, how did your father find all that out? It's hardly true, of course—"

"I know it is true. I could have believed it of you, had I never heard it said. It made me—made me feel poor and unworthy, Lynn—"

"You!" He laughed, as one laughs at a child for some absurd saying, fondly. "But, listen, Manon—I want you so. I want you terribly. I have nothing— This old house—" He nodded his head. "This land. And Youth."

"It is enough. It is all I could ask—all anyone could ask. But I cannot tell you now. I cannot think now. You must let me go. Give me time."

"If I let you go, I feel that I will lose you, that something, fear, pressure of your family, of what they hold against mine, may win you from me. Come with me now, Manon. Let us go today—"

"I dare not. I should be a burden to you. Soon you would hate me. You—so young and with your way to make. If you hope to make it here in the Tantramar country, you will find it hard enough without me. Married to me —you would get nowhere—nowhere."

"You could help me fight them—"

"It is hard for one of us to fight our own, Lynn—even for a man we love. No. We must wait. We must."

"But what good to wait—" Waiting, to him it seemed, would only serve to show more clearly how hopeless it was to think of conciliating her family, of winning their consent to a union with a man who, apart from his having nothing, was their enemy, one of a race forever hateful to them.

She knew that too, Manon. But she could not this moment find courage to go with him, to set Pierre, and Grand'mere Marthe and the horde of other Labrettes, at defiance. They would not only hate her, and hate Lynn more. They would go out of their way to hurt her and injure him. Black blood was in their veins and their hates were strong.

"Time. Give me time." She tore her hands from the firm clasp of his. "I go now. Goodby."

"But I'll see you soon—"

"Who can tell." She fled away into the fog, into the gray hinterlands of hellish vapor that swallowed her up, that set a blind, drab wall, mockingly between him and her—the wall of the Tantramar, of the marshes, of the land that owned her, on which he, even after generations was only an intruder, an alien. It mocked at him. It told him she was not for him, that, after centuries, in which the proud Westcotts had been humbled and the Breton peasants, the Labrettes, exalted, he the last and poorest of a broken line was not thus easily to come and win the loveliest and proudest of the foemen's daughters.

"Don Quixote of the Tantramar," he said with a rueful grin. "Too bad they have no windmills that I could try to knock over with my ash-stick. I'd best go home—home—" He turned and walked slowly into the mist towards the invisible pile of the old house. Home—it was the only home he had now, and he was all it had—the only one of the proud and the fair who had trod its wide stairways and made its rooms sing with their laughter. He and the old house would cling to each other, cling and, if need were, together perish, for it seemed to him, in some strange, inexplicable way, that were he to leave it or be deprived of it, he would have lost something that would never be regained, as it would fall to ruin, and its stones crumble away to gray dust, and its rafters fall and its windows sag and smash. And he found strength in this strange emotion, almost like a revelation. It was a castle and a fortress from which the proud foe could not oust him. It lent its strength to him, the rugged power of its thick walls, so he must, in return, give all his force to it. He must restore it to beauty, to new grandeur, to its old vigorous place in the life of the country around the Great Marsh. That was a debt he owed it and that he must pay.

Ah, they were sharp, those bright, ageless eyes of Grand'mere Marthe Labrette, they grew keener, wiser with the years; they probed into things. From Manon's jewelled hair, from the rime-like fog on her coat and beret, they flashed to Manon's cheek, from which the hot flush of virgin passion had not yet died, to her eyes which glowed still with a mystic light. And they saw, those eyes of age, all things. But the brown face, wrinkled like a walnut, was just as expressionless and the thin lips moved but said nothing.

It was noon-time now. They were all about ready to sit to table. Pierre and Ludovic were talking animatedly in the bow-window of the living-room; Lucien rooted among his papers; they crackled like dry husks under a hog's nose as Lucien handled them with great pride, with importance and much concentration. The fête-Dieu gathering of the Labrettes, which had lavished so much praise on him, had puffed him up enormously, until he

could see his name and his story spread across the world. In Canada he would be renowned, the champion of his people; in France, they would make him a chevalier, for certain, of the Légion d'honneur; in Acadia, there would doubtless, even before he died, be a statue of him, of Lucien Labrette, sharing with Evangeline herself the homage and acclaim of a grateful people.

Louis, sprite-like, dark of eye and hair, with olive skin and very white teeth, played with Lizette the cat, teasing her with a bit of Grand'mere Marthe's brown wool from the ball the old dame was using for the making of a sweater for Ludovic—Ludovic, whose chest was at times bothersome from the accursed gas of the war. Louis, too, looked at Manon, then devoted himself to making Lizette turn in mad circles chasing the thread. Very wise and secretive Louis looked. Of the five who were in the living-room when Manon entered, only Louis and Grand'mere Marthe seemed to sense anything unusual. Presently, Jeanneton came to say that dinner was ready, and they all went to the dining-room. Grand'mere Marthe was fully as hungry and eager for food as Louis, who had the appetite of a lusty young ox.

Lucien talked of his book. Across from him Ludovic, dark, sullen, coughed now and then and wheezed often, for on days like this, damp and gusty, his asthma was bothersome; sometimes he muttered a curse. Louis sat across from Manon and watched her with bright, knowing eyes. She smiled at him and he grinned impishly back at her. From the ends of the table Grand'mere Marthe and Pierre faced each other. They were great trenchermen, the Labrettes, and the Monday dinner of boiled beef and vegetables vanished by the platterful. Only Manon seemed to have any effort in putting away a gargantuan meal. Often she forgot to eat altogether and stared at the big blue dinner-plate, her fork idle in her hand.

Once Lucien, his eyes like pale blue marbles behind his glasses, saw her thus and said, "One loses appetite, Manon." She started then from a dream that she could not name and looked nervously around, a faint pink stealing to her cheeks.

"Love," growled Ludovic, and wheezed so sepulchrally that Louis giggled and choked and hid his face from his father's furious glare.

"Oh, yes, love," assented Grand'mere Marthe, chasing a bit of gravy around the edge of her plate with a crust of bread. "It makes young ones forget to eat and sleep. It is a disease—like measles, like croup—"

Louis, who had fresh memories of both these complaints, giggled again, choked on an oversize mouthful of beef and got a thump on the back from Lucien that almost made his eyes pop.

"Little pig," said Grand'mere Marthe darting a hawk's glance at him. "Behave yourself now."

Louis looked at Manon and winked. Puzzled, she smiled at him. He was an imp. So much younger than the others, he got very seldom into the limelight. This morning he had been quite crushed when Polydore and Calixte chased him away from the tractor, after ignoring the sage advice he wished upon them. From there he had gone roaming along the marsh below the dike, looking for nests to despoil and finding none. Still he returned in great good humor. He was, he mused, mashing a great piece of butter into his potatoes, about the wisest one in that room, not even excepting Lucien, whose scribbling, he thought privately, was a lot of nonsense.

"Polydore and Calixte," said Pierre, a forkful of cabbage half-way to his mouth, "were telling me this morning that Westcott came back here to look for treasure—pots of gold buried under the house."

Louis' eyes popped. Treasure. Pots of gold. Here was something. He had an instant vision of himself with lantern and spade sneaking down to their own cellar this very night and digging deep and finding a chest of jewels. Lucien's pale brows lifted. He was not so skeptical as Pierre or Ludovic, who was muttering things under his breath. Certainly there had been treasure buried by the early Acadians, hidden deep under the homes they loved, to be reclaimed at some future, happier time. And many of them had never returned.

"It is not impossible," he said. "At Grand Pré there was an instance—"

"Bosh!" said Pierre. "It is some foolish village gossip. That is all."

"Treasure!" Grand'mere Marthe stared for a moment straight at Manon, whose eyes were very wide and agleam with curiosity. "I, too, say it is not at all impossible."

"You too—" Pierre gritted his teeth in utter exasperation. "What treasure, in heaven's name! The place has been dug all over for treasure."

"Treasure," repeated Grand'mere Marthe. "So that is it. He comes here looking for treasure, this young Westcott. Now it is clear that the treasure, if he finds it, belongs to the Labrettes."

Pierre banged his fist on the table. “Why did I start this! How like fools you talk! What treasure of ours could he get?”

“Ah,” said Grand’mere slyly, with another look at Manon’s crimsoning cheek. “What treasure, indeed. It is fool’s talk, no doubt, Pierre. Let it go.”

“Gladly,” growled Pierre. “I merely said it for fun, not for anyone to take it up seriously. I thought that was only for those, like Bonnefoy’s mother, Luc Simard, Calixte and Polydore, who believe everything they hear. I did not credit it for a moment.”

“You would feel bad if he got your treasure, Pierre,” remarked Grand’mere with exasperating persistence. “You would be like a madman.”

“A wonder I am not one now, listening to such talk. As for this fellow: most likely he is just hanging on to see if I will offer him more money for the place. I shall not. We’ll see, when the property comes up for sale, if he is bluffing or not. Anyway, whether he buys it back or not, it will pass from him eventually and he will lose his money along with it.”

“Centuries the Labrettes have wanted that land and coveted it and fought for it.” Grand’mere Marthe was dipping crusts in her tea now and eating them with relish.

“Because it belonged to the Labrettes,” said Lucien gravely. “Why should we not want it back from the usurpers?”

“Ah, why not indeed?” nodded Grand’mere Marthe. “Centuries of effort to regain those lands—and tireless, bitter effort, too—should certainly in the end be crowned by success. Pierre’s father and his father, and how many more Labrettes, none can say, schemed and bargained and bid for that land of the Westcotts and those Westcotts only laughed and would not sell nor yet be swindled. Now, even this last, this young one, laughs at Pierre and says he will not sell.”

Louis fiddled with his dessert spoon. He fidgetted in his seat. He opened his mouth and closed it. He swelled out his chest. He avoided looking at Manon, who, anyway, was paying him no attention. No one, in fact, was paying him any attention. No one ever did pay him much except perhaps on his birthday or when he won a prize—rare occurrence—in school. And Louis craved attention.

“If Manon,” he said, and his voice that had begun so bravely, started to quaver and crack—“if Manon marries him and goes there to live with him won’t the place sort of belong to us then?”

There was a silence, awful, ominous. Pierre's face turned a deeper, deeper red and his eyes grew blacker. Grand'mere Marthe reached out a clawlike hand and caught Louis by the ear, but did not pull or twist. Lucien choked on his caramel-pudding and showered cream over his vest. Ludovic wheezed wildly, and Manon—Manon half-rose from her chair, her hand clutching its back; then she sat down, her face drained of all its color, her eyes big and frightened.

"What do you mean?" Pierre's ferocious look made Louis shrink down in his seat, which made him feel the pull of Grand'mere Marthe's sinewy hand. He yelped and straightened up again.

"I—I said—"

"We heard!" Pierre stood up, huge and menacing. "Foolish brat, what made you say a thing like that?"

"I—" Grand'mere Marthe twisted his ear. "Get from the room, you!" she said, her voice shriller than they ever before had heard it. "Get to your bed and be seen no more today. To think of such a thing—"

She yanked Louis from his chair and he started for the door, weeping.

"Wait!" Pierre reached him in two strides and caught him by the shoulder so hard that he winced and tried to wriggle away. "Wait! He would not think of such a thing unless—What do you know, Louis? Speak!"

"I—" Louis burst into violent sobs. Where now was the glory of this moment that he had been savoring all through the meal? Where was the importance, the prestige that he had thought would accrue to him. "I saw him," he blurted, "and Manon, on the dike this morning and he had her in his arms and he kissed her and her eyes were closed and—and that's all."

Pierre flung him away so that he staggered out the door and fell at the stair-foot and lay there sobbing for a minute, with rage and grief, before he dragged himself away. Then Pierre turned to Manon. They were all standing now, save Grand'mere Marthe, whose spoon rattled against her tea-cup, whose glance darted from Pierre to Manon, from Manon to Pierre.

He strode to Manon and stood above her, his hand raised high. She looked him straight in the face, her eyes steady, unswerving, though she saw him shake and tremble and knew that he did not know his own strength, that a blow from that huge fist might drive the life from her, might strike her dead where she stood.

Pierre's lips were bloodless, working, making no sound. For a moment, for ages it seemed, he stood thus, then slowly his arm came down, till with the other it hung at his side. With an effort titanic, visible to all of them there, he stilled the furious trembling of his great body. His voice was low-pitched when he spoke, but it shook still with some of the rage he seemed to have mastered.

"Manon!"

"Yes, father."

"It is a lie. It is some foolish thing he fancied. Tell me it is a lie and—"

"I cannot tell you that."

"Then—"

"It is so. It is the truth. I love him. I'll always love him. You can kill him, you can kill me or force me to marry Marcel—it is the same thing, but you cannot make me stop loving him or him stop loving me."

Pierre seemed as if he would go mad, as if he would smash her, kill her. His knuckles were white and in the crimson of his cheek were lurid streaks like welts. Grand'mere Marthe saw, and knew the signs.

"Manon! Come to me." The girl obeyed. Pierre did not move. Grand'mere Marthe's eyes were as intense, as glowing as Pierre's. They fascinated Manon, those eyes, yet there was something in them she could not read—hate so great perhaps that she could not recognize it as such. "A Labrette!" Grand'mere Marthe's voice was a lash of a thousand thongs —"One of a proud, strong race. And you do this. You turn to a stranger and to one of a family that has been for almost two centuries our great enemy. You do not know what you are doing, what you are saying."

"But I do! I know my heart. It is my heart that speaks—"

"Silence!" Pierre's voice made them all jump. "Speak no more, you—If you do speak more, I will kill you. I'll break that smooth white neck, you Judas."

"Manon!" Lucien in these moments had been formulating his little speech. Ludovic knew no words that would fit the occasion, save profanity and he kept it to himself with his asthma. "Think, Manon," said Lucien, his pale eyes watery, his crescents of strawlike hair almost touching his nose, "after generation upon generation, after so many fine and noble women have lived and died in this house, you stand there and dare to tell us a thing like this—the first woman of the Labrettes to disgrace your name, to turn to one

of a family that caused bloodshed and bitter hardship in your own—the first, the very first."

Manon did not speak. She gazed at the floor, with some of Pierre's sullenness, through most of this speech of Lucien's. Towards its close she lifted her chin and stared at the mirror in the buffet across the room. Thus it was, as Lucien came to the sonorous close of his final period, that she saw a sudden wicked smile come to Grand'mere Marthe's lips and as suddenly vanish.

Chapter VII

Manon was sent to her room. She stood at the window, looking out across the stretch of marshland and dike. The fog was slowly lifting, melting away before the onslaughts of the hot midday sun. Presently the faded red roof, the sturdy chimneys of the Westcott place, showed through the wet-gleaming willows and she looked wistfully at the big window over the pillared porch, that was the window of Lynn's room.

Probably he was there now. He was alone, a free agent. He had no one to plague and bother him, to say what he should do and what he must never do. No spies, like Louis, around him. Louis was a devil—a prying, malicious, evil little scamp. She had heard him, still wailing and lamenting, in his room as she passed his door. She felt a little sorry for him—only a little.

He was appalled at the explosion he had caused, when he was merely trying to make a mild sensation. He felt as if he had precipitated the end of the world—the way his father had looked and spoken, and the way Manon had looked. What was all the fuss anyway? If she liked this new fellow better than she did Marcel Vaubin, why, then, let her marry the new fellow. Marcel would get along all right. There were lots of other girls and lots of girls liked Marcel and he them. Louis had been on the dikes at other times. Summer evenings, he stumbled on lots of things. He was so small, Louis. He came and went like a little sprite.

