

MOON
OVER
ACADIE

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

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By the Same Author

FOG OVER FUNDY
TIDES OF THE TANTRAMAR

Moon Over Acadie

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM



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To
Ann Elmo

Moon Over Acadie

CHAPTER I

Monsieur Ulysse Plamondon stepped down from a day-coach onto the platform of the little station of Pont Lefebvre. The train puffed angrily and ground its wheels as if it resented stopping at such a piffling place. It was well on its way before Monsieur Plamondon had adjusted his hat, his stick, his travelling-bag and his brief-case. It had all but vanished, its lights pale in the smoky Autumn dusk, around the curve to Dorchester, when Monsieur Ulysse met the faithful Uldège who hurried up the platform to greet him and relieve him of travelling-bag and brief-case.

“Ah, Uldège!” Monsieur Plamondon returned the servant’s obeisance with one little less elaborate. “It is good to be home, good to find you waiting, *mon ami*, good to see the marshland and the river and the village and the church and—” He became aware that one could see very little of any of these things, so he coughed and said, “All is well *chez nous*?”

“All is well, Monsieur Plamondon. And your tour, it was a success as always?”

“As always.” Monsieur Plamondon smiled complacently. Twenty years ago he had been a student at the University of Paris; and his clothes and his manners were still those of Paris twenty years ago. He wore a broad brimmed black felt hat, a coat that came to his knees and trousers so tight in the leg that they could have been drawn over no boot save one so small as Monsieur Plamondon’s patent-leather. He wore, too, a tuft of beard and a goodly moustache and his thick hair was cut *en brosse*. He was slight, Monsieur Plamondon, very little over five feet two in height, but mountains high in dignity. Was not he, Ulysse Isaure Jacques-Marie Plamondon, the greatest authority on the folklore and *les chansons du pays* of the Acadian people? Did not the folk in every town flock to his recitals and shed real

tears over his rendering of “The Curé of St. Barbe and the Blonde Shepherdess,” and roar with laughter and stamp their feet when he sang “Floribert Hudon’s Goat”?

To be sure they did.

A dog-cart, the only one in the county, or for that matter in the country, waited on the cinders by the station-platform. A quiet brown horse looked interestedly at Monsieur Plamondon and pawed the cinders a few times. “Ah, Pégase!” Monsieur Plamondon caressed the horse’s nose. “One is glad to see one’s master, is it not? And has Uldège starved you? I think not. Has Uldège beat you? Certainly not. Has Uldège galloped you until you were flecked with foam? No. No. No.” Certainly no, no, no, for Pégase was so old he would have dropped in his tracks if driven faster than a modest trot. However, to Ulysse Plamondon, he was a winged steed, a match for any horse in the land in speed and so far above them in breeding that his master would never consent to pit him against the farmers’ nags no matter how splendid their form.

Monsieur Plamondon put his foot on the step and said to Uldège, “There is nothing new at Melpomyne’s Bower?”

Uldège was stowing the bag and brief-case in the boot. He did not look up.

“The young lady arrived safely, Monsieur Plamondon,” he said. “And Rosalie gave her your room until the spare bedroom could be made ready.”

Monsieur Plamondon took his foot off the step, drew his cigarette-lighter from his pocket, snapped it into a flame, held it under Uldège’s nose so that the light shone in his eyes and said, “In the name of the good God, Uldège, what are you saying?”

“The young lady, Monsieur Pla—”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes. But what young lady? Be calm, Uldège!” Monsieur Plamondon was seething like a new-mixed glass of fruit-salts. “Recall that in all definitions and expositions one attends to the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?”

“Your niece, Monsieur Plamondon. Your niece, Léocadie.”

Monsieur Plamondon looked dully at Uldège. “My niece Léocadie.” He shrugged. He frowned. Then he smiled. Then he banged Uldège on the back with stick and gloves. “Ah, *oui! oui!* My niece Léocadie, daughter of my dear sister Athalie. How stupid of me! How imbecile to forget, in the stress

of my tour, to notify you and that good domestic Rosalie that my niece Athalie, daughter of—*Ciel!* My niece Léocadie, daughter of my dear sister Athalie, was arriving. Let us on to Melpomyne's Bower, Uldège. She will be as impatient to see me as I," he finished grimly, "am impatient to see her."

From Pont Lefebvre, where the train from Quebec had deposited Ulysse Plamondon, to the village of St. Gudule, where in Melpomyne's Bower, the distinguished artist lived and had his being, is a distance of one mile straight across a causeway elevated some feet above the diked marshes of Memramcook. Never before had man done more thinking, wondering and puzzling than did Ulysse Plamondon in that brief mile.

Clop-cloppity-clop went the well shod hooves of Pégase on the hard clay; the dog-cart creaked and swayed, the early autumn wind blew chill across the marshlands and the first bright star came out and perched on Monsieur Plamondon's shoulder. From a tumbledown barn hardby the road came the hoot of a dismal owl and a shadowy gull screeled eerily overhead.

Monsieur Plamondon saw and heard nothing. "My niece Léocadie," he muttered. "That, *hélas*, is what she now and forever more is in the simple but honest minds of the good people of St. Gudule. Daughter of my dear departed sister, Athalie Corinne Plamondon. *Bien!*" He shrugged, turned up the collar of his redingote and stared straight ahead of him at the dim spire of St. Gudule church towering high above the white cottages and the farmsteads all about on the slopes of the Memramcook Valley.

"After all," he mused presently, "why should I be so appalled! Am I not a romancer, a writer of belles lettres, an artist to whom such contretemps as this are the very stuff by which his art must live? Should I not then look forward eagerly and with a curiosity vivid and ardent to this meeting with my niece Léocadie—"

"One arrives, Monsieur Plamondon," announced Uldège as Pégase, without any guidance, turned in at an open gate between a bare lilac hedge and trotted up a beach-gravelled drive to Melpomyne's Bower, a pretty cottage, in summer rose-bedight and drowned in a thousand flowers; even now cosy and inviting with soft lights glowing from its windows, with one warm light, Ulysse saw with faster-beating heart, shining from his own bedroom. Ah, he mused, if only there had been a wife who now would welcome him and look into his eyes as no other in the world could look—

Slowly, a bit timidly, despite the artistic justification he had given himself on the marsh, he followed Uldège into the cottage, greeted the stout Rosalie with great calmness, drew off his gloves in stately fashion and

shrugged out of his coat. He looked about him with such relish as one might show after a five-year, instead of five-day, absence. Then his glance travelled up the stairway and stopped still and sudden at the landing. His body stiffened perceptibly. His eyes were keen, those quick black eyes under bushy gray brows, very keen. Even had they been dim, almost blind, he told himself, they must have seen her, the yellow sunlight of her hair, the brightness of the Norse blue eyes, the grace of her figure not hidden by the tan dress she wore.