Downstairs, Pierre and his sons sat with Grand'mere Marthe in solemn conclave. Ludovic, that man of few words, announced in a hoarse voice, "This Westcott should be shot and I'll be glad to do it, though it's rather Vaubin's place to see that he gets what's coming to him. As for her—" Ludovic had shot his bolt. He sat back in his chair, sullen brows drawn down over beady bright eyes. It was all very simple to Ludovic. He had loved the war he cursed so often, loved the feel of a bayonet, loved the chance to gratify his bloodlust. He thought nothing of life, his own or another's.

Pierre said: "That wouldn't settle it quite so well, Ludovic, though I'm in favor of it, at that. What we shall do is marry her to Marcel Vaubin right away. The banns will be published Sunday. In the meantime, we can reason with her."

"Suppose she won't see reason?" put in Grand'mere Marthe. "Girls are like that. Girls who fancy themselves in love, Pierre, are very much like that."

"In love!" Pierre ground his strong square teeth together. "For your age, Grand'mere, you talk most foolishly. You must know—" he grinned sardonically—"by now, that love is not so important a consideration. How can she be in love? She has only known this fellow a few days, spoken with him, I dare say, a few times. She is not the sort of girl, fresh from a convent, from the good nuns, to—"

"No," said Grand'mere sharply, "she is not the sort of girl to— But she could be in love. It doesn't take long. Lightning strikes in an instant."

"Father is right," Lucien said judiciously; "Manon and Marcel must be married right away. There is no limit to a young girl's foolishness."

"A lot you know about young girls—their foolishness or wisdom," sneered Grand'mere Marthe, resting her chin on her hard knuckles bent on the crook of her stick, and gazing out across the marshes. "A lot any of you know."

Pierre glowered at her, shrugged his great shoulders and said, "It shall be done, anyway," to Lucien. And Lucien was pleased. It would be a catastrophe, a ghastly thing just when the publication of his great work extolling the family of Labrette, spreading the glory of its family tree, that mighty oak, over all the Acadian land, if its loveliest member should contradict the whole beautiful thesis by running off and giving herself to the Westcotts, who, in his pages, had got an amount of contumely equalling the praises heaped upon his own clan.

After an hour had gone, Pierre came to Manon's room. She was gazing out the window as if she had not moved. She had not heard her father's heavy tread; she did not know he was in the room until he spoke. Then she turned and saw him there, huge in his brown suit, his face showing paler after the terrible, angry rush of blood. He was calm. He was, she saw, determined to keep a grip on himself. Once he had all but killed a man, another Tantramar farmer, in a quarrel over the merits of some horses they were racing along the frozen roads. In the hours that this man, Leandre Hudon, had hovered between life and death after Pierre's beating, the great Labrette had lived an eternity of remorse. He knew the fury of his temper, and dreaded it.

"Manon," he said, "you know I love you. I love you because you are the only girl I have, but more so because you are beautiful and good."

"I know you love me—" The black eyes looked into his as he sat on the bed, an arm thrown carelessly around the post at its foot. "—and I hate to have offended you, but—"

"Ah! but—" He nodded. His voice became stern. "You understand I will have none of this—none of this whatever. How far things have gone between you and this young Westcott, I do not know—and I do not care. It does not matter. It means nothing. You, Manon—" He pointed a short spatulate forefinger at her—"are going to do what I say! That is, you are going to marry Marcel Vaubin, as we planned. On Sunday Père Berthelet will publish the banns for the first time. Now what have you to say?"

"Simply that I will not marry him. I will not!" Some of Pierre's fury flashed in her eyes, flamed in her cheeks. "If you force me to, as perhaps you can, you are committing a sin. How can you expect me to marry a man I do not care anything for; how can I ever make such a man a good wife? How can you expect me to turn from another whom I—I love—"

"Bah!" Pierre smiled scornfully. "Convent-girl's nonsense! Love! You sound like some silly motion-picture. What do you know of love, or marriage, or men—or anything?"

"I know—and you heard me say it downstairs—I know my own heart. I can hear what it says."

"It lies," snarled Pierre. "It lies. I know best. In time you will thank me for this. I won't have you tagging around with this Westcott, and if he persists in following you about—"

Manon stared at him wildly. "You—you wouldn't dare. You wouldn't touch him. If you injured him there is a law, you know—"

"Yes, in the Tantramar country it goes by another name—Labrette," said Pierre silkily. "If you think so much of this fellow, and want to see him go back to Montreal, where he belongs, whole and healthy, you will do as I say. Now, I ask you: are you going to be reasonable? Are you willing to do my bidding to submit, as you should? And will you promise to have nothing more to do with this man? To meet him no more and—?"

"I will promise nothing," said Manon hotly. "Nothing!" She turned from Pierre's stormy gaze and stared defiantly out the window.

"Very well." He got up. "Then you don't leave the house—except with me or with one of your brothers. If by any chance you communicate with Westcott again, then I'll either keep you locked in your room or send you away until it is time for you to be married."

Manon nodded. “Do it! I knew I could expect it. I—” She bit her lip to keep back the tears—“I knew what it would be. But even at the altar I’ll—I’ll tell everyone that I do not consent—”

“No, you won’t,” said Pierre. “You’ll change your mind by then, I’ll wager.”

“I’ll never change—never.”

“After a while,” said Pierre, “you will think otherwise. Say your prayers. Ask God to give you sense.”

Her lips opened angrily and her hands were hard clenched. Even when her father closed the door behind him, she took a swift step as if she would go after him and beat with her little fists against the rock of his unkind strength; but she sat down wearily on the bed and covered her face with her hands and cried a little and prayed a little, but not as Pierre meant for her to pray.

Pierre, still scowling, took the car and drove furiously along the marsh-road to Marcel Vaubin’s farm. He was not used to being opposed in anything; he had never been thwarted. He had settled it long ago that Manon should marry his neighbor, settle down comfortably and live her life just as he had arranged it for her. That she should, so suddenly and determinedly, show a will of her own and display a strength in that frail body of hers, great enough to fight him, puzzled and enraged him. If it could have been arranged, he would have taken her to the curé at once, along with Vaubin, and had them married out of hand.

Anyway, he would see that everything worked out according to his own desires. Manon was only a child; she could be ruled as a child. It was a parent’s duty to see that she did not make a fool of herself over this newcomer. Pierre’s fingers gripped the wheel hard. He would have something to say to that lad, too, just as soon as he had finished talking with Marcel. Must be careful though. He knew enough of the family history to remember that in the thousand and one encounters between his tribe and the Westcotts, force had produced even less success than diplomacy.

Of course, long ago, there was a Westcott, Giles, the English colonel to whom the grant of the old Labrette homestead had been made, who had died very suddenly, very suddenly indeed, by misadventure of falling into the turgid, rushing waters of the Tantramar one night. When they found his body, there was nothing that might prove he had been helped over the bank, but Michel Labrette, who, with the money made in the American revolution,

had been trying to get Westcott to sell him back the land, was a hard, stern man—a man, Pierre thought, much like himself.

Even so, Michel had not got the old place back. He had been compelled to stay on the farm adjoining, the one that Pierre owned now, and see Giles Westcott's brother, Peter, come from England and settle down on the estate left to him. Yes, that perhaps was one time when a Labrette had been too much for his enemy. But Giles Westcott would have been a strong man, no doubt; while this youngster was nothing—a bond-salesman, or the like, out of a job.

In front of Marcel Vaubin's house stood a light roadster, painted a garish yellow with black trim. The scowl came back darker to Pierre's face. He chewed his lip and swore fiercely. Vaubin was a fool, still busy about his foolishness. Pierre had warned him about this business. He would tell him again, finally, that it had to stop. And it would stop, for Pierre was very necessary to Marcel Vaubin. True, his farm was worth a great deal, but Pierre had managed to get Vaubin's big scrawl on sundry notes that it would be embarrassing to meet all at once.

A girl came out of the sprawling wooden farmhouse. She wore a green knitted suit that fitted her tightly—designedly so, it seemed—to show the boldly rich curves of her tall body. Her hair was red, her mouth a splotch of crimson in a pale face. She had wide blue eyes, challenging eyes, that Pierre Labrette hated. He sat behind the wheel until she said goodby to Marcel, and climbed into her car and drove away, with a cool nod to Pierre, and no glimmer of a smile.

He stared after her for a moment until the bright car turned onto the marsh-road, then he got out and strolled over to Marcel, standing big and ruddy like himself, on the top step of the verandah. Marcel wore riding-togs. He wasted, Pierre thought angrily, far too much time on horses and women. He would have to change his ways.

Marcel looked a bit confused. He smiled, however, and shook hands with Pierre. It was unfortunate, he thought, that Pierre should happen along just now. He feared Pierre, everybody did. And he had to stay on the good side of this little Mussolini of the marshes. Also, he knew that Saara Martin was worse than no help at all to him in achieving that object.

"You're still tagging around with that—" Marcel's lips tightened at the word, but he kept back the quick retort that burned his tongue-tip.

"It is nothing." He shrugged, spread his hands wide in a Gallic gesture that contrasted oddly with his rough ways. "One has those things in one's

life; it takes time to get rid of them."

"Time!" Pierre sneered. He walked to a wicker chair into which he planked so heavily that the thing shuddered. "I'd send her pretty promptly about her business, if I had it to do."

"It is not so easy—" Marcel sat in the porch swing, crossed his knees, clasped them with his hands and stared sullenly at the gray-painted floorboards.

"Well, let it go. I came here to tell you that if you want Manon, you had better get busy."

"Busy!" Marcel's pale brows shot up. "What do you mean?"

"Simply this: she says she is in love with this Westcott—confound his cheek; that she won't marry you—"

"But—" Marcel was on his feet, his big head thrust forward on his thick neck, bullishly.

"Oh, Louis saw them on the dike this morning. She was in his arms—"

Marcel nodded coolly. "So! One of these fast-working boys from the big city. Look here, Pierre—I'll fix that fellow. I'll see that he gets out of St. Benoit, baggage or pullman."

"Odd that stupid people's minds should work exactly alike. Ludovic wanted to shoot him too, but thought it was your job. The simplest way to settle the matter is for you and Manon to be married as soon as possible. We'll have the banns published next Sunday."

Marcel's fingers went to his lips. Pierre watched him narrowly. "Have—have you told this to Manon?"

"Oh, yes," said Pierre easily. "I told her. I'm keeping her more or less a prisoner. She defied me, you know."

"You mean she—that she is really serious about this fellow—?"

"That's what I'm telling you, my friend. Just how serious you may realize when she said she would proclaim it at the altar that she was being forced to marry you; that she didn't like you."

"Not—not like me! Manon not—"

"Seems inconceivable, doesn't it," observed Pierre dryly. "All the girls sort of adore you, don't they?"

Marcel flushed. He said nothing.

"Saara, there," persisted Pierre, his nostrils widening, "seems to think a lot of you."

"I thought we weren't going to discuss her. Hang it, Pierre, a man—"

"You've gone with her a long time—long enough, I think. You bought her those clothes and that harlot's chariot she rides around in. Just little gifts! You've made, as usual, a prize fool of yourself. By heaven, now, you'll have to cut it out—end it once and for all. Think it's going to help you with Manon if she finds out about you and this girl? Manon is innocent, but not too innocent to know about women like Saara Martin."

"I—I tell you I'm through with her," growled Vaubin. "All through. You—you won't have anything more to complain of—" He lied along desperately and his desperation made it convincing enough for Pierre. He had to keep in with Pierre, had to marry Manon. Pierre, who thought he knew everything, didn't know the quarter of Marcel's debts. Cards, horses, all-night drinking bouts, girls like Saara Martin—those things swallowed money as a big hearth uses dry white birch.

"That's as it should be," grunted Pierre. "No more monkey business."

"All right. Will you have a drink now?" Pierre nodded. Marcel called, "Levrier. Cognac." And presently an old man with a pale rabbit-like visage, very solemn and pink-eyed, shuffled onto the verandah with a bottle of Castillon and liqueur glasses. He filled two and passed them to Pierre Labrette and his master.

"A toast," said Marcel, "to lovely Manon, to her happiness—with me."

Pierre lifted his glass, drank in silence. Suddenly he set it on the floor, stepped with catlike tread to the end of the verandah and looked down. There was a shrubbery and a brook ran past there down to the marsh-road. The alders grew thickly, making a screen of dark green along the brookside.

"What is it?" Marcel gaped at him.

"I thought I heard someone."

"No. I think not. Maybe one of the men. Maybe one of the hounds."

"Maybe," nodded Pierre, but he excused himself shortly and drove away fast, taking the turn that Saara Martin had taken. In a little while he saw the yellow car in the distance. It hadn't got very far for the rate at which it travelled. Pierre nodded wisely. His ears were sharp, and he trusted them. She had been listening.

Pierre, his face grimmer than ever, turned in at Westcott Manor, cursing contemptuously at the rusted, tumbledown gate, sagging from the big gateposts of freestone, at the gullied weed-grown driveway and the desuetude that seemed to have encroached upon the garden beyond the hope of its ever being conquered.

"Tumbledown! Rotten! Finished!" he muttered. "Only fit for a madman to live in. It should have been left for the crows and owls." But the house, he had to admit, looked alive. It looked almost jaunty, like a shabby old beau who has donned a bright new waistcoat. Bonnefoy's mother had bought some curtains and hung them. With her son's aid she had cleaned the windows and polished the brasswork of door-knob and handle until it shone dazzlingly in the afternoon sun.

Even now, Bonnefoy, long and gangling, with his head cocked, his eyes squinted and his tongue sleeking out, was most artistically adorning with fresh black enamel the heads of the iron horses with rings in their nostrils, that had been the hitching-posts of many a proud mare and gelding.

Bonnefoy gave the horse a final daub on the ear and turned to Pierre who had been watching him with a scornful grin for at least two minutes.

"*Bon jour*," bowed Bonnefoy, "M'sieur Labrette."

"Where's Westcott?"

"I do not know, M'sieur Labrette."

"Is he in? Out?"

"Out," said Bonnefoy. "Out, but I could not say where."

"Ah!" Pierre stamped on the starter. "Tell him I came here. Tell him I will come again."

"He will be glad," said Bonnefoy. "It is a distinction, even for M'sieur Westcott, to have Pierre Labrette call upon him and bid him welcome to St. Benoit."

"Bid him—!" Pierre in his rage started out in reverse gear and almost drove Bonnefoy into the iron horses. "Serves a fool right," he yelled with an evil look at Bonnefoy's terrified face. "Bid him welcome! I'll bid him to the devil and see that he does my bidding!" Then he drove away, his spinning wheels tearing up the weeds and gravel, filling the air with the stench of burning rubber.

Lynn had left the house as soon as the sun drove away the fog. He would have gone out anyway, fog or rain or a shower of swordfish. No house, not even the huge empty box of the manor, was large enough to contain his happiness.

"She loves me. Manon loves me. Manon—Manon—"

He said it over and over again, that lovely name, as he paced up and down his big room after his return from their meeting on the dikes. Manon—Manon—and in that ancient room the name, spoken in soft, warm accents of passion, of deep and fervent love, seemed to awaken an echo out of the ages past, and another voice, young too and ringingly strong, answered, "Manon." Yes, he knew that loved name had been spoken in this room before, when or by whom, he could not guess, but it sounded sweet and friendly there as if it were uttered to a lovely, frightened girl who stood shyly on the threshold, timid to enter.

Lynn was gay. In this mood the world would prove an easy conquest for him, and a million dollars or so a mere bagatelle. Just what weapons he would use to conquer the world or just how he would gather up the bagatelle, he didn't stop to think. What did it matter? In all the world there was only this dark, strangely lovely, strangely shy yet hotly passionate girl who loved him, who answered his desire for her with one as deep and unafraid, who amazed him with the strength of her longing as she humbled him with her nunlike serenity and innocence.

He had to get out. He had to walk and walk and think and think. He did not want to eat, but already he had learned that Bonnefoy's mother was, besides being a good servant, a mighty stern mistress. She was waiting at the stair-foot with her eternal broom—Lynn swore she never dropped it, that it had a telescope handle or some other fiendish device that enabled her to make it appear and vanish at will.

"One is going to dine, M'sieur Westcott."

"One," denied Lynn, "does not feel like dining."

"There is steak that I myself selected from the wagon of Hormidas Leclerc, the butcher, and broiled with a nicety. It is ready, m'sieur."

"But—"

"With onions richly fried in butter, m'sieur. It will not be so good if one does not hurry."

"One submits," groaned Lynn, marching resignedly to the kitchen alcove that a table and bench had transformed into a creditable breakfast nook, and Bonnefoy's mother, her broom over her shoulder, her steel-rimmed spectacles agleam with triumph, followed like a sturdy little tugboat in his wake.

To her chagrin, however, Bonnefoy's mother discovered that it is one thing to lead a young man in love to the steak-and-onions; quite another to make him eat his share thereof. He got away from the partially consumed repast during a brief interval in which the good dame was scolding her "boy" about a floorboard he had promised to fix. When she got back, flushed with triumph from another victory over her enemy, man, Lynn was gone. She glowered at the neglected plate. "It is the treasure, of course, that has taken his appetite away, just as it is this same treasure that makes him walk up and down his room like a prisoner in his cell at Dorchester. I wish he would find it, and stop wasting good food."

Lynn was striding along the marsh-road by this time. From the front window, whither she hastened, she saw his tall figure on the white strip of the road. For a while she watched, until he had passed from the range of her dim eyes; then she returned to her sweeping, revelling in clouds of fresh-raised dust.

It was warm that day, with always the cool breeze that blows across the Tantramar, and Lynn walked lithely, pipe in mouth, the good ashplant stoutly in his hand. Never, he thought, had he seen anything so brightly green as the spreading carpet of the marshes. Already the grass was as high as a man's waist and the breeze rippled across it as across the smooth surface of a tropic sea, shivering, trembling in little sweeping waves. In the air was the sweetness of honey and thyme and the sea-savor, and butterflies fluttered their bright way among the hedges and in the cottage-gardens where peonies reared their gorgeous heads. The singing hum of the insect world, in its heyday now, was a distant bourdon far back of the robin's throaty song and the voice of finch and meadowlark. Now a gull's gray and ghostlike shape came in from the sea and its shadow, as it sailed overhead, crossed his path, wings spread wide, motionless, seemingly, as a glider, sailing with infinite effortless grace.

By many a farm he went, where brown-faced, bright-eyed children peeped shyly at him from door or house-corner, where rowdy sheep-dogs rushed out to bark at him and sniff at his heels as he passed; laborers along the road straightened from their hoeing to touch their wide straw hats and give him a curious good-day. Behind him against the blue horizon the roofs

of St. Benoit and the tall spire of the village church showed above the bright green plumes of the willows; and there was his own house on its little knoll, and over there the farmhouse of Labrette.

He thought of Montreal, of the teeming streets, of the money-marts of St. James, of Morley Cross, of Alyne Stairs, who was blonde and serene and remote as the snow on a mountain peak, but who, he knew somehow guiltily, would melt a little, perhaps only a very little, when she learned that he had gone for good. He tried to think of his future here in the Tantramar country. It had to be here. It must be here. With some capital, he could stock the farm, hire some capable man to run it for him. Surely it could be made to pay, to afford him at least a living that would be wholesome and honest. He visioned a life spent here in this great peace, in these fields Elysian, far from the push and turmoil of the crowd—with Manon, always with Manon.

It had to be. It must be. Hope ran high in him. On such a day one could hope and believe and make little of obstacles. He had always been a dreamer; even between the uncompromising rows of figures on a sheet, between the martial lines, he could vision toil and romance and the reward of labor; love and the gentle peace of the good life.

Hours he walked under the mellow sun of afternoon. He was thirsty and tired when he got to the outskirts of another village which, Bonnefoy had told him, was called Petit Verger. A grassy road lined with young willows turned off to the right and down in a hollow there was the silvery glimmer of water. Lynn walked into the cool shade of the over-arching trees, along a leaf-shadowed tunnel where the earth was dark and moist. He came to the edge of a small reedy lake. There was a pavilion on the shore, built of boards, painted green, and there was a cottage close by it, a low stone dwelling whose age mocked at the cheap and blatant newness of the pavilion. There was a sign on a tall post, the letters carved into a square piece of board: Lac Minotte Inn. Tacked to the pavilion were posters advertising a weekly dance with music furnished by Paul Leblanc's orchestra, all the way from Moncton.

The cottage door was closed. A white collie with sad eyes came and barked sharply at Lynn, but soon wagged his plume and was friendly. Lynn opened the screen-door and wielded the iron fox-head that made the knocker, but no one came. As he turned away, feeling some disappointment, for he felt like lingering here, a car jolted down the lane, the thick bushes and the tall grass swishing against its fenders. It was a yellow roadster—the same car Pierre Labrette had followed.

Saara Martin stopped in front of the door where Lynn stood, waiting. She got out. She looked at him with veiled curiosity. Strangers were not plentiful around Petit Verger. She saw, from the powdery white dust coating Lynn's brown brogues, that he had walked some distance; from his English-cut knicker suit that he came from some of the big towns. She guessed his identity in a moment. So this was the big threat against the family peace of the Labrettes—

"No wonder that convent-pigeon fell hard," mused Saara. She said, "A customer!" and she smiled, showing fine white teeth between the splotchy scarlet of her lips. Her red hair under the green tam, she knew was dusty, though dust could not hide its flamboyant brightness. "It's good I got back before you escaped. For you were going to escape, though I told Sailor there to hold all customers by force. Bad Sailor!" She scolded the delighted collie. "Why were you letting him go?"

"Are customers so rare?" said Lynn. She was rough; her voice was deep, rather coarse, but there was a swaggering, free-and-easy air about her that he did not dislike.

"Very rare." She gathered some parcels out of the seat. Lynn took them from her. "Of course, on Saturday nights, when there is a dance, I have quite a few, mostly outsiders. The curé Père Berthelet, won't let his parishioners dance. They must not, under pain of hell-fire. So all I get is the renegades."

She unlocked the cottage door as she spoke and called "Come in," over her shoulder.

Lynn followed her into the cool dimness of a long hall, into a big room where there were high-backed settles and little tables along one wall. There were some old hunting-prints there, some plates and quaint figures of old men and women in peasant garb wearing huge wooden sabots.

Lynn always liked such. He was staring at them with something in his eyes that made Saara smile—a rather gentle smile for a face so wise and barren of illusion. She stood beside him and looked too. "Like them?"

"Always was crazy about them," said Lynn, smiling. "Wood, aren't they? Done here?"

"Right here."

He looked quickly at her, his brows lifting momentarily. "You mean you do them?"

Saara nodded. “Yes. My grandfather was a woodcarver—used to make queens and goddesses and Neptunes for the figureheads of the ships down at Dorchester. He taught me. I had a knack for it. I sell them—sometimes.”

“That’s great.” Lynn looked at her admiringly. He thought it was quite a thing for a girl to be able to carve such quaint and fetching little figures and paint them so gaily—their jackets so blue with big white buttons, their bright red neckerchiefs and little black hats. “But I’m forgetting,” he said. “I was thirsty.”

“Rum, beer, milk, tea, coffee—the rum is the kind popularly known as Nova Scotia champagne.”

“Milk,” said Lynn. “I’m warm enough as is.”

She brought him a blue jug of rich cold milk, a plate of doughnuts and thin crisp vanilla cookies. With a better appetite than the one that had scorned the good steak with onions of Bonnefoy’s mother, he munched away and drank aplenty.

Saara stood for a while with her back to him, turning over the pages of a magazine on a table by the door. After a while she faced him and met his friendly eyes with an answering smile.

“Great stuff,” he said.

“I’m glad you like it. You’re new around here, aren’t you?” She came and sat on the settle across from his, facing him over the narrow deal table.

“Yes. My name is Lynn Westcott. I have a house at St. Benoit. It belonged to my family, but I—”

“I know.” Saara cupped her round full chin in her hands. “Everybody in the Tantramar knows about the Westcotts. Everybody in the Tantramar, at some time or other, knows about everything.”

The blue eyes with their too long lashes studied him so intently that he found himself returning their look with one as intent. “What do you mean?” he asked, toying with his empty glass.

“You’d be wise to go back,” said Saara evenly, “back to Montreal.”

“I say—” Lynn frowned, quickly resentful of her intrusion into his affairs.

“Don’t be angry.” She shrugged, and got up. She turned away from him. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have said that at all. It just sort of slipped out. I meant well.” She seemed to have drawn away from him, as if something had made

her quickly conscious that she was not his equal, had no right to act as such nor to expect him to talk with her on equal terms.

"I'm sure you meant well," said Lynn slowly. "I—I think you're rather nice."

She turned with a smile of sudden gratitude. "You do!"

Lynn nodded. "I do."

"You won't," she became sober again, "change that idea of me if—"

"I think not. I'm sure not. I'm a stranger here and you—well, you're almost the first person who has seemed friendly, human, willing to meet me man-to-man and not treat me as if I were an interloper with no business in the country. I feel grateful to you. It is nice to talk to you, to hear you talk. Won't you tell me your name?"

She hesitated. The hesitation made her smile, so that Lynn was puzzled. And she smiled because quite unconsciously she had thought of the reaction of Tantramar folk to her name.

"Saara Martin," she said. "Does it mean anything to you?" She expected him to say no, when she would have said, "Nor to anyone else," bitterly. But instead he nodded and said, "Yes, a pleasant half hour, some lovely milk and the best doughnuts and cookies I ever tasted—that's all so far. But, we're neighbors, aren't we—what's six or seven miles?"

"Nothing." She looked down at the table pensively. "But six or seven thousand is a lot."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you'll know soon enough." She switched the subject designedly. "How did you like the fête-Dieu celebration? Did you see it?"

"Yes. It was rather impressive. I liked it."

"There'll be another big splash shortly—" She traced circles on the table with her forefinger. "A wedding—Manon Labrette and—and Marcel Vaubin. It will be a grand affair. Labrettes are so rich—"

"When is this to be?" Lynn with an effort kept his voice steady.

"The banns are to be published Sunday. Then for two more Sundays; then the week after that—"

"It is a long time," said Lynn. "Much can happen."

She looked up at him with sudden brightness and touched his hand shyly. “Luck,” she said.

“You’re kind,” he said. “We’ll meet again.”

“I wonder.”

“Why? Are you going away or something?”

“Oh, no. I’ll be here.”

“Then I’ll come to see you carve your little people. I’d like that.”

“Then—then come,” said Saara, her cheeks glowing an unwonted crimson.

“I’ll come.”

Chapter VIII

Lynn haunted the marshes, the great dike, the village. He did not see her. Not until Sunday, when, with a faint idea the roof would fall in on him, he went to church. She was there. So were Grand'mere Marthe, her three brothers—as he judged them—and Pierre. Lynn saw her and only her. The gaunt, wild-eyed Père Berthelet, looking, with his grizzled tonsured head and glowing coals of eyes, like some medieval monk, called from the altar steps the names of Manon Labrette and Marcel Vaubin, between whom there was a promise of marriage, anyone knowing a lawful impediment to which, was bound to make it known. It was in Lynn's heart to rise up and say, "She does not love him; she loves me. What then could be a greater impediment to this marriage?" But he said nothing. A stir ran through the crowded church. Manon looked down at her white hands folded quietly in her lap. But in her heart was black rage and defiance. Pierre's lips curved into a momentary smile that did not soften their hardness. Grand'mere Marthe's bony chin moved, as she prayed with a great rattling of beads, and pinched Louis at regular intervals to keep him from squirming.

Not until the crowd streamed out did Lynn's eyes draw answer from hers and then his heart turned to lead at what he saw in their darkness. She looked tired and pale, her face like a white rose under the drooping brim of a black leghorn hat. She had a white prayer book clasped close against the blue of her dress. She was so straight, so proud.

He was at the church-door ahead of her. He could wait no longer, let her people say what they would. He came to her eagerly, smiling. His face was browner from the sun and wind. "Where have you been, Manon? All week I waited for you—" He did not care for the startled, angry looks of her father and elder brothers nor Grand'mere Marthe's hawk-like stare. He did not care for anyone or anything. He was so glad to see her.

"They will not let me—"

"You mean to say—" Lynn looked from her to Pierre. "Have you any objection to my speaking to your daughter? We have met."

"We know." Pierre looked fixedly at him. "We know everything. I came to your house to tell you to stay away from mine, from all belonging to it—from Manon. You weren't there. So I tell you now. It is clear?"

The people, gathered about the church-door, stared in wondering silence. Pierre's voice was deep and harsh. Pierre was very angry—angry enough, he looked, to take this strange young man in his hands and break him. A bad man, Pierre; they thought, many of them, of that ice-bound, bitter day on the marsh-road when Pierre had mauled Leandre Hudon, of the blood dark on the iron-hard crust.

"You make it clear. Yet I think you do not consult any inclination other than your own." Lynn was as deadly calm as Pierre was hot. His eyes met Pierre's unflinchingly, measuring Pierre as they had that night in the room of La Maison Simard, and not finding him such a great man.

"We will go now," said Pierre. "There is no more to say."

Manon's bright look, dark and haunted, met Lynn's, and between them there was much said, in that instant.

"You are rash, m'sieur." Lynn found Grand'mere Marthe's strange eyes regarding him. "Very rash." She took Manon's arm with her clawlike hand, gloved in fingerless black, and drew Manon away; but she looked back with an odd quizzical expression at Lynn, as they entered Pierre's car.

Lynn, unconscious of the whisperings, the curious stares of the villagers, stood where they had left him, feeling alone, and angry and, after a fashion, amused. It was droll. It didn't seem real. A few Sundays ago, in tail-coat and striped trousers, in gray ascot-tie and gray gloves and gleaming-topper, he had walked down the broad steps of St. James Basilica with Alyne Stairs; today, before a little church in a little village in the heart of the Tantramar, he stood rejected and forlorn. Yet he was happier today. He had something today that a few weeks ago he had not dreamed of; he had found something that he had never before known, he had found it in this girl—something that was beyond name, perhaps even in her beautiful body and gentle spirit unattainable; yet it would keep him always seeking, always craving, always loving. Hopeless, mad, quixotic, his love might be, still he loved.