In one instant, Ulysse Plamondon was transported over the years and the ocean, and gazed, not up the stairway of Melpomyne's Bower in the little Acadian village of St. Gudule, but out of a dusty casement on Mont Parnasse.

Slowly she walked down the remaining flight and, oblivious of Monsieur Plamondon's consternation, of his wide eyes and agitated manner, came to him and, after gazing full into his eyes for a moment, put her arms about his shoulders and kissed him.

"Uncle, how are you? It is a surprise, this, but you will forgive me, I know. I am so glad to see you."

"But yes, my child." Monsieur Plamondon felt that the secret of life and happiness was slipping from his arms as she moved away. "I was so overjoyed to know of your visit that in my excitement I neglected to advise my good Uldège and Rosalie of your coming. But they have been good to you, *hein*? They have not starved you, beaten you, abused you, as they do with my poor Pégase?" He laughed at his favorite jest. "I think not, *ma p'tite*."

He turned to the smiling Rosalie and open-mouthed Uldège. "We will come to dinner in a brief while. We go into my study now to talk for a while, to enable me to make inquiries about my good sister, the mother of Léocadie." He gave Léocadie his arm. She looked at him, in his black jacket, fawn waistcoat, Ascot tie of blue foulard and narrow, striped trousers—looked at him as if she had never seen his like, took his arm without a word and they went into the study opening off the hall.

Monsieur Plamondon closed the door, saw at a glance that his walls of books, his chairs, his table, his couch, his pipes, his cognac, and his old dog Cerbère, stuffed these many years and perched on the mantel, were just as they should be.

"Be seated, *chère*," he said to the silent girl. "And I will bring you a little glass of cognac and have one myself. We both need it, *mignonne*. Then you

shall tell me all that it is that this is.”

He poured the cognac with not quite steady hand. He felt the blue eyes upon his back and was conscious of his graying hair, his smallness, the withered spareness of his body. The ruby in his cuff link leered up at him from its setting in the stiff-starched linen. He spilled a little brandy when he poured his own.

He served her, avoiding with a shyness he cursed himself for, the steady appraisal of her eyes. He stood back, held up his glass on high, lowered it, sniffed it, held it up again and admired its deep amber hue. He bowed to her; he said, “To you, my child.” She lifted her glass and said, unsmiling, “To you, my father.”

Monsieur Plamondon’s jaw fell slowly, comically, at the same rate that he lowered his glass. His eyes were fixed hypnotically upon the sweet, somewhat frightened face of the girl. Twenty—yes, she would be about twenty—He lifted his glass and sacrilegiously took his cognac in one swallow.

“You said?” he whispered.

“To you, my father.” She sipped hers, holding herself in check. How her hand shook!

“But I—I never—” Monsieur Plamondon passed a palsied hand over his thick gray hair. “How then is this? Explain to me. It is some grave mistake you are making, my chi—my good young girl.”

“None, I think.” She bit her lip, she started to sob. “I—I had hoped for a different welcome, a different reception. When—when I saw you I thought you were such a one as would not—would not deny me and—and put me to shame—”

Monsieur Plamondon’s heart was pierced, agonized. She wept, she was in distress and he—he had caused it, he who could not take a little fish off the hook without feeling a deep pity. He darted to her. He knelt beside her. He patted her hands, her shoulder. “There! There! There!” he pleaded. “It is well now, all is well. Tell me your story, small one. I become old now. I forget what I should most remember.”

She lifted a tear-stained face. How sweet, how small and warm she was and how her hair exuded a perfume like hedge-roses. And now she looked as one starved, beaten, abused, would look; and he, Ulysse Plamondon, had done it.

“You lived in Paris twenty years ago, m’sieur,” said Léocadie. “In Mont Parnasse. You met a girl they called Mimi Perron. You loved her. You won her. You married her. You left her with me.”

“I—” Monsieur Plamondon was stiller than a wax-man. After a moment or two his mouth opened and he whispered, “Good God of heaven and of the earth, I—”

“See—” Léocadie fumbled in her bag, brought forth a yellowed paper and a faded photograph and thrust them into his hands. Stiffly, he got up and carried them to the light that was concentrated on his big table. He sat down in his desk-chair, spread paper and picture before him and studied them keenly. Not for long. Watching him, she saw that it took him only a moment to understand, to recollect if ever he had forgotten. The paper was a marriage certificate, the picture was inscribed on the back, “Mimi Perron *et* Ulysse Plamondon, Fontainebleau, Juillet, 19—” Hers was a lovely face, fair as Léocadie’s, his was dark and handsome, his moustache fine and fierce, and he wore a velvet-coat.

“But the years have dealt harshly with me,” he muttered. He looked beyond the zone of light to where the young girl sat. “What did the years do to her, to Mimi—she who was so—so—” Monsieur Plamondon’s voice trembled, he dashed a hand across his eyes. “Unkind—they were not unkind to her, the fleeting years?”

“Not too unkind, *mon père*. I had better perhaps say, *mon oncle*—”

“Better perhaps.”

“The years were not too good to my mother, monsieur, nor yet to me, though, through her love and tenderness better to me than to her. When she died, a month or so ago, there was nothing much for me—a little money, a letter, this marriage certificate, and the picture. In the letter she bade me make a voyage to Canada and seek you out, that you were now a great man of letters, *un homme de génie*, and surely you would not refuse to aid me, until,”—so proudly—“I can make my way alone. You see, I can sing, I can play! I eat very little and I am good with the needle and—”

Monsieur Plamondon got up from his chair, walked deliberately over to her, knelt down, took both her hands in both his, kissed them and burst into tears. She pillowed his graying head on her young breast and sang softly to him, crooned to him as to a child.

“*Ma pauvrete!*” he said brokenly. “*Ma pauvrete!* My poor starved, beaten, abused little one. A just God should strike dead him who did this to

thee!”

“I would never have it so—never, even were you not so kind, so splendid, so noble as you are, monsieur—*mon père*.”

“I!” Ulysse shrugged deprecatingly. “I am none of those things, Léocadie.” He lingered over her name. “Léocadie,” he repeated. “I am, *tout simplement*, Ulysse Isaure Jacques-Marie Plamondon, like François Villon, poor maître-ès-arts, artium magister, master of arts, of the University of Paris. Also, a maker of verse, albeit poor verse, a player of music, a painter of pictures, a lover of excellence in these pursuits, the moreso for that I know I can never hope to attain such.”