Absently, as he stood there, he filled and lit his pipe. What, he wondered, did Pierre mean by, "We know everything." How could they know anything about him and Manon? If they really did know, they must have made it hard for her, cruelly, devilishly hard. But how had Pierre found out about their love: it had been so secret. Then he thought of Saara Martin, that strange torch-like girl who lived in her old cottage by Lac Minotte and carved quaint little men and women out of wood. What was it she had said—"Everybody in the Tantramar, at some time or other, knows about everything." The

mysterious things she had hinted at that day, didn't seem so mysterious now. She must have known something; perhaps, like Pierre, she knew everything.

"Poor Manon! Poor little thing!" he muttered. "That's pretty rotten. I let her in for that. If I'd never come here, if I'd never bothered her—no!" He shook his head. "In spite of anything they might do or say, she's happier for having met me. Didn't she say it was the same way with her as with me? And I'm a different man since I met her. Maybe a madman, I don't know. I don't care." He grinned cheerily at a group of open-mouthed villagers, doffed his hat politely and strode away.

Well, the banns had been published—once. Two more Sundays—"She will never marry that chap—never. Even in this place, about four centuries behind the times as it is, they can't make the marriage altar a sacrificial one. It isn't done. But that Labrette, her father—I'll wager it was someone like him who gave the aristocrats the final push up the steps to the guillotine. I wonder if Vaubin is anything like him. They're built, these marsh-people—like their houses—and with about as much 'give' to them."

He walked slowly homeward. Roast pork, potatoes, turnips, cole slaw, chow-chow, lemon-cream—Bonnefoy's mother had a habit of announcing at breakfast just what there would be for dinner. This because Lynn had failed to show up for so many good meals and she thought it wise to put forth so tempting a menu that he just couldn't fail to appear and do justice to it. In love or not, he was doing a lot better at the table than at first. Bonnefoy's mother, watching him do away with her ample servings, thought he must be hot on the trail of the treasure.

Today, as he got through in fine shape, to the lemon-cream, she ventured "to make him a question."

"The treasure, m'sieur—it is found, yes, no?"

"Yes," said Lynn gravely, looking up at her—She was a little above the top of his head as he sat—"No."

"Ah! It is not found then. I thought—"

"It is an elusive treasure, madame. One moment I have it; then I haven't it. This morning—" He lowered his voice mysteriously—"I could have gathered it up in my arms and carried it off."

"*Mon Dieu!*" gasped Bonnefoy's mother. "And you could not! You were prevented!"

"Prevented," nodded Lynn. "By evil spirits."

"It is guarded then—this treasure!"

"Guarded closely, madame. But I shall outwit them. I'll have it yet."

"It is gold, this treasure? Jewels?"

"A pearl," said Lynn, with a gentle smile. "A single perfect pearl—*perle*, you say in French. It is beyond price. All the money in the world could not buy it."

"But—m'sieur is mad! How could such a pearl be here, in St. Benoit?"

> "'Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear—'"

quoted Lynn. "Wait, madame. Someday, perhaps, I will show you this treasure, this matchless pearl."

He became silent. Serious. All very well to clown: it didn't bring Manon any nearer. What was going to bring her to him? Miracles don't happen. "Still," he mused, "men have, ere this, run off with maids. And here is Young Lochinvar come out of Westmount. I love her and I'm going to have her. Have her—" He dreamed of her, here with him—here where the yellow sunlight streamed in; here, across from him, smiling at him, that dark smile of a madonna—and the perfume of her hair, the warm smooth softness of her lips that he had kissed. "I must see her, soon, soon. I must hold her in my arms again. I must make her see that this has to be, that nothing matters except this; nothing."

But he could not go to Pierre Labrette's house. That was sure. And they were, evidently, keeping close watch on her. "What can I do? What can I do?" He strode up and down his room for an hour after dinner, making Bonnefoy's mother fear greatly that her chances of seeing the pearl were getting slighter with each stride. But all this aimless tramping brought him nothing. He had never been up against anything like this. He had heard of such things, read of them, but it had seemed impossible that a situation like this should ever crop up in his life. In love with a girl—for the first time in love—and not even permitted to see her! Lynn Westcott, for whom a score of stately drawing-rooms held warmest welcome, forbidden the house of a Tantramar farmer—just because, ages ago, one of his ancestors had been given some land taken from an ancestor of Pierre Labrette's.

"And they talk about Kentucky," he muttered. "I wish to goodness the Westcotts had given them back their acres. Why—" he stopped in his stride —"why, maybe if I—" No, he certainly couldn't barter his land for Manon

Labrette. It wasn't only because of the land that Pierre objected to him. So that was no go.

He went out after a while; walked towards Lac Minotte, towards that leaf-tunnel of a lane that turned off the marsh-road on the outskirts of Petit Verger and led to the low gray stone cottage where Saara Martin lived. The lake was smooth, shining, like a mirror set in a frame of green. It was breathlessly still, a haze of shimmering heat hanging over the water.

He saw no one until he turned the corner of the cottage, following a worn path among the apple-trees, that brought him right up to the door. Saara Martin was sitting there, on one of the white benches that flanked the door. A man with great wide shoulders sat facing her. She saw Lynn but he did not, and he kept on in his loud voice—"so Pierre right on the church-steps, right in front of everyone, told this fellow to go about his business, to leave Manon alone. If that doesn't cure him, there are plenty of other ways and I—why are you making faces at me, Saara?"

Saara stood up. Vaubin turned his head then and saw Lynn. He stood up too, big and towering, floridly blond. He had a half-empty glass in his hand. He drank it off and stared at Lynn.

Saara's cheeks were white, but her voice was steady enough. "Good day, Mr. Westcott. So you did come again! This is Marcel Vaubin."

Lynn nodded. "So I gathered. Perhaps I intrude upon you now."

"You intrude upon us all, Westcott. You probably heard what I said or would you have me say it again?"

"What you say means nothing to me." Lynn's eyes were cold—cold as when he had faced Pierre. "Nothing. So you might save your breath."

"By heaven, my man, then I can make it mean something to you." He flung his glass into the bushes, took a step towards Lynn. He moved like an angry ox.

"Marcel!" Saara's voice was sharp, vehement. "You will do nothing. This is my house—"

"Pouf! You defend him. You couldn't have kept your house or yourself for that matter except for me. You did not even tell me you knew this fellow. How often has he been here, eh? What is he to you—"

"You had better keep quiet—you had much better keep quiet. If you do not—" Her voice broke, but she went on gamely—"I can say something—"

Marcel tore his gaze from Lynn's contemptuous eyes. He looked scowlingly at Saara. "You could, eh? And you would, eh? To save his skin—It must be that you—"

"You do not need to stop him, Saara," said Lynn. "It is only a postponement at best. I fancy the gentleman and I will meet again. I'll go now."

"I'll go." Vaubin laughed and said, in French, something that Lynn did not understand. He saw Saara's cheeks crimson, but Vaubin had gone by then and she and Lynn stood there alone.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm honestly sorry. I shouldn't have come butting in like that. I'm afraid I've made trouble for you."

"No." She stared at the ground. She wore a red blouse today and a fawn skirt, her thick hair was parted, its waves lay close to her head like golden furrows. In her fashion she was lovely. "No. It is I, myself, who have made the trouble. I—you must know now. You must think bad of me. Well—" She stamped her foot in a sudden fit of fury—"why do you stand there, saying nothing. Why don't you go! Why don't you say what you think. Why don't you tell me that I talked to you under false pretences, that I made you think I—I was decent, when—"

"Saara!"

She stopped. She looked at him, her eyes misted with tears, her red mouth twisted, her fists clenched, tautness in all her body. Then before his kind eyes, the gentle way he said her name, she relaxed. The stiffness went from her shoulders, from her neck, and the tears came more gently. "It is you who put those things in my mouth," he said. "I would never say them myself, because I would never think them—"

"You don't despise me. You don't feel different—"

She gave way utterly when he smiled at her—a smile that made her feel very young and not—not the same girl that Vaubin knew, that the Tantramar folk thought her. She cried, with very joy, and Lynn put an arm about her shaking shoulders. For an instant she clung to him hard, as a frightened child to a strong protector, "You are like God," she said, "so good."

"But I'm not." He shook her lightly and helped her dry her tears. "There!" He grinned at her. "Now what about my milk and doughnuts and my little men and women."

She laughed then, shyly. No other man had ever treated her like this. It was a new and wonderful experience. She knew now why Manon Labrette was defying that wicked tribe of hers for love of him. He was so big and so lean and strong. Marcel was puffy. He had not been afraid of Marcel.

She brought him the same good refreshments and while he ate, she went upstairs and came down with a shallow box filled with her carvings. Lynn's eyes danced. And she watched his eyes, saw the delight in them as he touched the gnomish old men and troll-like women, the little houses, the little white church. He looked from them to her, his eyes still shining. "Great, Saara! Great!"

"This too?" She brought from behind her back a little image of himself, a faithful, astonishingly clever bit of work. There he was, silk hat and stick, cutaway coat, a white carnation for a *boutonnière*.

"You're a wonder!" He laughed delightedly, taking the little man almost reverently in his hand, standing it on his palm.

"It's for you." She looked at him and looked away. "I carved it after you were here. You—you told me you liked funny little men."

"That's not nice."

She laughed to keep from crying. Quickly she said, "I'll get some more cakes," and ran into the house. Lynn sat there among the toys, happy, but Saara, who was very young, leaned against the kitchen door when she had closed it, laid her cheek against the panel and bit hard at her lip and felt a smothering, a choking in her heart, in her breast, as if heart and breast were all too small—oh, how much too small—to hold this hopeless wonder.

Monday morning Lynn received from Morley Cross a cheque for the money he had left in Montreal and with it some information that made him leap from his chair and pace the floor and generally make such a racket that Bonnefoy's mother, busy at her cooking in the kitchen below stairs, jumped too and wondered what new developments in the search of the priceless pearl could have taken place so suddenly.

"—for Fortune is kind to fools, my dear Westcott. You recall those old Guillemot Lake mine-holdings of your father's? They didn't figure in the debâcle: no one wanted them. Now they've struck pay-dirt up there and you're in the money. No fortune, of course, but plenty to gratify your whims in the direction of cows, sheep—and is she blonde or brunette? But I still think you should come back to Montreal, to the life you know—"

"Never!" said Lynn. "Never it was before this came and it's never—never now. Why, there's nothing to stop us from getting married now. I can spend money on the place. I can do all I want to do. I feel as if I could wade right through all the Labrettes in Westmorland and a dozen Vaubins thrown in." On his table the little figure Saara's brown fingers had carved so cleverly stood jauntily. It came to him now that the little man was garbed in wedding-finery. He smiled, a bit pensively, wistfully. He sighed. "I don't know what to make of that girl. If what this Jersey bull, Vaubin, said about her is true, he's a poor specimen of mankind, not only for saying it, but for treating her as he does. There's something fine about her, something pretty splendid. I wish I could see Manon. I'd like to tell her of this. Guillemot Lake Mines—I often heard dad speak of them, and he had faith." Once, not so many weeks ago, this bit of news would have meant just one thing to Lynn Westcott—exploitation, leading to gold and more gold. Now the gold was nothing, it was the fact that gold could set him free, gold could give him her, could give him the happiness he knew was beyond all price.

Gold, he felt sure, would make no difference to Pierre Labrette. Not all the gold in the world would change Pierre's attitude towards him or make that proud, peasant family think of him as anything but an alien and an enemy. "I wish it could be different. It's going to be hard for her to live here, in sight of the house where she was born and spent so many years that were good and happy—and not to go there ever, not to be spoken to by any of them. I—why it will be impossible for her. Yet, I feel she would not want to go away. I'm sure she wouldn't."

All day he thought of Manon and racked his brain for ways of reaching her. He could think of none. She was guarded from him as effectively as if she were shut up in the keep of a Norman castle, watched by those dark-browed kinsmen of hers, by that ancient woman with the awful eyes that could stare right through your coat and waistcoat and see everything that went on within your heart. As well try to get through a circle of fire-spitting dragons, he thought, and walked, or rather flitted like a lost soul in and out and around the house: one moment visioning the changes to be made, the new life that would come—the cows in the tide-meadows grazing placidly under the sun; the sheep, like little white clouds floating against the green of the upland hills, the hens, the ducks, the geese; the good saddle horses in the stable, and men, his men, working in the broad fields, his fields—the fields of the Westcotts; the next moment, despairing of any happiness.

How the ghosts of his ancestors would whisper and argue and quarrel among themselves when he brought here the bride of his choosing. How

some would despise her for the daughter of Breton peasants—these would be the lady-ghosts—while they envied her for her beauty; how some would toast her in ghostly goblets of spectral wine—these would be the men—the big ruddy country-squire Westcotts, whose hats were off to a fine woman, who would welcome her here. One, especially, would love her coming, would take her hand in his airy fingers and lift it to his lips—that one to whom was written *Toujours, Manon*. He would worship her, as he must have worshipped that other girl long, long ago.

These fancies came to Lynn that night—a warm and mist-filled night, as he sat in his room long after the dark had come, and mused on many things. Bonnefoy and Bonnefoy's mother had left shortly after the evening meal. He was alone, if ever he could feel alone in this house of a thousand friendly footfalls and whispers and sounds he could not name. He sat in an old arm chair, smoking his pipe, staring out at the gray mist swirling against the pane, thinking, dreaming, fancying many things in this house of fancies. Laughter tinkling light and laughter ringing hearty, you could hear, if you listened, and the patter of little feet on the broad oak stair; doors that softly opened and gently closed—

Why, his own door— He took his pipe from his mouth, watched the door with parted lips, scarce breathing, scarce, it seemed, living this earthly life. It was so real, the quiet way the big knob turned and the door swung inward on its great hinges. Then in the dimness of the hall, he saw a white hand, a face— He got up slowly, still staring, still believing that this was a trick his eyes had played him, still thinking that even when the door opened wide and he saw her clearly, standing there on the threshold, wearing a long black cape, her uncovered head dewed with the mist, her eyes like pools of deep velvet darkness in the white beauty of her face.

"Manon!" he whispered. "Manon!" And again, it seemed, that ghostly echo came, so gentle, so wondering, so weighted with love and desire: "Manon!" Timidly she stood, as if all the courage, all the sacrifice of her modesty, all the longing that had urged her here, had deserted her now, as if she would turn and run from him.

He came to her and took her hands and stared into her eyes. And she smiled up at him then, unable to speak, her mouth trembling, until he kissed it and stilled its trembling and drove away her fear by the gentle encompassing of his arms that strained her body close against him.

"You would not come to me. So I came to you."

They stared at each other, wonderingly. A strange feeling came to him, a prickling, shivery feeling. He saw that she too was affected. "Did—did I say that?" she whispered.

"You must have—"

"But it seemed like another's voice. Just as when you called my name —"

"There was another Manon, you know. She may have come here once. Yes, and, if she was of your people she may well have said, 'You could not come to me, so I came to you.'"

Manon smiled. She threw off her cloak. She looked at him, her head tilted. "I like so to look at you, Lynn."

He kissed her lingeringly. He smoothed her black hair back with his fingers. "How did you ever escape?"

"It was risky. But the men are all away tonight. Louis is in bed and Grand'mere Marthe is in her room. I had only Jeanneton to watch out for. But I could not find my own coat; this cape belongs to Grand'mere. Maybe it is old as the hills. I do not doubt it. Maybe Manon Girard wore it when she came here. Anyway, I hope it has magic—to bring me back safely. I should not have come. But I had to see you. I should have died, Lynn, I know, if I had not seen you—"

"Lovely Manon. And I have news for you. Wonderful for both of us. I have money now—enough for us to be married."