“But you are modest.” The tears had ceased, leaving the blue eyes brighter, leaving them like stars drenched with dew. She kept looking at Monsieur Plamondon, studying his face in its every lineament, its every wrinkle, studying it as a school girl studies a map, seeking to commit it to memory.

Monsieur Plamondon smiled most paternally and got to his feet, not, alas, with too great agility. “You look at me as if you feared I would vanish any moment, as if you must have a picture of me in your mind before I go.”

“No, it is not that. It is just that I have been so curious all these years to know what he was like, my—my—you understand, Monsieur. My eyes have hungered to look upon you and now they are not easily cured of that hunger.”

“You—you do not then hate—”

“Not you. I did come prepared to hate, to accuse, to condemn. I find I can do none of these things. You have disarmed me, because you have been kind.”

“And who in this wide world could be unkind to my Léocadie.” He bowed low. “*Bien!* Come now, *petite jeune*, repair the so great ravages of tears and chagrin, for the good Rosalie is kept waiting and you no doubt have as much hunger as I, who have scarcely eaten a thing since I left Quebec this morning.”

Léocadie went to the mirror in Monsieur Plamondon’s little dressing-room off the study, which he lighted for her. He heard her humming softly as she powdered her nose. He smiled with ecstasy. He stretched out his arms to the fire on the hearth and rubbed his hands together, gleeful as a boy with a great and precious secret. Sing, oh, sing on, Léocadie! Sing! It is so good to hear a sweet young voice here in this staid old house, so wonderful to have

Youth enter here and shed its warm roseate fragrance everywhere, dispersing the damp and the must of the years. Sing on, Léocadie, bring to this gray, aging man, to his heart not grown so old but somewhat weary, memories of days that were golden, when hope was high, when the world was all new and splendid like a great fair when first one enters. Sing, Léocadie, the ancient mad little songs of Mont Parnasse, make Ulysse Plamondon's heart beat in tune to the lilt of *Mère Michel* and his polished toe go tap-tap against the fender bars to the swing of *Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre*.

With courtly grace, when Léocadie came smiling from the dressing-room, Monsieur Plamondon gave her his arm; with step as stately and mien as high as those of any grand seigneur of the old regime, he conducted her from the study to the dining-room across the hall. Solicitously he saw her comfortably seated, then, taking his own chair across from her, he beamed at her with a brightness that dimmed the gentle light of the candles in their silver sticks.

A great peace, a great joy, was in Monsieur Plamondon's heart. He could be content to sit here, merely to sit here, forever and a day, and gaze upon this child. Melpomyne's Bower, always beautiful, was now a place of enchantment, the napery and crystal were dazzling, the onion-soup, the crêpes, the croquettes, were food for the gods and Rosalie was of all servants the most dexterous and swift. How good was the low sighing of the wind that made the shutters tap against the wall and made rustling sounds in the fading maple trees in the garden! How bright the stars must be tonight and how big the Hunter's Moon when it heaved itself above the Beaumont and impaled itself on the spire of the white church on the summit.

His eyes met her bright gaze and his laughter danced to meet hers. "Ah, what a joyous surprise this is!" he said. "What a night of nights, this on which you come to me!"

"You are then so glad, monsieur?"

"Glad! I—" He closed his lips, shook his head. "It is beyond all words."

"But tell me of her and you," she invited shyly. "She loved you well, I know, though she did not often speak of you or tell me much about you. It was only a little while you stayed with her."

"It—" Monsieur Plamondon looked down at his plate. "I loved Mimi—loved her so much that I have never loved again—"

"Then why—why did you so cruelly leave her? Ah!" She half-rose from her chair, moved by the pain in Monsieur Plamondon's eyes. He seemed to

vince at her words, as if a lash had struck him. "I am sorry for having said that, my uncle. You do not need to tell me anything. There must have been some reason, some reason that was good to you. I cannot conceive of your hurting anyone, you who are so gentle, unless you could not help it."

Ulysse lifted his head and looked gratefully into her fresh young face. "You are kind to say it, Léocadie. Believe then that it is so. Believe that my heart bleeds for her, for Mimi, and for you, that you should have been left to face a harsh world alone. Believe that I thank the Good God for having sent you to me. From Mont Parnasse to St. Gudule in Acadie, is a far, far cry, but love is not of place or time, *ma mie*, and the love I had for your—for your mother, I have for you. I shall love and cherish you always. What I have is yours—everything. My home is henceforth your home and my life shall be wrapped up in yours."

Her eyes shone. She pressed her hands against her breast. "You make me so happy. You make the world more wonderful, more lovely, more kind than ever I thought it could be. I was so alone, and frightened and knew not which way to turn. With fear and anguish I came here. I thought, me, what if he denies all this; what if he is an ogre, a bad man, who will drive me away or accuse me of being an imposter and give me to the police. What shall I do then, I asked myself. Where shall I go. Of a certainty, I shall starve. I shall perish. After all these fears how sweet it is to find that you are so generous, so noble, so ready to succor me—"

She jumped up, circled the table and flung her arms about his neck, kissing him, pressing the rose-petal smoothness of her cheek against his that was dry and faded. He closed his eyes. He trembled. He said in his spirit, "You are good, my God—you are all good. You take away but to give back a thousand-fold."

"Léocadie!" he said sternly and tapped on the table with his knife. "Go to your place, young one. Go there then and eat your supper, foolish one, or I shall send you to bed without any."

"But you are severe, monsieur!" She backed away in mock terror and hastened to her place. "But it is an ogre I have to govern me."

"Of course!" growled Ulysse. He loved to fancy himself as stern and hard, loved to think that in him was wickedness enough to enable him to beat Pégase, even, and steal his oats. "Ha! You thought it was an easy one you had, eh! You deceived yourself that it was some soft marshmallow of a man, one who would take you to Moncton tomorrow perhaps and buy you a lovely fur coat for the cold winter that comes and pretty hats and dresses and

shoes and lovely things like that. You were such a little fool as to think Ulysse Plamondon would be plastic and easy and buy you bon-bons and jewels. No! Of course he would do nothing of the kind. Instead he might lock you in your room with no fire and no bread and no broth.”

“I am sure he would,” said Léocadie breathlessly. “I can see that he would.”

“You are a wise girl then. The train for Moncton leaves at eight-thirty; do not oversleep, lazy one. Finish now your repast and off to bed with you. Tonight I must think a great deal about ways to punish you when you are wicked. You will find that I am very severe, very harsh. If you doubt it, ask Rosalie, ask Uldège, ask Pégase, ask Cerbère.”

“But I do not doubt it.” She laughed till the tears came and Monsieur Plamondon laughed too. He kissed her fingers when she said goodnight, that was after they had lingered an hour and more over the coffee and cognac and Monsieur Plamondon’s pipe. He kissed her fingers and she dropped a kiss upon his gray head. For a moment their eyes met, their gazes mingled, their souls felt that strange oneness that comes to those who love.

“God bless you, my child,” said Monsieur Plamondon.

“And you, *mon père*,” murmured Léocadie. “Goodnight.”

He watched her climb the stairs, so young, so sprightly, so bright with life. He heard her door close—the spare room was ready now. It would be her room always. He took his hand off the newel-post, slowly turned and went into his study. He sat down in his big chair by the fire and gazed into the glowing caverns of the burning beech. The wind, without, spoke with old sighing voices, the trees swung their bare branches against the moon that whitened the church spire with its light; the village was quiet, all but asleep. It was the time Monsieur Plamondon loved, the quiet time, the hour for dreams and meditation. But tonight he could not dream; here was something far more wondrous than any dream; here, into the emptiness of his life, came something to feed his starved spirit, to warm his chilling heart, to renew his fading youth and make him live again.

“How good life is!” he murmured. “How grand it is!”

She would be asleep now. So peacefully she would sleep, happy in the knowledge, after so long a time of worry, that she was beloved, that his home was open to her. She would sleep with one white slender arm flung across the pillow and her golden hair showering over it. The moonbeams would stray across her hair and become dim amid its brightness. Almost, he

could hear her soft breathing. He longed to go there, to her room, and kneel beside her bed and pray, he who for so many years had prayed not at all.

He looked longingly at his piano, feeling a great urge to go to it, feeling that tonight he could extemporize a melody that would be more beautiful than any slumber-song of Gounod, than any barcarolle of Offenbach. For her—just for her—no, for Mimi, too. She was his. The years had brought him this wondrous thing and nothing—nothing—he set his jaw fiercely and scowled at the fire—nothing should take her from him.

“Pouf! How could one take her from me.” He laughed. “It is the vengeance most poetic, this.”

CHAPTER II

Ulysse sat at his piano, the lovely rosewood piano, square and graceful, that he had purchased with his first earnings. Two years it had taken him to pay for his piano. Hard years, for at the beginning few came to hear his recitals, few had found out then the excellence of his rendition of “The Curé of St. Barbe and the Blonde Shepherdess” and “Floribert Hudon’s Goat”. But here and there, at village-halls, at fairs, at academies, there had been engagements, often yielding little, alas, but always helping him forward, leading on to the present happy dignity of Melpomyne’s Bower, of Pégase, of Uldège and Rosalie, of this fine piano, this coat of blue-black velvet, this quiet and ease that he loved.

He improvised idly, fitting little verses to the chords his nimble fingers made, fitting pretty chords to the snatches of verse spun out by his quick and busy brain. His songs were the songs of the earth, of the people; they told of the ploughing and the sowing, of the haying and the reaping, of the angelus at glorious morn and crimson eve, of the village ancients, of young ones in love, of fiddlers and fortune-tellers, of rivers and the sea, of the country dance and the old dames at their weaving and spinning. “*Les chansons de chez nous*”—“The Songs of Home”—this was the proud title of the red-bound book that bore also in golden letters the name of Ulysse Isaure Jacques-Marie Plamondon. Like a golden banner, thought Ulysse, regarding it now on the piano in front of him, a proud golden banner of achievement.

From the belfry of St. Gudule, clear and resonant in the still cool autumn evening, the angelus bells clanged out and Ulysse’s little piano picked up the billowing waves of sound and did things with them. Lovingly, Ulysse’s fingers found and sounded deep, echoing chords. He loved the angelus. Each stroke of the deep bell brought him a picture clear and colored; *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae*—he saw Gabriel the Archangel in his shining robes appearing to Mary of Nazareth, in all the splendour and majesty of heaven, announcing to her the will of God that she should become the mother of His only begotten Son. And Mary of Nazareth saying humbly; “*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*—Behold the Handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy Word.”

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.”

These pictures Ulysse saw and in a million belfries aged sextons pulling with gnarled hands at frayed ropes, telling that old and lovely story the world over forever. In St. Gudule church, Simon Perrier, bent and bearded, tugged at the great ropes and tasted yesterday's beer in his mouth from the stress of his exertions. And in white farmstead and weathered cottage, in field and byway, for miles around, the peasants, hearing that dulcet chime, crossed themselves and knelt and prayed, even as Ulysse prayed with his piano, with soft triad and sweet arpeggio.

He turned his head, glanced over his shoulder, feeling her presence there. He stopped on a lingering chord, finding a greater beauty in her face, in the blue brightness of her eyes. He thought in one startled moment, "Why! It is as if to her too, to this lovely Léocadie, there has appeared an angel, announcing joyous things."

He swung around on his seat, held out his hands. She came to him, lovely in the new fur coat, the gay Cossack hat and pretty shoes he had bought for her this morning in Moncton. There was a flush like nacre on the smooth rondeur of her cheeks, the lovely hair escaped in strands of gold gayer than the sun's late beams that flitted about Monsieur Plamondon's studio. He took her two hands in his, two little hands, reminding him so much of those others that only in dreams he had touched for, oh, so long.

"What then has come to you, Léocadie?"

"*Comment!*" She only half-tried to feign surprise. The nacreous flush deepened, deepened; the blue eyes swerved slowly, shyly, from Monsieur Plamondon's.

"Speak then. Do not be afraid. Oh, I can read the eyes of people. I can read love or hate, joy or sorrow, truth or deceit in the eyes of everyone. Shall I tell you then what I read in your eyes?"

"No! Oh, no. Please—"

"But we both know, *hein!* And who is this one? Is it what you call the love at first-sight?"

She shook her head. "No, I saw him on the train the night I came here. And when we got to the station a big car was waiting for him. I—I had told him—I had to tell him something—that I was your niece, monsieur. So he offered to drive me here. His name is Paul Allain."

"But yes!" Monsieur Plamondon nodded. "The son of Judge Geoffroi Allain. Very rich, very fine, very aristocratic. And he fell in love with my Léocadie! But of course."

"I—I do not know. I met him now as I was out walking. He came to the door with me."

"And adored you with his eyes." Ulysse was in ecstasy, refusing to admit the sadness in his heart. They were young, Léocadie and Paul. It was only right and natural that they should love. But Geoffroi, with his ponderous judicial manner, his big iron gray moustache and lion's mane of wavy white hair—what would he say about this? He spoke of great things for Paul, who had studied at Laval and Oxford and Paris, who would be a great lawyer, a great judge. Of a certainty, mused Ulysse, reaching back and striking a minor chord on his piano, Geoffroi would object most strenuously to Paul's falling in love with the niece of a poor minstrel, to whom once contemptuously he had alluded as "that little organ-grinder, Plamondon."