"Was it only money that stood in the way? I thought there were other things—oh, you know as well as I do, Lynn, that your money won't change their minds. I know of nothing that will. It is all this unfortunate business of ancestors. So dull, so foolish, to us; but to them, to my father and grandmother, to Lucien and Ludovic—you would think to hear them that it was only yesterday that the Labrettes were driven, at the bayonet's point, from the house that stood here, and only yesterday that Colonel Westcott came here to establish himself."

"What does it matter to us, Manon?"

"This much—there will be no peace for us, for you and me. Oh, I have heard Grand'mere taunting my father and Lucien—'A sad day for the Labrettes—the great family whose roots are deep in Normandy and *le pays Breton*!' she will say. 'An evil day when the daughter of the house gives her love to one of those who tried to destroy it.' Then she will taunt Lucien

about his book, telling him he had better leave room for another chapter. We have them all against us."

"Marry me, Manon! Come away with me!" He held her hands tightly. He spoke with quiet urgency, as once many years ago, though they knew it not, another man had spoken there to another woman, under conditions much like these.

"You mean for me to defy them, turn my back on all of them—forever. It will be forever."

"Isn't it worth it? I love you so. Love is worth anything, any sacrifice, Manon. It's our happiness. If we don't take it, and quickly, you will find your life wrecked. You will be married to a man you don't like—"

"And what of you?"

"I should be miserable—always miserable. But—"

"You could turn to Saara Martin." She looked at him steadily.

"How—?"

"One hears everything in St. Benoit. You are a friend of Saara Martin's."

"I met her twice. She is pleasant, Manon. And good."

"Good? They do not say that here. But I know nothing of her, and I do know you and you love me. Life would be too cruel if you did not love me. Take me, kiss me—"

"You will come away with me?"

"I—" She could not speak: she was so glad, so happy, clinging to him, her arms about his neck. Lips closed, she nodded rapidly, her eyes shining. "Yes," she whispered at last. "Yes. Not tomorrow—the day after—Wednesday. It will be at night, late."

"I'll be waiting," he said softly, "under those willows in front of your house. I'll get a car and we will drive to Moncton. I shall go there first and get the licence—"

"It does not seem true." How large her eyes were. Not seeing him, they looked afar off. "And I shall come back here to St. Benoit, to live in this house. I shall no longer be Manon Labrette. I shall have to give up being a Labrette for they will surely disown me. But I shall be your wife, my handsome Lynn. You are so big, so not afraid of anything—not of Pierre, not

of Grand'mere Marthe or anyone. Do you not fear they will kill you; they are bad men. And there is Marcel Vaubin—"

"I'm not afraid. I think of you, and nothing else seems to matter. Tell me, have you had a hard time at home, on account of me?"

"I am almost an outcast." She laughed. "I have been very angry, but now—pouf—it seems nothing. But I am a disgrace to the family, I have been told, first by my father, then by Grand'mere Marthe, then by Lucien, then by Ludovic, then by all four together. Louis—it was Louis who started it all. He saw us on the dike that morning—that lovely morning. Maybe he did not know what harm he was doing. Anyway, he hates me now, as the author of all his ills. But they would have learned, anyhow. I told them I was not ashamed. I told them I loved you."

"You were brave."

"I told them I would not marry Marcel Vaubin. My father said I must. You were in the church when the curé called my name. I could have screamed. I knew you were there. I hated to have you hear that."

"It didn't mean anything. Did I not come to you at the church-door?"

"Yes. I was so proud. To have you come to me so boldly in front of them all. Grand'mere Marthe said your family were all like that and if one of them loved a woman nothing would stop him—nothing except death. This was in the car going home from mass. And Pierre, my father, said, 'That is a good thing with which to stop a man.' Then Grand'mere said, 'The story has always persisted that it was Michel Labrette who threw Giles Westcott into the Tantramar and drowned him.' Then she began to laugh—the queerest laugh, and she said, 'The proud Labrettes; they treat their enemies thus.' She is a strange old woman. No one knows her. I do not, who have always been close to her. Sometimes I think she laughs at us all."

"She didn't seem to be laughing when she looked at me," said Lynn. "Her eyes are so bright, so young—"

"Her heart is young—ah, what is this. Why, it is you, Lynn. A little Lynn, all dressed up as for a wedding. How grand!" She picked up the little figure from his table and gazed at it with bright eyes, with parted, smiling lips. "But where is the bride? Saara Martin made this. I have seen others she made. But she did not make you a bride—"

"No," said Lynn. "It may be that she did not have time—"

"It may be," said Manon, "that she did not have courage. You—what did you do to her Lynn? You were kind to her, and strong and gentle."

"I tried to be."

"And no one ever was before—no one."

"Well—what of it? I will ask her to make a lovely little bride—you."

"Do not." Manon shook her dark head. "Please do not. She may not want to make it. She may hate it when it is made and stick pins in it and destroy me."

"She is not like that," laughed Lynn.

"Then it may stick pins in her."

"If it is you, it would not do that."

"But love is like that. You are a man. You do not know. I am a woman. Just since I met you, I am a woman. I have defied Soeur Angelique and all the good Ursulines, and I have become a woman. Soon I shall be madame. It is wonderful, *hein*? I am so glad—so glad. Now I go. There are so many in that house. Even Matta, the dog, and Lizette, the little black cat, keep an eye on me."

"But you will get away on Wednesday night?"

"I am not locked in ever. I will get away." Her lightness vanished. "I will get away and come to you and stay with you and be with you always. You know what it means—always. The last thing at night I shall see your face and in the morning as soon as it comes light. Always."

"Always, Manon," he said and kissed her white hand and kissed her lips.

"*Toujours, Manon*," she whispered; then with his arm about her they went down the dark old staircase and faces seemed to glimmer at them out of the glow above, and whispers to follow them, out the door and into the gray mist that billowed up to meet them—mist o' the moors, mist of the distant sea that hammered, hammered, eternally against the dikes, the frail walls of man's poor building, as love, that is a sea, too, hammers forever against the feeble bonds that men put upon it and breaches them in the end, even as the sea its barriers.

Chapter IX

For Lynn, that night was a dream of Manon. She seemed still to be in the room, to be smiling at him, to be looking at him with that glad wonder in her eyes. Still, her arms clung about his neck, her lips sought his and his fingers touched the silken softness of her hair. He awoke from that dream into a reality that was no less fraught with beauty. His in dreams; she would soon be his in reality. Soon—just another day. One more day. He would go to Moncton. He would see about the ring and the licence. A strange, hectic wooing, he thought, in which no tangible token of his love had been given. But it was a wooing that required no gift of gold or jewels. Fate had flung them together; down through the centuries, it seemed to him, many, many things had conspired, leading to this outcome.

After breakfast he walked across the march to St. Benoit where there was a branch of La Banque Provinciale. The mist still brooded over the Tantramar, thicker, grayer than ever, and great drops of rain fell warm on his face. The rain had turned to a down-pour, torrential, filling the village street with a muddy turgid flood by the time he finished his business at the tiny grill in the tiny office. Across the street was La Maison Simard and fat Luc, his hands behind his apron, his hair sticking up like two horns on either side of his big cheese of a head, was standing in the doorway.

Lynn dashed across to him, head bent against the cascading rain. More pleasant to wait in Luc's taproom than in the dingy little bank. The fat Simard, his doughy face turning even whiter, stood aside to let Lynn enter. There were some half-dozen men there in the murky dimness. Lynn, busy shaking the water from his fawn trench-coat and from his hat, did not for a moment notice them. When he did look up, his eyes met the stolid, baleful regard of Marcel Vaubin. He bulked huge against the bar where he stood with two other men, great, rugged fellows like himself. He had a glass in his hand and Lynn knew in an instant, from his flushed face and brightened eye, that it was not the mild beer of La Maison Simard that he was drinking.

"Welcome!" Vaubin bowed mockingly. "You said we should meet again, and we do. There was a slight postponement of our business. It can be transacted now." He set down his glass. He strode towards Lynn, lifting a big chair out of his way as though it were a feather.

"M'sieur!" squeaked Luc. "I beg of you. Let there be no—" He got in Vaubin's way and got for his pains an elbow in the paunchy midriff that sent him, green and gasping, staggering into a corner. The other men there did nothing, said nothing. After all, it was not their business. Anyway, Marcel was not an easy man to stop once he turned that color, once his mouth looked like that, twisted and cruel. This other—well, he was big too, a tall willow—but Vaubin was an oak.

"Your face—" Vaubin stopped a few feet from Lynn, planted his feet wide and put his hands on his hips—hands huge and brown—"your face is so pretty, all the girls in St. Benoit are falling in love with it. That is hard on us others, you understand. Perhaps if it is not so good to look on they will lose interest in you. So we will fix it for you."

His hand lashed out with terrible suddenness. Flat, it cracked against Lynn's cheek with a report sharp as a pistol's. Lynn swayed. Swiftly into his eyes came a glint, hard, cold, calculating, cruel, that even Vaubin, in his fury saw, and for a moment balked at. But he could not stop now. His fists were clenched, raised. He bored in, lashing wildly at Lynn, who wasn't there. The flaming fists struck air, struck nothing. Vaubin roared and great oaths rolled from his lips.

Lynn was watching those lips, that wicked mouth—watching as he dodged and side-stepped with the lightning precision of a dancer. Then his time came. Like a steel piston his left flashed out smashing against Vaubin's mouth and left there a wreckage of blood and teeth. Vaubin staggered, bellowing like a poll-axed bull. Another man would have been flat on his back. Not he. Blindly, senselessly, he rushed at Lynn, seeking to grasp him in his arms and crush the life from his body. He would do that now. He would kill. Nothing would stop him. He was a madman, insensible of punishment, careless of the hard-driven fists that ceaselessly punished him, thudding on his chest, cracking against his jaw.

"Get him, Marcel! Get him!" they shouted, all on the side of the bleeding Vaubin, all itching to see this cool, light-stepping fellow torn into bits. It was preposterous that he could last so long against the mighty Vaubin, who had defeated the strongest men in the Tantramar. "Kill him, Marcel!"

Vaubin grinned a bloody grin and clawed at Lynn's face. If ever those awful hands got a grip—Lynn was driven back, back. He saw murder in Vaubin's red rimmed eyes, heard it in his mouthings. Still he dodged and boxed and feinted, waiting, waiting as before until his chance should come.

It came. His right curved up in a murderous arc, smashed against Vaubin's jaw, lifting him, toppling him over with a terrible crash among the splintered chairs and the tumbling spittoons on the sawdust floor. He rolled over on his face and lay there.

Lynn stood, looking down at him, caressing his broken, bleeding knuckles. "Throw some water on him," he said. "He will be all right, I think —and a bit more polite, I hope."

The men there looked at him darkly. They did not like strangers. Especially they did not like this new one, this last of a family who had loved their women as it listed and felled their men often in fair fight. He was another in the Westcott tradition. It was known that Manon Labrette, Pierre's daughter, of all the girls in the marsh-country the most beautiful, was in love with him; rumored, too, that Saara Martin smiled on him.

"You win for the moment, m'sieur," said one. "But you have done a bad morning's work."

"Would you call it that?" Lynn turned away, walked to the door. Luc was standing there, stricken, trembling. He caught Lynn's arm; in a hoarse, frightened whisper he said, "*Mon Dieu*, m'sieur, this will be your death. Now—now surely you will go from here. He is a bad man. He will surely kill you. You must go away."

"I am here to stay, *mon ami*," smiled Lynn. "I belong here—as much as he does; more so, it may be."

"Then God protect you." The good Simard blessed himself as he watched Lynn cross the village street and go down the road towards the railway station. One of the men was using a cold sponge on Vaubin's battered face; another held a glass to his lips. He revived slowly, gazed stupidly around him, then glared like a maniac and struggled groggily to his feet. He stared about him at the inscrutable faces of his friends. He wiped his bloody mouth with the back of his hand. Then he laughed—a horrible, startling laugh and staggered out of the inn.

All through the Tantramar country it was known before nightfall that Marcel Vaubin had taken a bad beating from the stranger Westcott. Old men and women shook their heads, spoke of the days when the Westcotts—their amours, their wild rides and desperate fights—had been the chief topic of conversation. They were history, these proud, wild people, and it seemed strange that history should live again, that the last of the clan should re-appear and do again the very things his forefathers had done.

"They stole our women and thrashed our men," said Grand'mere Marthe when young Louis, wide-eyed, gasping, ran into the house—he had run, indeed, all the way from St. Benoit, and startled the dinner-table with a story of the fight so lurid and extravagant that Manon got up from her chair and walked to the open window, where she stood, her straight back turned to them, her hands at her sides, looking out on the garden, finding peace in its scents and the low sounds of the summer-insects in their world alone.

"It will be the end of him," growled Pierre. "It is too much. We will not stand for it. We will not have such people here. Years ago, when they were rich and powerful they could play the tyrant, no doubt. But not now. We are the rich and powerful now. We are strong and he is one alone."

"He is not alone." Manon's voice came over her shoulder, low-pitched, husky. "He can never be alone while I am here."

"Silence!" Pierre's fist banged on the table, made the dishes rattle, made Lizette the cat take a flying leap from the window into a mass of brambles, made Matta, the collie, set up a wild and furious barking in the stable-yard. "Go to your room. Stay in your room. I do not want to see you. I do not want to hear you!"

"Shame, Manon—shame!" said Grand'mere Marthe. She grinned wickedly. "The girl must be a changeling, Pierrot—she must indeed. No blood of the Labrettes flows in her veins, I'll swear. Who could dream of such defiance—" Manon had gone, quickly, upstairs—"why, only a few weeks ago she was a mild and docile girl fresh from the convent."

"Devil's alchemy," said Pierre, his eyes glaring. "But I'll fix her. I'll fix him. I'll see she's married to Vaubin no matter what happens. The fool will persist in ruining his own cause. I must go and talk to him."

But when the following afternoon, Pierre went to Vaubin's place, the old man, Levrier, told him that Marcel had gone away after dinner, riding like a fiend into the rain.

"Drunk, eh?" snarled Pierre. "He was drunk."

"He was like a madman, M'sieur Labrette."

"I'll break his neck—" said Pierre—"The fool—the accursed bungling fool—if he doesn't break it himself galloping around in the mud. Where has he gone, eh? To his paramour, no doubt. To that flame-topped light o' love. Why do I bother with him! Why don't I give Manon to some peasant, to Polydore Cormier, to Calixte Breau—to anyone—just to put her beyond reach of this persistent seducer—this Westcott! Tell Vaubin to come to me,

at once, when he returns." Pierre slammed the door of his car and skidded away through the red ochre mud of the lane.

Vaubin rode down the wet leaf-tunnel to Lac Minotte. His battered face had been repaired somewhat; still, he was no pretty object, and the wildness of his bloodshot eyes, the ruddy puffiness of his face did not at all enhance his appearance. Why he went to Lac Minotte, he did not know. Perhaps because he had always gone there, perhaps because instinctively he turned to the girl who had first trusted herself to him, who had loved him, who had been patient and kind, who had agreed to step sorrowfully aside and let him marry another, since it meant he would be saved from ruin.