Ulysse gritted his teeth and thought with thinned lips of running a rapier through Judge Allain's imposing façade or, better, holding a cannon close to his ear and pulling the trigger, or whatever one pulled to make cannons go boom. From these pleasant picturings he was recalled by Léocadie's earnest gaze.

"Pardon?" he said brightly.

"I did not say anything, monsieur. I was wondering if—if you were angry with me."

"*Jamais!* Never—never in a thousand ages, in saecula saeculorum, *ma p'tite*, would Ulysse Plamondon be angry at anyone for falling in love. And when it is you—"

"But I did not say I had fallen in love. I have only met him twice."

"Once suffices for some."

"But you go too fast. It is nothing. He could not be in love with me—"

"He could not be otherwise—unless he is a fool."

"He is no fool," said Léocadie very quickly, and blushed deeper still when she realized, helped on by Monsieur Plamondon's smile, just how quickly she had said it.

"Ah, then!" said Ulysse. "But have you thought, my girl—" He looked his fiercest, drawing his brows down till they met and mingled, thrusting his jaw grimly forth—"have you thought how I—" He struck his chest—"how I will look upon this matter. Think! Is it not possible, is it not even very, very probable that I will put my foot down or even thrust it out against this young Paul's trouser-seat? Knowing me as you do, would you not consider it likely

that I will forbid him the house, forbid his speaking to you and even threaten him with the menace of firearms should I find him in your company?"

"It is very probable, monsieur; very likely."

"Then beware, and let him beware."

"You are so stern, monsieur!"

"I am cruel—utterly implacable. Of course, I have not said, mind you, that I will adopt this attitude. I have merely drawn your attention to the likelihood of my doing so, that you may walk warily. Anyway," he finished softly, "I do not like to think of your falling in love so soon. Why, you have just come to me and already you think about going."

"I do not." She flung her arms about his neck. "Never once have I thought of such a thing."

He put her from him, touched her cheek, her hair, with infinite tenderness. "You make me happy, Léocadie, when you say that. Come, tell me, do you like it here in Acadia? Is it nicer than Paris? Are the hills lovelier than Mont Parnasse, the countryside prettier than the Bois or Fontainebleau?"

"Much prettier. It is like the country my mother took me to once, in Normandy."

"Ah! She took you to Normandy." Ulysse looked thoughtful. "To where in Normandy?"

"To a town called St. Guilbert, where there is a great castle—a huge castle on a rock. I remember it so well, though I was just a little girl. And she said to me, 'How would you like to live there, Léocadie?'"

"Yes! Yes! And what did you say?" interrupted Ulysse eagerly, staring at her as if all creation depended on her answer.

"Why, I said, 'I should love it of course.' Such a fairy castle, monsieur, all spires and turrets and golden banners and colored windows and a river flowing below the white walls and the castle mirrored in that river so that the big swans sailed over the battlements. Inside it must have been more wondrous still, but she would not take me inside, even though I wept and pretended to be ill and was very naughty."

Ulysse nodded several times very slowly. "I will play for you," he said then and turned to his piano. For a while, for moments, he sat staring at it, then softly he played, scattering golden liquid notes through the twilight,

piling sound on sound, chord on swelling chord, building higher and higher a theme of beauty until in crashing resonant chords it reached its peak and ended there.

After a moment, after the last wave of sound had ebbed, he looked over his shoulder, up at her, and his heart leaped at what he saw. Motionless she stood, eyes wide, hands clasped. Even in the gloom he could see the sheen of her eyes like a night sky scattered with stardust.

“It was lovely,” she breathed. “Lovely. It carries one away, your music.”

Ulysse was pleased, touched deeply. He rubbed his hands. “I am glad it makes you happy, Léocadie. Come, you shall sing and I shall play for you. Presently, if you will, you may come on tour with me and together we shall become famous—Ulysse Plamondon and his niece Léocadie. You shall be Léocadie Perron, as you have been. It is well?”

“It is best, monsieur. I thought it would be best that way when I came here; that you might not like suddenly to have a big daughter.”

“*Bon!* What shall we have now—Saint Saëns? Debussy? Gounod? Godard? Here, *berceuse de Jocelyn*—we will have that.”

In the gathering gloom Léocadie sang the lovely slumber song to the soft accompaniment of the rosewood piano, and those who passed in the village street stopped to listen, to admire, to consider how well it was that this lovely Parisian had come into Monsieur Plamondon’s lonely life. How sweetly she sang, that one! How pretty she was! Already she had turned the heads of half the young men in Memramcook; the other half had not yet seen her. Already, Paul Allain, the judge’s son, had been seen walking with her, his dark head bent down to hers, so fair and full of yellow sunlight. Well, Judge Geoffroi would have something to say about that—plenty to say.

“Preposterous!” Judge Geoffroi was saying with all the ponderous dignity and crushing condemnation that made him an ideal chief justice. He sat in the firelit gloom of his library in the big white dwelling on Belliveau Hill, that looked down on Melpomyne’s Bower and the houses of St. Gudule, much as the judge himself looked down on their inmates. The judge’s leonine head, topped by shaggy snow white hair purposely kept in grand disorder, was silhouetted against the window. He had passed in his car while Paul walked with Léocadie, and Jean Morand, his chauffeur, had

informed him that the girl was Ulysse Plamondon's niece, newly arrived from Paris. Paul, questioned, had reiterated this information.

"Why is it preposterous?" asked Paul. He was sprawled in a big chair by the fire, across from the judge. "And what is preposterous—that Monsieur Plamondon should have a niece?"

"Yes. That in itself is preposterous. Plamondon was hatched out of a cocoanut. How could he have a niece? So that is preposterous. But even supposing he had a niece, it is preposterous that you should have to do with her."

"She is a very lovely girl, monsieur."

"The world is full of lovely girls not related to mouth-organ and jewsharp players."

"You are harsh on Plamondon. He has quite a name you know, among the people, and he has a great love for music and great skill as a musician."

"I don't like music or musicians," announced the judge, his tone implying that any musicians who came before his tribunal would have a couple of years thrown in gratis on their sentence. "I suppose the girl is a musician too—plays the tambourine, no doubt."

"She plays the piano, but she is primarily a singer. She will appear with her uncle in his concerts."

"She will, eh! She should be deported. Don't tell me any more about these people, and don't have anything further to do with her. Emilie Plaunte is coming this week, I believe, to visit her aunt. You and Emilie have been friends since childhood."

"We still are." Paul wondered if they would ever be more than friends, if ever they would fulfill the not too secret hopes his father and Emilie's aunt, Dame Margot Laurin, had for them. To be sure, Emilie was lovely, with gleaming black eyes, a sweet rose-tinted face, soft dark hair and lovely form, but Léocadie Perron was to her as noon is to midnight, Léocadie was quick, gleaming like a rapier, bubbling with life and laughter. From the moment he saw her he had been unable to get her out of his mind; not that he had tried very hard. Not once, since her coming, had he gone for a walk without the hope that he would meet her, but not until today had they met.

A cold frosty day. She was wearing a coat of gray fur, a swagger, jaunty coat, and a little Astrakhan hat like a Cossack's hat, with a silver sickle for adornment. Paul's breathing stopped when he saw her, then went on faster

than ever. He had thought her beautiful that night on the train, but now in the full light of day, he realized that nothing quite so lovely had ever come into his life. And his eyes told her so.

They walked together across the marsh to Pont Lefebvre and stood for a while on the bridge, gazing down at the racing river, hell-bent for Fundy, chasing the ebbing tide, baring the steep, gleaming banks of chocolate-colored mud. The bridge shook with the weight of mighty farm-wagons drawn by slow Percherons with thunderous hooves, gulls wheeled, bleating eerily, above the dim miles of marshland, and funereal crows hopped about in the stubble or perched somberly on the grassy dykes.

They did not talk much. Very early in their relationship they had found it wasn't at all necessary to talk. From time-to-time they gazed from marsh or sky or river into each other's eyes, and smiled and looked away.

"What do you do here?" she asked as they walked back to St. Gudule.

"I do nothing here. I have a law-office, newly opened, in Moncton. Just last June I finished my studies. My father's practice comes to me. There is my father." He doffed his hat to a great van of a car that had been the awe and pride of St. Gudule ten years ago, and still was. Léocadie saw a huge head, crowned by a black felt hat of giant proportions, caught a glimpse of a bottle nose and bulldog jaw.

At the gateway of Melpomyne's Bower, Paul lingered, reluctant to leave her. Villagers hurried by, old Simon Perrier, the *bedeau*, limped along to the church and vanished into the door at the base of the spire like a gnome into a rock. Presently the great bells rang out, shattering the air, stirring it into billows of sound.

"I must go now," said Léocadie. "It has been pleasant meeting you, Monsieur Allain."

"Paul."

"And I have enjoyed my walk with you."

"Paul."

"Very well then!" She colored softly. "Paul." She gave him her hand. "Goodby."

"I must see you soon again, Léocadie. When may I see you again?"

"We shall meet as we did today. It is better like that, for then one—"

She stopped confused. Paul nodded. "Then one has the happiness of hope," he said. "One thinks, I shall meet her face to face when I turn this corner. She will be coming out of Florian Gaudet's store just as I am passing. She will be in the post-office when I enter and we shall see each other suddenly and—"

"Goodby. I must go." Only then did she notice that her hand was still in his. She drew it away quickly and ran up the steps and into the Bower. Something sang in her heart, some heavenly fire was in her veins and the world was a place of rose and ivory, just then as the Angelus ceased ringing and Ulysse turned from his piano to greet her.

A few days later Léocadie's trunks and boxes arrived from France and Uldège brought them from Pont Lefebvre piled up on the dog-cart.

"There are some I have not opened," said Léocadie after they had been stowed in the attic. "I do not like to open them; it is like prying into the past."

"But yes!" Monsieur Plamondon nodded vigorously. "It is so. And often, most often, I think, the past is a book that we should not seek to reopen."

"You would not wish then to reopen the volume of your past, *mon oncle*?"

"It is always open to me, Léocadie." They walked in the faded garden where the ground was already hard with frost. "The book of my life is always an open one. Now I have begun a bright chapter—" He looked at her fondly. "Yes, the brightest one of all, I think."

"There were some dark ones."

"Black, *ma p'tite*—black as Erebus. Of them I do not like to think, do not care to talk. It is sufficient that I am happy now, that I dare to hope this happiness will continue."

"You mean that my coming has brought you some joy."

He laid his hand—a fine, slender, sensitive hand, on her arm. "You can have no idea what your coming has meant to me, what a vast emptiness in my life it has filled up, what a hunger and thirst of my spirit it has satisfied."

She looked at him, blue eyes wide. He seemed no longer bizarre to her, no longer a curiosity. His head was finely, even nobly shaped, she saw; his nose straight, his profile firm and regular. Long years with those fencing-

foils crossed above his hearth had supplanted and strengthened his wrists, she knew, till they were as steel. Père Grignon, the vicar, a young man, came regularly to practice *l'escrime* with Ulysse, and always called him master.

"Why did you suffer that emptiness; that hunger and thirst so long then?" She had not intended to ask him this. She regretted the question even as it passed her lips. But he did not wince now; he did not seem to mind greatly.

"Pride, I suppose. I thought that part of my life—the part in which she—Mimi—had taken so bright a part, was ended. I might have known that things in this life are never ended, never absolute."

"Then—then you did not know about me?"

He hesitated for a moment. She felt her heart beat harder. Perhaps he had not known about her. Surely he had not known about her when he left Mimi to those hard years, those cruel years—

"I knew about you," he said. "But—but, believe me, I was not the callous wretch I might seem to you—oh, let us not talk about it."

"We will not talk about it. I do not blame you, monsieur; nor do I blame her, my mother. She was good."

Ulysse bowed his head. "She was splendid; Mimi. Much too good, too fine for me."

"I think not. No woman—"

He stayed her with a little pinch. "You forget—" He drew himself up—"you ignore the fact that I at times am a brute, a cruel, domineering, bullying ruffian, who would laugh at a woman's tears and kick her away from my feet where she knelt in supplication. You are not aware that I go sometimes to the stall where Pégase munches his oats and whip him cruelly and blow smoke in his eyes."

"Why, I had forgotten that!"

Ulysse scowled. "People are prone to forget that, to overlook the transformation of the quiet, easy-going Ulysse Plamondon into a demon in the form of a man. At such times, Léocadie, I am a fearsome object to behold."

"Then I hope I shall never see you so. I could not bear it."

"Then never anger me: I might pull the Bower down in ruins about your ears. At such times I am not responsible. Ah, the great Judge Geoffroi Allain

passes on his daily round.”

The judge’s pot head and Gargantuan hat with the long fluffy locks falling from below its brim, appeared above the lilac hedge that came almost to his shoulders. He turned his head slowly as he walked and gazed with glassy eyes from under huge white brows at Ulysse Plamondon and Léocadie. Stiffly, in answer to Monsieur Plamondon’s deep bow, he lifted the great hat about a half inch from his head and let it fall down again. He was talking to himself as he walked ponderously along.