She was sitting before a little fire on the hearth, for the day was chill and there was dampness everywhere—the marsh-damp that penetrates through a pin-hole, a crack. She started up when he flung into the room, dripping and muddy. She looked at him and sudden panic showed in her eyes. She ran to him and grasped his great arm in both hands.

"Tell me! Tell me! What have you done to—"

He flung her away, roughly. She staggered against the rough stone of the hearth and there was blood on her elbow. She did not notice it, nor the pain.

"It is of him you think, eh?" gritted Marcel.

"Yes. Yes, but I think of you, Marcel. I know what you are—You have not killed him?"

"Listen, you!" He reached her in one stride and caught her wrists in his big fingers, crushing them. "What is it to you if I killed him or not? If he's dead or alive? You—surely you aren't soft towards him too. But you are—you are—the same as she is. Both of you my women, and he tries to take you from me. He won't. I haven't killed him, no; but I will. I will! Look what he's done to me? Before my friends—Goguen, Laplanche, Hudon, Bonville, the others—he has disgraced me. I can't hold up my head now—"

"He—he bested you!" Saara did not know there was gladness in her voice. He knew. He lunged towards her and his hand slapped against her mouth, bruising it. She reeled away from him and murderously he followed as if to hurt her more. She covered her face with her hands. "No," she said. "No, not that. Not to me. I should not have that from you. Not—not after—I loved you, Marcel, I still do. I let you go because—because a girl like me is no good to you—but God is not so cruel as to let you beat me!"

He chewed his lip, stared sullenly at the floor. Slow shame crept into his heart but did not displace the hatred that dwelt there. "I'll do him in," he muttered. "That will hurt you more, no doubt—and will hurt Manon."

"And you—you will hang!"

"They will not be able to prove it. The nights are misty, dark—"

She shuddered. "No, Marcel, no! Do not think of such a thing." She came to him, but with a brusque wave of his hand he repulsed her. "Please," she begged. "Why do you not go away from here—go with me—?"

"We've gone into that," he said harshly, "a thousand times and more. I have no money. I swim in a tide of debts that is always about my ears. Unless I marry Manon, I will have nothing, nothing—"

"But we could make out. I know we could. And you do not love her—not as you love me."

"So," he said cunningly, "you try now to get me out of the way so that Westcott will get her."

"I did not think of that," she denied. "But it might be as well."

"It won't be. Never fear; it won't be. Now, stop talking to me, and give me a drink."

She brought a demijohn. It was no use refusing him, for he knew where it was kept and would go fetch it himself if she would not. Anyway, it was through money lent by him that she was able to keep this place. But she had loved him enough to hope once that he would marry her. She watched him moodily as he drank, dabbing at her bruised lips and elbow with her handkerchief. By-and-by he dozed. She helped him to a couch in the back room. Drunkenly he drew her to him and kissed the lips he had cruelly hurt. "Nice girl, Saara," he mumbled. "Fine girl. Always remember."

She looked down at him as he dropped off to sleep. She touched his thick blond hair with gentle fingers. She thought of other, happier days before dissipation and reckless gambling had seized too strong a hold on him. "I'll keep him here," she decided. "Keep him here drunk, if I must. When he gets one idea fixed in that big head of his, nothing will stop him and he could wreck a lot of lives—hers, his own, mine, Lynn's—" in her heart she knew it was Lynn's that mattered most to her—his life and his happiness. He had been so kind, so gentle—

Until the following afternoon Marcel slept soddenly. And she was glad. Perhaps, if she could keep him there for a while, reason with him, he would

cool off. He seemed quieter when he awoke, though his mood was hellish and not until he had had a drink could she talk to him. Then she brought him some boiled eggs, some toast and coffee. He took these, talked to her for a while, then dozed off again. He seemed weak, inert, his life almost suspended, as even strong men will seem, after a bout of drinking.

"I'll stay here till tomorrow, Saara," he said. "You don't need to bother with me. I'll be all right."

Several times she looked in at him; he seemed to be sleeping. But each time, after she left the room, his lids opened, his eyes, fixed and glassy, stared at the ceiling, and his lips moved. Night came. Softly, again, she opened his door. She carried a lamp in her hand. She wore a dark tweed suit. Probably, he thought, she is going to Petit Verger, to the store for something.

"Marcel!" she whispered. "Are you sleeping, Marcel?" He said nothing. He breathed heavily. The light receded. The door closed. He heard her go out, heard the noisy starting of the little car. Then he got up and dressed quickly. He fortified himself with a copious draught of the rum, that Saara had removed from the table by his couch. Then he went into the big front room and took from a gun-rack by the door a .32 rifle. There were shells in the table-drawer. He slipped some in his pocket and hurried through the mist to the stable. He would be back before Saara returned and she would swear that he had not left the house. His alibi, should he need one, was proven. Rum-crazed, his brain spinning in a vicious whirl, he was yet deadly cold and steady; in his mind, one set purpose, from which nothing would swerve him. Through his still swollen lips issued an unmusical, monotonous humming, keeping time to the hoof-beats of his horse on the muddy road.

Saara did not go to Petit Verger. All day she had tried to summon up courage to do what her heart told her she should do. She knew Vaubin better than anyone else. He was poisonous in his hatreds and one must guard strongly against them and, if one did not know them, a warning was necessary. So she drove through the fog towards St. Benoit, left the car hidden in a lane below Westcott Manor and made her way through the wet grass, up the hill to the house. She had a little parcel in the pocket of her tweed jacket, her fingers warm about it sheltering it from the rain that spattered through the fog. There had been a struggle in her breast, too, about bringing that, but now that she had yielded and decided to give it to him, it seemed easier to do this thing.

She walked around to the front of the house. A light burned in the hall and the upstairs windows glowed. A strange shyness held her now. Twice she grasped the big knocker and twice let it go. At last, timidly she knocked, and the sound was like thunder in her ears, and she waited, trembling, wishing to run away, but unable to move.

The door opened. Lynn stared at her in the dim light. "Saara!" he said. "I'm glad to see you. Come in out of the wet." He took her hand, drew her into the great barren hall. Shyly she looked about her, then at him.

"You're surprised to see me?"

"Pleasantly. Come on upstairs to my room. It's brighter and warmer there."

"I—perhaps I'd better not—"

"Of course, you will." He took her arm and marched her upstairs into the roomy comfort of his own chamber. On his table stood the little figure she had carved. She saw it right away, and smiled pleasedly. Lynn looked too and nodded. "I'm crazy about myself," he said. "Sometime soon you will—"

He stopped, looking at the gift she had taken from her pocket and quickly unwrapped—the figure of a bride, in long veil, in satin and lace—a dark, lovely bride, lovely as a madonna. She walked to the table and stood it beside the figure of Lynn.

"There!" she said, catching her lip in her teeth.

"It is lovely! Why, I was just going to ask you to make one—"

"I had it the other day, when I gave you your own. But—but I couldn't seem to give it to you then."

"Why?"

Her cheeks reddened. "Oh, nothing. Maybe I—I forgot. Maybe—" She couldn't tell him, couldn't tell anyone or wouldn't admit to herself that it was because it brought a hideous pain into her heart to see that other girl standing in her bridal array beside him. Poor, foolish, hopeless, warm little dream.

"But it was not for that I came," she said quickly. "Listen—you must listen, and must believe."

He was struck by her sudden, white-faced earnestness. "You are going to tell me about Vaubin?"

"Yes. You be careful of him, be always careful. I told you when I first saw you that you would be wise to go away from here, back to Montreal. It was bad enough then. Now you have made things worse. When he is angry, he is a madman. He can hate forever."

"What could he do to me?"

"He could kill you. He would. He as good as—"

"You have been talking to him?"

"He is at my place now. Sleeping. He—he had been drinking. Tonight there is no danger from him, I think. But you will watch—you will be cautious when you go abroad at night?"

"Most cautious. But I hope he would not be so foolish—"

Saara shook her head, its golden colors glinted in the light. "You do not know him."

"You were good to come to me and tell me, Saara. I thank you."

She bowed her head. Her fingers pulled at the sodden fringe of her jacket. She wore a lavender sweater, high about her strong neck. "It is nothing. I—I am glad you like your—your bride."

"She is to be—my bride."

"You are so sure—"

"Sure, Saara—tonight she is going away with me. I tell you what no one else knows, because I feel she wouldn't mind and I want you to hear it."

"Tonight! She is going to run off with you! But—but it is impossible!"

"Not at all. I went to Moncton yesterday. I have the licence. I have arranged for the wedding—"

"But—have you thought what you are doing to her? Have you considered what this will mean? Her people, everyone, will disown her. She will be disgraced. Why, they will hate her, those Labrettes, as much as they hate you. And they will do you harm, ruin you—they never forget a thing like that. There will be no living here for you."

"We are going to live here. We shall be happy."

"You are brave—brave and good, Lynn; and Manon is brave and good. Courage—I would not have courage for that; maybe I have never loved like that. I—I do not know. I must go now. I wish you luck. I wish that you will be of all people in the world the happiest, you two who are not afraid."

Lynn pressed her hand. She looked at him, her blue eyes misted and shining. Together they walked down the wide stairs. She opened the door. Wind and rain, a black squall, burst in upon them. She shivered. Lynn said, "You had better stay. You will be drenched."

"No. I must go. My car is down in the lane below the house."

"Then here, put this over your shoulders." He took his light trench-coat from the hall-stand and wrapped it around her. She smiled at him. She said again, "Good luck," then, head bent, she ran down the steps into the driving rain, into succeeding flashes of pale green lightning.

Lynn walked slowly upstairs, hearing the wind that rattled shutters and window-sashes, hearing the slam of a shed-door that had broken its fastening and swung wild on its rusty hinges. Once above the din, he heard a sharp sound, a crack as when a limb is snapped from a tree, distorted, so quickly gone, that he thought perhaps it was fancy. He forgot it, forgot everything. Presently, the car he had arranged for would come from the village and he would go to fetch Manon.

He stood in the centre of his room. He spread his arms wide, exultantly. He gazed about him, at his chairs, his table, his books that had come only today; at the miniature bride-and-groom, standing side-by-side; and he thought again of Saara, kindly, for a moment—only for a moment, for Manon possessed his mind, his soul.

"When I come here again," he said, "she will be with me—my wife. Together, we will make this old house live again, together we will be too strong for all little hates and meannesses. Together."

The rain drip-dripped from the sodden willow-branches onto the roof of the car, parked in darkness, in the road in front of the farmhouse of Labrette. Lynn, weary of sitting, torn with impatience, with conflicting hope and fear, walked up and down the muddy road. No lights shone through the trees. No one passed in the road. The hour was not late, but in the Tantramar, on nights like this, one goes early to bed.

Would she never come! Once he addressed a gatepost. Once he walked up the drive almost to the door of the house, then dashed back, nearly falling in the darkness, fearing she would come by a roundabout way and perhaps miss him. He dared not light a match though he wanted to smoke as he never had wanted before. "A little more of this," he thought wildly, "and I'll dash up and hammer on the door—"

A low whistle came out of the night. “Manon!” he called softly, “Manon!” Then she was in his arms, clinging to him, laughing, sobbing, her wet cheek pressed against his, her cold lips on his, her arms hard about his neck. She had brought a little travelling-bag. Lynn rescued it from the mud where it had dropped and they got into the car. They could not speak for a moment. They were like people hotly pursued. When the starter failed to work the first time, Lynn swore and Manon, in dread, clutched his arm. At last they were away, following the misted beam of light across the marshes to Moncton.

“I almost failed,” she said. “Oh, I thought we were lost, Lynn. It was Louis again. He came into my room when I was packing this bag. He told them. My father raved. They were all at me. Tonight I was locked in my room—locked in until a few minutes ago.”

“How did you get out?”

“Someone let me out. I was sitting on my bed, all dressed, crying and praying and—and maybe swearing—” She laughed nervously—“then I heard the key turn. I could not believe it. I went to the door and, sure enough, it was unlocked. But there was no one.”

“Louis must have repented.”

“Louis will be killed. I will too, unless you protect me, my Lynn.”

He pressed her hand. “I will protect you, Manon. I will love and guard you and watch over you as long as there is life in me.”

“I am not afraid, Lynn. I cannot be afraid with you, who are so brave. You beat Marcel. He will hate you; they all will. Are you not afraid of him?”

“No. Saara Martin came to me tonight. She told me he would kill me. He won’t, Manon. She came—and she brought another little figure—of you—all in bridal finery. I wish it could be like that.”

“When—when we are forgiven we will be married again like that, in St. Benoit—that will be never. It does not matter. Saara Martin loves you, Lynn.”

“No. No, I was kind to her, that is all.”

“She is good, Saara—not a bad girl?”

“She is good, Manon.”

“I love you, Lynn.”

"I love you."

Thus the last of the Westcotts and the flower of the Labrettes rode across the Tantramar through the gray murk that blew from the Bay of Fundy; and came thus to the old town named after General Monck, and there they were married—married in a shabby parlor by a threadbare cleric who lisped, but to them it was a vaulted basilica, and they stood before the grand altar and in thunderous, trumpet tones the high-priest said—"till Death do you part."

In the house of Severin Hudon, not far down the road from the manor, Marcel Vaubin knelt by the bed where Saara lay, her face white and drawn, her shadowy lids closed over the violet blue of her eyes. Vaubin prayed and pleaded, frightened, contrite, appalled at the terrible thing he had done. Madame, Severin's fat wife, bathed the wound and stanched the flow of blood and Severin himself stood off from the bed, angry and uneasy.

This was a bad thing Vaubin had done. Surely the man was mad. He had talked like a madman when he carried her in out of the streaming rain and bade the Hudons telephone for old Doctor Laurin, that a murder had been done, that perhaps, though, it was not too late, if only they would hurry, hurry, for heaven's sake hurry, and make the doctor hurry.

"It was the coat—the light coat, his coat!" Vaubin was muttering. "How could I know that she was there! Saara—Saara—God strike me dead and thus punish me for what I have done. What right have I to attempt the life of any man, to love any woman! I was not fit for Manon, that is why this dreadful thing has happened. I am not fit for Saara. She will die and I will die with her. I have been an evil man."

He raved and ranted and raked his wet blond hair with big fingers. He talked to Saara as to a sick child, beseeching her to speak to him. When at last the doctor's car arrived, he rushed to the door and seized old Laurin before he could get into the house, almost grovelling before him.

"Save her! Save her! You can. You must. About me it does not matter. I do not care. But she has done no harm. She was always good and kind to me, to everyone; and I was not good to her. I was going to leave her—"

"Quiet, imbecile!" Old Laurin shooed him away, shook off the fevered grip on his arm. "You have been doing the devil's work a long time. This should teach you something. No—" He gestured Vaubin back—"You stay here. Madame Hudon will be the only one required."

He went into the bedroom off the hall where Saara lay, and closed the door. Marcel slumped down in a chair and stared with glazed eyes, straight ahead of him. The bravado induced by the liquor he had drunk, the smart of the thrashing Lynn had given him, the sense of his injuries, had carried him along well to the point where he pressed the trigger and sent a bullet winging towards the hurrying figure in the roadway. Then Saara cried out—a terrible, sobbing cry—and, paralyzed, he had dropped the gun and staggered to where she lay.