“The ground shakes with each footfall,” smiled Ulysse. “The heavens darken at his frown; at his voice the thunder is still and the lightning ceases to flash when he glances at it.”

“He is a fearsome-looking man,” murmured Léocadie. “I should be in terror of him, I think.”

“Pouf! Do not be afraid of him. Wait till you have seen one of my fits of anger; then you will know that Judge Geoffroi’s, in comparison, are as squalls beside cyclones. Ah, what then is this?”

A big open roadster came down the village street—a royal-blue, opulent looking roadster, streamlined to sublimity. A dark girl in a wine red coat trimmed with gray fur, a pert velvet beret aslant on her gleaming hair, was at the wheel. Paul Allain sat beside her.

Slyly, Ulysse watched Léocadie’s face, the change and play of her eyes, the movement of her lips. Paul was looking their way. He waved. Léocadie waved back. The car passed on.

“The girl he is supposed to marry, Mademoiselle Emilie Plaunte, niece of Dame Margot Laurin, a very wealthy old lady who lives in Dorchester down the marsh and rides in a barouche.”

“She is very pretty,” murmured Léocadie.

“Dame Margot! She looks like the Witch of Endor.”

“I meant Emilie Plaunte.”

“Oh, yes. She is pretty. Not half so pretty, though, as my Léocadie. She is blue night and moon and stars; you are all these and the sun beside, and the meadows, and the roses in a hedge.”

“You speak like a lover, monsieur.” She was looking after the cloud of dust far down the road to Cormier Cove, where the car had gone. She did not see, therefore, the quick flush that came to Monsieur Plamondon’s

cheek, the swift biting of his lip. She turned finally and slipped her arm through his. “I think I should like you for a lover, monsieur. Ah, you are cold. You are shivering.”

“It is the wind—off the marsh,” muttered Ulysse. “Only that.”

CHAPTER III

Dame Margot Laurin, an ancient lady in black satin and white lace cap on whiter hair, took snuff from a silver snuff-box, its top cast in the mold of a rose. The good Scots snuff was scented with Wintergreen and Bergamot and looked like gold dust, the pinch of it that the old lady held delicately between thumb and forefinger. Delicately she applied it to her nose and snuffed it with relish. It was one of her pet theories that the grace had gone out of living along with snuff-boxes and candle-sticks. Yes, life wasn't at all what it used to be, now that people dashed around in fast motorcars and airships, now that jazz had replaced the dignified dances of her day and bizarre decoctions taken the proud place of sparkling Burgundy. Still, there was love—that hadn't changed much.

She gazed benignly at her niece, Emilie Plaunte, sitting on the red plush sofa with young Paul Allain at her side. A fine looking couple, she thought appreciatively—young, slender, full of life. Time they had come to an understanding, too. No doubt they had, and were keeping it a secret. How pretty Emilie's mouth was, so red and full; how clear her cheeks, their delicate pallor enhancing the gleamy black of her eyes and hair. And Paul—he had the strong chin and straight nose, the olive complexion and white teeth of the Doirons, his mother's people. "I hope," mused Dame Margot, "that he inherits nothing but money from the judge!" He would make a fine husband for Emilie, but—she closed the snuff-box with a snap—hadn't she heard something about him and some girl who had just come to St. Gudule. Things slipped her mind at times. What was it about this girl—oh, yes, Ulysse Plamondon's niece!

"Tell me about that girl," she commanded, looking at both of them, startling them with her abruptness. "Who is she? What is she? Where does she come from? And what does she want here?"

Paul looked confusedly from the old lady to Emilie and then at the floor. Emilie shrugged. "One does not know much about her, Tante Margot. She is Monsieur Plamondon's niece. Her name is Léocadie Perron. She comes from Paris. She is going to stay with Ulysse Plamondon and study music."

"And is she—well, well—" Dame Margot tapped the ferrule of her silver-topped stick impatiently on the hearth-stone. "You young ones! Why leave out the most important thing!"

“What, madame?”

“Imbecile! Is she ugly as sin, or lovely as a rose? Is she cross-eyed, knock-kneed, hare-lipped—?”

“She is very beautiful,” said Paul softly. “Is she not, Emilie?”

Emilie, staring at the fire—what she could see of it around her aunt’s ample skirts—merely nodded.

“Oh, she is!” muttered the old dame. “And leave it to you to say it. What do you know about her?”

“Only what I have said, Dame Laurin. I met her the night she came here. There was no one to meet her so I took her to St. Gudule in our machine. Then I ran across her in the village and walked a bit with her.”

“Hmm! A Parisian, eh! I did not know that Monsieur Plamondon had a niece. But then, no one knows anything about him. He is either a genius or a charlatan. Some of his songs, however, are not bad, not bad at all; and his manners, to be sure, are such as most people, nowadays, could imitate to their advantage. I suppose you’ve fallen in love with her, young Paul?”

“Eh!” Paul started. He too had been staring at the fire. “Oh! No—that is —*Mon Dieu*, madame, you do ask the most disconcerting things! Fallen in love with her! How should I know? How does one know when one has fallen in love, anyway?”

“Ask Emilie,” grinned Dame Margot, rubbing her bony chin, gazing sharply at Emilie’s slow-coloring cheeks. “Girls know better than boys. Girls have a special gift for such things—love and romance and the language of the eyes and the upheavals of the heart and so on. I’ll wager Emilie could tell if you were in love. Eh, Emilie?”

“Please, Tante Margot!” Emilie held out her hands protestingly. “How should I know anything about it! If Paul—if Paul—”

“Oh, stop saying ‘if Paul’ and ring for the tea.” The old lady glowered out the window at the fading marshland beyond the gray rooftops of Dorchester town. Vaguely she was disturbed. This girl now—Léocadie—why had she come here and why, first off, had she come between Emilie and Paul. Some upstart, no doubt. Some flirtatious little minx, amusing herself with country folk, rolling her eyes and using all kinds of tricks to win Paul Allain.

“Emilie is no niece of mine if she lets this chit get Paul away from her. When I was a girl we fought for our lovers; we didn’t shrug our shoulders

and wring our hands and keep saying ‘if Paul’ — ‘if Paul’ —” She scowled at Emilie. When Hébert, her man, brought in the tea, she poured Emilie a most scalding cup in the hope she would burn her tongue. But Emilie’s thoughts were far from tea and she held the cup in her hand, forgotten, until it grew cold. Emilie was thinking of the look in Paul’s eyes when he saw that girl walking with Monsieur Plamondon in the garden. A light, an eagerness had sprung into his eyes and Emilie knew that she was thrust out of his world in that moment. She had passed it off lightly. She had professed interest when Paul told her who the girl was and how he had met her. She had put away the fears that Dame Laurin had so speedily and brusquely dragged forth again.