He had said incoherent things in those moments, done things he could recall only as one recalls the fragments of a grisly nightmare. There in the driving rain, in the mud of the marsh-road he had called her name and cradled her in his arms and kissed her cold mouth wildly. He saw the lights of Severin Hudon's house blinking among the willows across the road, and he went there.

Now, as he waited, with no heart in him, for what the doctor should have to say, he could see clearly the consequences of what he had done and of what he might have done. Justice here was swift. All those who had been his friends would turn instantly against him. They would say he had tried to kill Saara, to get her out of the way in case she should interfere with his marrying the daughter of Pierre Labrette.

Had it been Lynn Westcott whom he shot, it would have been as bad. Murder is murder. Gone now were any chances he might have had of marrying Manon Labrette. Pierre would have no more to do with him now. In the Tantramar, his prestige had gone.

"But let her get better, *mon Dieu*," he prayed, "and I will not care for that. I will give my life to atonement and I will make up to Saara for all the evil things I have done to her—"

But there in the stuffy little hall of the farmhouse with the ancient odors of hearty cooking impregnating even the faded cushions of the chair where he sat, the minutes dragged on like hours, ticked out sombrely by a wheezy clock in the corner. He was alone. Even Severin would have nothing to do with him. He was a pariah already, and he hated himself.

Then old Laurin, gaunt and gray, in his black waistcoat, the stiff cuffs of his white shirt turned up, opened the door of the room and came out into the hall. Marcel sprang to meet him, a piteous question in his bloodshot eyes.

The doctor nodded. "I have found the bullet, Vaubin. Drink and the devil loaded your gun and pointed it for you but the hand of God deflected your aim."

Marcel bowed his head. He swayed with the weakness of his relief. Doctor Laurin put a strong hand on his shoulder and gripped him hard to steady him. "She will be all right. Now she is sleeping. I shall stay here until she awakens. Why did you do this? It is a hideous thing."

"I—I did it—It was Westcott that I—"

"Ah! You were out to murder that young man, who did you no harm except that he resented your insolence and your arrogant conduct! This, then, is your punishment for your evil intention. You set out to slay a man you think you hate and you almost succeed in killing the woman you love. You do love Saara?"

"Not until this night did I know how much."

"That is well, *mon ami*; in her delirium she called your name, as a woman calls the name of the man she loves."

"She—she called my name!" Vaubin's big hands clenched, his mouth trembled. He jerked his head, shook it savagely. "I have been a fool, *monsieur le docteur*; I have been a blind and crazy fool."

"Blinder and crazier, I think, than you know," said Laurin fastening the big old gold cuff-links in the stiff-starched button-holes. "Saara will be the mother of your child."

Vaubin sat down. Laurin, whom the years of witnessing pain and suffering had not hardened, pitied him now.

"No!" muttered Vaubin. "No!"

"But yes."

"And she did not say. She would not say. There was nothing, she told me, to stand in the way if I wanted to marry Manon Labrette. There was no claim upon me from her side. Ah, but she is a good woman, that Saara. I am not fit for a good woman like her."

"One can but try," said the doctor, dryly. "Manon Labrette will not be hurt by losing you."

"Manon does not care for me; she loves Westcott. It is her affair. To them too I have been evil and I shall make atonement. To all the world I shall make atonement."

Laurin, himself an Acadian of old stock, cursed the sentimentality and emotion of the French. Fierce as hawks one minute, ready to kill and

destroy, here they were the next, weeping, wringing their hands, lost in a morass of self-pity and reproach.

He went back to the room where Saara lay sleeping quietly. He let Marcel look at her, then they went to the kitchen and madame gave them coffee. Severin was there, grim and silent, but there was relief in his dark, weather seamed face.

"This need not be spoken of," said the old doctor, sipping his coffee and wiping his droopy gray moustache. "I know you Hudons, you, Celestine, and you, Alderic—you are close mouthed; you will not talk. I will not, and I know that the girl will want only to shield you, Vaubin. So it can be one of those many things that go on in the world and the world knows nothing of, *hein*?"

The Hudons nodded. Marcel bit his lip and gave them all a look of doglike gratitude.

"It is well then," said old Laurin. "In the morning she will be well enough to be moved. You can drive her home, Vaubin, and get a woman to look after her for a while."

When, presently, they tiptoed into the bedroom, Saara was awake, her eyes big and dark, shadowed, in the whiteness of her face. She smiled. Marcel knelt by the bed. She put her hand on his hair, smoothing it. "You will be well now, Saara," Doctor Laurin said and nodded sagely and left them alone.

For a long time they did not speak. Then she said, "Marcel." And he raised his head and looked humbly at her. "Do not look so sad. I am all right now. But—we must thank God that he saved you from what you planned to do. It was at another you shot."

Vaubin nodded. "I have thanked God. I always shall thank Him. I was mad, Saara. I am different now. I see things I did not see before—how fine you are, how much you loved me—"

"I always love you." She was glad. "And now you do not wish that you could marry her or hate him because she loves him?"

"I love you, my little Saara. I think I never loved her. I did Pierre's bidding. Westcott—I shall ask him to forgive me. I wish him well. I hope that he may get her."

"By now," murmured Saara, "they are married."

"They have run away! They have defied the Labrettes!"

"They love each other—so much that there was nothing strong enough to stop them. It is a great thing—love like that."

"Yes." He looked at her, his eyes adoring. "Yes, it is a great thing." And he leaned over and kissed her lips. "So I will love you, Saara, and nothing shall come between us." With clumsy, gentle hand, he smoothed her white brow until she fell asleep, and when, later, old Laurin looked into the room, he too was sleeping, still kneeling by the bedside, his head pillowed on his arms.

Chapter X

Morning on the Tantramar, and sunlight richer after rain—sunlight warm and yellow-golden, sweeping in shimmering waves of dusk and shadow over that sea of green, as the white, woolly clouds drifted across the deep summer blue of the sky. Along the road that Lynn Westcott drove with his bride that morning the air was rich with bird song. Robin and lark and linnet and thrush, madly vocal, hopped in the grass by the roadside, fluttered in the hedges or soared across their path.

They did not talk, the last of the Westcotts and the fairest of the Labrettes. They did not need to talk, for there was that in their young hearts, warm, sweet and pulsing, that brooks no utterance. In them the generations of bitterness and envy had emerged, transmuted by youth's fair alchemy, into a love priceless beyond all naming. Chosen, they were, by Fate to unite in bliss the two houses where hate had dwelt. And they were proud and happy and unafraid. All the worries that had beset her, about her family, about their attitude towards her marriage to Lynn, had melted away in the fire of their love's fulfillment. Those fears were as nothing now and she wondered why ever she had given heed to them or been depressed or frightened by them.

For Lynn was strong. Her dark head lay on his shoulder in shy but full surrender and the great dark eyes studied his brown face, so lean and strong and boldly cut, as he drove. Her husband—the thought overwhelmed her, who had come, such a very short while ago, from the convent's dim seclusion, who had dreamed of no beauty like this, who had felt in her, deep, deep, some stirrings of desire, the fulfillment of which was beyond her knowing.

She was with him now, she would be always with him, and the world well lost. He had given to her, when he made her his wife, much more than her family, by their anger, could ever take away from her. This warmth and fullness of heart he had given her, this wonder in her breast, this running rapture in her blood. And was there anything else in the world to equal these?

She kissed his cheek with light warm lips. He stopped the car where now they had emerged from the inland hills, and the marsh-country, of which they had caught only fair glimpses before, was spread in all its vast beauty

before them. He took her in his arms and rested his cheek against her hair and they clung thus for a long time in silence. Then he kissed her tenderly and long.

"You are very happy, Manon." He stated it, he did not ask, for her eyes told him, so dark and clear and filled with her love, that he had brought her happiness, that in the realization of her love was no smallest drop of disappointment or regret.

"I am very happy, Lynn," she said. "For this happiness, death would be too small a price to pay. That it shall go on, all our lives together, seems even too great a kindness of God to show to humans. How we must study and pray to be worthy of it! How I shall try to please you!"

"Serious little girl!" he smiled at her. "You need not study or need not pray. Be always as you are, Manon, no man could ask more of woman. You are a child, sweet and pure—so pure that even to me, and I have lived clean, your purity is almost a reproach."

"Oh, no! No, I beg that you—" Soft rose flushed her cheek and her eyes were averted from his. "It is just that love itself is so pure, this love that you have given me. I will be a good wife to you. I will make your home. That I know how to do, that is what all Acadian girls know best. I will be a good wife and—and a good mother to your children."

There was something so guileless, so childlike, yet so typical of the strength of her strong race in this that she said—so much of her woman's soul, that Lynn felt a tightening in his throat and a great wonder in his heart. These girls, from the time they could walk, saw their life clearly and fitted themselves for it—to be a good wife to the man they loved; to be a good mother to his children.

For a while they sat and gazed at the Tantramar, loving its mighty stillness, the great hush that seems to hover over the world's flat places. Far off was the blue haze over-hanging the tidal waters of Old Fundy, farther off still the dark blur of the Nova Scotia coast, Cape Blomidon and the hills above the Basin of Minas. Acadia—the land her forefathers had settled and loved, sending deep roots down into its grateful soil; the land his forefathers had conquered, and loved no less. Now, in him and in her, were those two jarring races united in the strongest bond of love. So let that bitter past be all forgotten. Let Lucien write his book and Pierre talk of the glories of his family and the persecutions it had once suffered. Let Grand'mere Marthe continue as the proud leader of her people, their champion. Let Ludovic and

Louis grow up in that old and dark tradition of hate; but with Manon it ended, for in her it had never taken root.

"Let's go home," said Lynn suddenly with a smile at her pensive face. "Home—it seems so strange for me to have a place I really can call home. You have no idea, Manon, how proud it makes me feel. It seems as if I had lived all my life in St. Benoit. I feel as if I really belonged here from the day I saw the manor."

"I am so glad you belonged, *mon seigneur*," she said with mock humility. "Had you felt as an alien, you would not have gazed upon the little village girl, Manon Labrette, save with passing interest. You would have gone away and left her in sorrow. *Ciel*, that would have been most awful, my Lynn! Now we go home, *hein*? There will be, I fancy, no triumphal arches erected across the roads and adorned with boughs of evergreens, no bands playing, no banners flying, no saplings planted along the roadside or roses strewing our path—and none of the Labrettes to welcome home their prodigal daughter. *Saprée!* How furious they will be! I, they will say, am the first of the family to prove a traitor, to go over to the enemy."

"But it is you who have conquered me. It has happened in history. It is well that it happened here. They can't keep this family feud alive forever."

"You do not know the Labrettes. Are you weary of hearing that, *mon beau*? But it may be that we have given a death-blow to this false pride. I do not know. We shall see. *Bien! Allons!*"

She laughed gaily. The car raced away. The sun was so good, so hot and the road was smooth and she was with Lynn, married to Lynn. Nothing could ever alter that now—not all the books of a thousand Luciens nor all the furies of a thousand Pierres. For the first time in the troubled history of the Tantramar, a Labrette went to dwell in the house of the Westcotts.

They drove into the tiny village of Petit Verger. Lynn thought of Saara, of her concern for him. A young girl's fancy, no doubt. He did not yet know these people well enough to realize that they seldom spoke or acted without cause and without deep consideration. He did not dream of the near tragedy that had been enacted in the rain and darkness so handy to his own home, so close to him.

But shortly after they had passed the woodland road that leads down to Lac Minotte, they saw Saara's gay yellow roadster coming slowly towards them.

"It is Marcel who drives the car." Manon's English became a direct translation of French when she was excited. "And how slowly he drives. And Saara—she is wearing some bandages. *Voyons!* Let us see."

The two cars slowed, stopped. Saara's face was pale but smiling and her teeth flashed as she smiled and waved at them. "A thousand felicitations, my little ones!" she called. Marcel, his cheeks brick-red, his eyes tired, got out of the car, and Lynn and Manon got out too, puzzled, wondering at Vaubin's altered manner. Gone was all his sulkiness; his truculent arrogance completely vanished.

He stood in front of them, feet planted far apart. He looked from Manon's lovely face, to Lynn, so quiet and so at ease. "I, too," he said, "would add a thousand felicitations, if first you will allow me to ask a thousand pardons—" He stammered, stuttered, moved his big hands. "I have been a very bad fellow. I am very much ashamed. I have been punished for it. I should like to be your friend—yours, Manon, and yours, Monsieur Westcott, if you will permit."

"You are good, Marcel," said Manon simply. "I thank you."

"And I," said Lynn. He held out his hand. Vaubin gripped it eagerly and shook it hard. He could speak no more; for there were not words in English for what he felt and he did not know the French ones. The three of them walked over to the car where Saara waited. She kissed Manon. She shook Lynn's hand. There were tears in her eyes and she blinked them away.

"I am so glad, so glad!" she said. "And you are so happy, you two. Soon —" The color came to her pale cheeks—"soon Marcel and I will be married."

"Ah!" Manon clapped her hands. Lynn bowed. "But what has happened to you, Saara—your arm in a sling—your shoulder—!"

"It is nothing—nothing. Some little accident." Lynn looked from her to Vaubin. He thought—but no, he must be wrong in his thinking. It probably was nothing like what he thought. Anyway, today of all days, he must think the best. And Saara was happy. And Vaubin was contrite, so abjectly contrite, that Lynn, knowing his former pride and haughtiness, pitied him, and wondered.

So, presently, they parted, Marcel and Saara for the quiet of the little cottage by Lac Minotte, the Westcotts, Lynn and Manon, for the old and mellow welcome of the manor that had in its long life stretched kind arms to

greet full many a bridal pair, but surely none so strange as this and surely none so happy.

The ancient willows, like stately knights, dipped their proud pale green plumes and whispered a greeting with rustling voices. Sunlight dappled the drive below them and the tangled shrubberies and weed-grown gardens were no longer forlorn, no longer dismal to behold. And there was the gray old house, its stone walls straight and massive, its red roof almost gay on this bright morning, as the whole place seemed to shake off the worn garment of neglect and stand forth in beauty to receive the master and mistress it had so long awaited.

And so fair were they! So young, so bright, so gay, as Lynn helped her from the car, gathered her up, laughing and hotly blushing, in his arms and carried her up the wide stone steps between the bewildered Bonnefoy and the ecstatic, broom-armed Bonnefoy's mother.

Over the threshold and into the house. And there he kissed her and set her down and kissed her again, and then, with his arm about her shoulders and with a wave of his hand indicating the great hall and the great rooms opening off it, practically empty as yet, but cleanly ready for their fit adornment, he said simply: "Here, Manon-of-my-heart, is your home and mine. Here may love live and may there be always beauty."

She looked at him with shining, eager eyes, with her proud dark head held high, with the brave independence of her race; then lightly she dropped him a courtesy and said, "My Lord Westcott, you honor me above all women. May I be worthy of your trust and be a faithful keeper of the keys, a good chatelaine and a careful one."

Then they laughed together like children and joined hands and raced upstairs to the big room and sat in the wide window-seat, happy in each other's arms, careless of the hours' passing, of the multifarious things to be done, the house to be furnished, the life to be planned. On Lynn's table stood the little figures, the bride-and-groom, that Saara had carved. Manon laughed with glee and picked them up and kissed them.

Lynn watched her, still in a dream, still not able to bring this wonder that had happened to him quite down to the level of everyday things. "But yes," he mused, "yes, she is to be always here, always mine. Nothing can take her from me now—nothing."

Then, across the marsh, he saw the house of the Labrettes—as old, as solid, as proud as his own, he thought; and he wondered, "Have I in reality brought the two houses closer together by what I have done, or have I rather

driven them farther apart? They will never accept this marriage, those proud people, unless through some miracle that I cannot foresee. They will never admit Manon or me into their kinship. But we can make our way alone."

She came and rested her hand on his shoulder and looked where he was looking. "Yes," she said softly. "Yes. It seems near, but it is very far. The window you see is—was mine—"

"Was it!" Lynn's eyes danced. "Why, so I dreamed. So I thought when I looked at it."

"And I thought this was yours. I used to see your light and—and pray to it. Oh, I must have been good, for God more than heeded all my prayers."

"Manon," he said gravely, "you will not regret what you have given up for me? Seeing each day that house where you were born, where you must have been happy, you won't ever think—?"

She shook her head, bent and kissed his forehead. "I shall never regret. Seeing the house each day will only serve to remind me of the happiness they would have kept away from me."

He caught her to him. "I am glad, Manon. I want nothing to make you unhappy."

A big blue roadster came up the drive. Manon said, "That is Omer Leger, whose car you had—"

"Who now has mine," smiled Lynn. "I thought it would be here in time for our flight, but it just 'reached' as you so quaintly say, this morning. It's a Bentley, quite an old one, relic of the days when there was money in the bond business. But it's quite good yet. We'll go buy things in it. We'll go get ourselves a honeymoon in a few days time."

"*Bon!*" She was radiant. "We shall drive and drive and maybe capture the moon some night, away up on a high hill."

"The moon and all the stars, Manon. And of the stars we'll make for you a lovely chaplet and of the moon a bright jewel for your hair."

"And could I not have a bracelet too?" How gay they were, how young; how lovely the world was! Then Bonnefoy's mother, her glasses gleaming, a startling red-check apron adorning her Gibraltar-like front, stood in the doorway with news of *soupe aux choux*, *dindon rôti*, *marrons glacées*, and a flock of other things fit for the bridal table. Lynn picked up the little figure of his bride, Manon the figure of her husband, and downstairs they marched to

set them atop the imposing *gâteau de noce*—the wedding-cake—that Bonnefoy's mother had made.

To her Lynn said elaborately: "I thank you, Madame Gaudet, on behalf of Mrs. Westcott and myself. Once I told you I would show you the treasure—a pearl, you recall, a priceless pearl—which I stayed here to seek—"

The old dame courtesied and a smile wreathed her faded, homely face. "Monsieur, I am not so dull now. Only I did not think there was in all the world a pearl so beautiful."

Then they sat and broke bread together and ate but tasted nothing.

In the farmhouse of Labrette was chaos such as never before had disrupted the placid lives of those who dwelt there. Turmoil surged and billowed around the tower-like form of Grand'mere Marthe, who sat, gnarled hands on shiny stick, bony chin on gnarled hands, sat and watched everything with those fiery dark eyes, listened to everything with those sharp old ears, but seeing and hearing more with the eyes and ears of her spirit, attuned through long years to finding those things which the less percipient senses of others so easily missed.

That unforgettable morning, so gay and bright, so filled with darkness and bitterness for this proud household. They had been sitting at breakfast, Grand'mere Marthe and Pierre, Lucien, Ludovic and Louis, keeping the morning silence, when Jeanneton came downstairs, gathered her apron to her eyes, hiding her chalk-white face, and began to weep. They raised their heads and stared at her. "Eh! Eh! What is this? What is it?" Pierre leapt to his feet, sent his chair a-clattering on the floor and reached the frightened woman in two strides. He seized her shoulders with his big red hands and shook her until, it seemed, the words were shaken out of her:

"Manon—Manon—she is gone! She has—run away!"

Pierre stood stock-still for a moment. He made a sound that was a concentration of a thousand oaths. He flung Jeanneton aside and dashed upstairs to see for himself. If this were so, if she had defied him, flouted them all—

He came down slowly, with the tread of an executioner; almost, one could see the sharp ax on his shoulder. There was a mad look in his dark eyes, from which the others, all except Grand'mere Marthe, averted their own.

"Who in this house unlocked that door?" He stood in the arched entry to the dining-room and stared about him. His gaze rested on Louis. Lucien and Ludovic stared too at the frightened cadet, who had begun to tremble, to turn pale under his olive coating. He began to whimper.

"Louis!" Pierre's hands were spread like claws as he advanced towards his last born. With a sharp sudden cry of "I did not! It was not I!" Louis squirmed out of his chair, dodged his father's clutching fingers and darted out of the house and away like a rabbit.

Grand'mere Marthe dipped a crust of toast in her black tea, popped it into her mouth, and looked slyly around.

"You must not chastise Louis, Pierrot. She is gone now—gone to the stranger. We must do something. We must settle this. It is, without doubt, the greatest disaster that has befallen the Labrettes in two centuries. To think that she, the loveliest of our house, the fairest flower, should give her love to a Westcott, of all people! Write that in your book, Lucien."

"But—" Pierre's hands clenched and unclenched and his face was mottled.

"What can you do?" demanded Grand'mere Marthe. "Go after them? They are married now. Use violence upon him? You, I think, are not in favor of violence."

"Do!" blurted Pierre thickly. "I can disown her, despise her. I can make her life and his, if they dare to stay in this place, miserable forever. I can ruin him—I should like to tear him apart. I shall go to her and—no, I will never look upon her face, nor will any of you. Mark me, no one of you shall ever speak to her or acknowledge her existence upon the earth. Let her go with that fool Westcott. They were always a curse to us from the time they came here. Let her go and rot, I say—"

He glared from his mother's sphinx-like visage to the helpless faces of his sons. He ground his teeth and turned and stomped out of the house. Lucien ran his fingers through his pale straw thatch. Ludovic wheezed like a tire losing air. Grand'mere Marthe finished her tea and spoke sharply to the stricken Jeanneton for neglecting the toast.

"On Sunday," said Grand'mere Marthe benignly, "my other children will come here with their wives and families to celebrate my birthday. A hundred odd I am. Think of that, Lucien. Think of it, Ludovic. A hundred years, and for eighty-five of them—well—We shall consider at that gathering what there is to do about Manon, who has brought such disgrace upon our house.

Jeanneton, fetch quickly some more hot-water: one must eat, even if silly romantic girls will go off breaking the tradition of generations."

Pierre did not come near his mother all that day. Lucien had no heart for his famous book. Ludovic went to the barn and thought gloomily of the war, which he had enjoyed immensely. Louis, after an hour or so, slunk back and hid behind his grandmother's skirts. She gave him the rest of his breakfast and promised that Pierre should not beat him.

"If you say so, Grand'mere," said Louis thankfully, his mouth full of bacon, "then it will be so. One always obeys you, even my father."

"Yes," nodded Grand'mere Marthe. "So."

"But I swear to you, Grand'mere, I did not unlock that door and let Manon run away. I—" A stricken look came to his face, he choked on his food and had to be thumped on the back by the ancient dame. "I—I might have done it in my sleep!" he said appalled. "Oh, I just might have."

"You couldn't be blamed for that," consoled Grand'mere Marthe with a grin. "That's not bad: it's only when you walk in your sleep all your life that harm is done."

"But how can one always walk in one's sleep?"

"How indeed, *mon p'tit*! When you are a hundred like me, you may know. Do you hate Manon for running off and marrying this man?"

Louis frowned and shook his head, and looked fearfully at her. "Will you box my ears if I say I don't, Grand'mere?"

The old lady drew him to her and kissed him. Then she sent him away and sat quietly, looking over the marshes towards the red gables of the Westcott house among the waving willows.

Soon all St. Benoit and the country round knew that Manon Labrette, defying Pierre and her family, had run away and married Lynn Westcott. There were dire prophecies bandied about. Pierre would do something terrible to them both. Then there was, more powerful even than Pierre, more proud and dangerous, the old dame, his mother. Grand'mere Marthe was respected, venerated and feared by everyone in the Tantramar. She had lived so long. She knew so much. She would do something terrible to these rash young ones.

Then, on top of this vast excitement, Marcel Vaubin was married to Saara Martin. That was a shock. That was something that lifted the whole countryside to the very peak of astonishment, until it was learned that Saara and Vaubin had visited the Westcott house and that Marcel had publicly announced that whosoever said anything against this young couple, said it against him and would have him to reckon with.

"The fool!" said Pierre. "The big stupid ox! Even he turns upon me then. Very well, him I can punish. I can bring him to his knees. He should be careful that he does not owe money to the man he challenges." And Pierre let it be known that any who wished to be considered friends of his—and they were a goodly number—would have nothing to do with Manon and her husband. "We have disowned her. We will have no more to do with her until the day she dies. Let her live with this stranger as a stranger amongst us."

But Marcel Vaubin let it be known that Pierre could take his farm if he willed. It was nothing to him. He would live with Saara at Lac Minotte, and Pierre, finding that his threats caused no consternation anywhere, settled into a bitter silence, even in his own household.

On Sunday the legions of Labrettes began to gather: Alphonse from his law-office, Leon from his jewelry-shop; with them their quiet wives and noisy children; Evangeline, Celeste and Jeanne with their quiet doctor, newspaper-editor and railway-executive—and their noisy children. The elders came with long and solemn faces, not at all befitting the birthday of Grand'mere Marthe, but suited to the more important fact of Manon's elopement.

By noon they had all arrived and were seated at the long table, frock coats and expensive silks and a rich display of jewelry and gold watch-chain. But the talk was subdued and Grand'mere Marthe looking from face to face with her sharp old eyes, saw not one that did not reflect the bitterness of Pierre's. And they ate of the goodly things provided, much as mourners at a wake would eat, very lightly and as if the food were not food at all.

Grand'mere Marthe tap-tapped impatiently with her stick. Today she was decked out in regal finery—a wondrous cap of her best Flemish lace atop her proud head, pearls about her neck, and she wore her black silk dress and carried her stick with the silver knob. The sun was warm and bright upon her withered cheek and through the window above the waving blue and red of the garden flowers, she looked out upon the marsh and loved it as in the days when she was young. Young, she felt, today—younger than all these about her.

Alphonse proposed the toast to his mother. Ignoring the *style simple* and the *style tempéré*, he rode the *sublime* utterly to death. He pictured his mother as the great oak, the last in a forest of lesser trees, rearing her proud crest far above them, and making them seem as nothing. She was the champion of their house, the upholder of its glory. Then sadly he said how deeply they all felt sorrow that this occasion that should have been one of the most joyous in the history of the family, should have been darkened by shame—

He got no further. Grand'mere Marthe stood up—stood up straight and proud, so much like the mighty oak he had likened her to, that he and all the rest stared at her timidly, their mouths agape. Terrible she could be, they knew; and she, not Pierre, was the head of the house. She controlled the purse-strings. She could leave her money where she would.

"I am past a hundred, my children." Her voice was sharp and clear, her eyes flashing wickedly. "That is a great age, and only a fool does not learn much in a century: I have never been a fool. You know that, eh? *Bien!* For almost eighty-five years I have listened to one tune—the pride and glory of the Labrettes. I wearied of it the first year. I did not say so. Why? Because I knew one day I would see it conquered. That day has come. One of the family you have hated and reviled for nearly two hundred years—the last of them, a poor youth at that, has come and won the love of your loveliest daughter. Manon—you should love and praise Manon—not hate her. You should emulate her not condemn her. She is the first of you to rise above false pride and family hate and all the rest of the dark things that have haunted this house—the first to follow her own heart and go where it led. Not all your talk, your pride, your smugness—even your fierceness, Pierre, could hold her back.

"From the first I was on her side. I guessed that she would never marry the man you so kindly chose for her. She was braver than I was for I was forced to marry a Labrette; she was more fortunate than Manon Girard who founded your line—because Manon Girard loved a Westcott, who by some strange mischance, was found drowned in the Tantramar, the night before they planned to run away. Put that in your book, Lucien!

"Manon's love was strongest. It was I who opened the door of her room, Pierre. I would have cursed her if she had let you rule her. I knew she was strong and she had my own strength, though she did not know it. When I bade her not to be a fool, I meant for her not to give up the man of her choice. Now that she has defied you and your silly pride, you would disown her. You, Pierre, forbid anyone to speak to her, to acknowledge her existence

on this earth. Very well then! I am the head of this house—I, Marthe! And today, my birthday, I shall carry the greetings of my house to the house of the Westcotts, to which my own is joined in the bond of love. Thus, on this day we celebrate, I give you something to think about. Pray to God that the old darkness may be driven from your hearts; that you may forget a past which means nothing to those who live now; and cease trying, I warn you, to rear a strong house on a foundation of pride and hatred."

Majestically, scarce leaning on the stout stick with its silver knob, she walked amid that utter silence from the room and out of the house, and there was no sound behind her. Tall, straight, like some ancient queen who goes to battle or surrender alone, scorning the support of her legions, she walked across the marsh-road. The peasants going to the afternoon-service in the church of St. Benoit saw her and stared as at a vision and crossed themselves and were silent until she had passed. But before nightfall there was none in the Tantramar, save the infants or those impotent with age, who did not know that the great Marthe had gone to visit her grandchild. No more would Pierre's dictum be taken seriously. Was she not the chief, the leader of her people? If she forgave, all forgave.

Proudly, serenely she walked in the sun, and in the manor they did not mark her coming, did not dream that such a thing could be. Bonnefoy's mother opened the door and Grand'mere Marthe motioned her to silence—an unnecessary gesture, since paralysis, instant and complete, had seized the good Madame Gaudet. She leaned against the wall and Grand'mere Marthe swept by her, straight to an open door where she heard the husky well-beloved tones of the Manon she loved.

She loomed in the doorway, tall and splendid, and stood there a moment unnoticed. They had finished their dinner and were talking, too rapt, too absorbed in each other to notice even that heroic figure out of the strong past. Then Manon turned and gasped, and Lynn turned and they both rose slowly to their feet as Grand'mere Marthe advanced into the room. She held out her arms to Manon and Manon flung herself against the firm bosom and clung and laughed and sobbed.

"And you, my son." The old lady held out her hand to Lynn. He took it gently. "You are kind," he said. "This is great for Manon, and great for me."

"You are the head of your house, m'sieur, and I am the head of mine. I bring you our friendship and our love. You have done well, Manon—" She touched the dark, glossy hair and smiled into the eyes so like her own. "You have been brave and fine, as no other woman of our family ever dared to be.

I am proud of you. You two are starting a new chapter, may it be a long and splendid one. No more can the Labrettes hate the Westcotts, for they now are one. And peace comes to the Tantramar." She pointed with her stick, through the open window, to the river, winding, glistening, gleaming in the sun, like a silver serpent in a bed of crimson clay. "The tide comes and goes, flowing ever, and a hundred years are nothing to it, nor a thousand, and the lives of men and women are only as drops of water. We are nothing, *mes enfants*, except when some great passion, some love like yours, picks us up and makes us gods. You have found a precious thing and you have been strong to take it. This, I have learned in my long life: that love comes only once at its best, as it came to you. You have my love; for the others you need not care. Time will do for them what it does for us all—level their pride, their smallness—love is greater than all these, and love will dwell in your house."

They listened in silence, Lynn and Manon, hands clasped, their eyes reverent, to her who spoke with the voice of Age—Age that finds at the end what at the beginning it knew.

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 *Tides of the Tantramar* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]