Paul was hers. Paul had been hers since the days when she cried for his toys and kept on crying until she got them. Paul would always be hers, she assured herself. What Paul felt for her was something different, something real and mature and solid; not like his passing fancy for this blonde Parisian. When tea was over, when Dame Margot had shooed them out of the room so that she could take her nap, Emilie’s shoulder pressed his in the gloom of the hall, and her eyes, dark and wide, looked up into his with bright invitation. His arm went about her shoulders and he smiled down at her; but only as a good friend or a brother would smile and in the clasp of his arm was strength without passion. Wisely, she did not show the rage that twisted up in her like a tornado, that brought a dark mist before her eyes and a trembling in all her body. So soon, so easily, this girl had got into him and possessed him, destroying what the years had built up between him and her.

She caught him by the lapels and tugged at them lightly as they stood on the stone porch at leave-taking. “You’re not—not falling in love with this girl, Paul?”

“Of course not. Gracious! How you women talk! And how you build up great structures on nothing but a bit of idle gossip or fancy. Why, I’ve only seen Léocadie—”

“Léocadie—?”

“Well, Mademoiselle Perron then—I’ve only seen her a few times. I like her. That is only natural. One cannot help liking her. She is so free, so vivid, so—” He broke off, stopped by the sudden quizzical look Emilie gave him. “Oh, I am sorry—”

“Don’t be.” Her voice was edgy. She did not look at him. “Why should you be sorry? You are quite free, you know, to do as you wish. No strings.”

Far down the road to Amherst sounded the musical twin-horns of the motorbus, like a good angel's trumpet to the ears of Paul Allain. He felt uncomfortable. Emilie, he told himself, had no call to look at him as if he had committed a crime. No strings, she said; and said it rather in the tone of one who had believed there were cords instead of strings. "Goodby," he said lamely. "I'll see you later. Give you a call tomorrow."

"Good of you. Don't forget." Her truculence had passed. He pressed her hand briefly and dashed down the drive, catching the big green and tan bus on the run. He felt better once he had settled into a seat in the rear. He felt free and strangely glad to be away from Dame Margot and Emilie. It was the first time he had had anything like a deep insight into the possessiveness of women. Today, in that big room, he had felt it all about him, felt the mystic terrible strength of their desire to hold one. He had felt too that the fact of possession was more important to them than the object possessed. Even yet he sensed the invisible pursuit of that strange instinct, and thought gratefully of Léocadie.

She would not seek to possess one—or would she? Weren't all women like that, always wanting, always reaching out their hands to hold and keep? No doubt they were; but some you wouldn't mind—Léocadie—he closed his eyes, thinking of her hair that was yellow light, the deep blue of her eyes like the waters of Fundy seen afar; the rose-pink of her skin, like the sky at early dawn.

The bus bowled along the road to Pont Lefebvre, rumbled over the bridge where he had stood with Léocadie, crossed the marsh to St. Gudule and let him off at the white gateposts of his father's house, just as the bells were ringing the angelus. The distant hills were black against a copper-red sky and in the east, above the Beaumont, a small pale star glimmered early. Laborers afoot and weary teamsters driving their tired horses passed in the road on their way to home and rest. The cow-bells clanged from many a field and meadow. There was the threat of frost in the air, sharp and zesty, and the tang of wood-smoke blown down from the squat chimneys of the judge's house.

He steeled himself for the inevitable questionnaire that was as much a part of dinner as the great jurist's port. Better even than Ulysse Plamondon, did Judge Allain know his Who, Why, When, Where, How, and used those magic keys to knowledge on even the most trifling occasions. But tonight there was mercy: the judge, Lucille Breau, the housekeeper, told him, was off to Moncton and would not return until late. Paul, with little appetite, ate a solitary dinner, made more lonely by the conjured-up picture of Léocadie,

sitting opposite Monsieur Plamondon, talking gaily to him, smiling at him with those sparkling eyes of hers.

He wondered if it would be fitting to pay a visit to Melpomyne's Bower. He had been there a few times, long ago, when Ulysse was rehearsing a pageant for the village-concert. He had been a pageboy in that tableau. There were fencing-foils in Monsieur Plamondon's room and many books and a stuffed dog before which the artist was wont to place an enticing dog-biscuit. An eccentric person, Plamondon; Paul had never before paid much attention to him; now he was of great importance, a man worth cultivating.

But not tonight. Somehow he couldn't face those shrewd eyes of Monsieur Plamondon's tonight. They could look right through one, tell what was in one's thoughts, in one's very heart, and that would be most disconcerting, especially when one wasn't quite certain what really was there. Love—Dame Laurin had spoken of love, and Emilie had acted queerly just because he spoke of Léocadie and said she was pretty.

"Pretty!" He got up from the table and strolled into the living-room. "She is more than pretty. Compared with her all other girls, even—even Emilie, are flat. And if seeing her just a few times has done this to me—" He shook his head—"Perhaps I'd better get away to Moncton and go to work; perhaps a few days there and it won't seem as if she is all the world and the sun, moon and stars. But why should I want it to seem otherwise; it's torture to feel like this, but it is heavenly torture."

For an hour he worked on some papers in the judge's library, papers dealing with the arguments of two sturdy yeomen who claimed ownership of the same field. It was, the judge had said, a most enthralling case, offering some very nice points of law; to Paul it was just so many words and he wished heartily that Giles and Hodge were both buried deep in the good red soil they were wrangling about.

A field—what a silly thing! He looked out the window and said, "Ah!" He put aside the papers and pushed back his chair. He walked to the window and said, "Ah!" once more. A field—to worry about a field when there was such a wondrous planet in which each man could freely share, in which, in fact, no man could help sharing, since it shed its light impartially on beggar and prince, on clod and genius.

The marsh was silvered by the moon, turned by the moon's fair magic from a drab dike-ribbed plain with a twisting, muddy river and ugly haycocks, into a mystic realm of silver and shadow through which flowed a shining stream on which might sail only the gilded barge of some faery

queen; into an enchanted kingdom where might walk only tall young knights and ladies of flawless beauty; where only strangely sweet, unearthly words might be spoken and godlike vows exchanged.

Paul could see it all through the French windows. It called to him irresistibly, and he answered. He stepped down from the rugged stone steps into that world of blue and jet and silver where the dark branches of trees were silhouetted against the disc of the moon and moved, shaken by the night-wind, like spidery fingers across its brightness; where the owl hooted mournfully and the wings of the gulls on their seaward way beat softly overhead.

Slowly, Paul walked up the village street, past the cottage of Philippe Boudreau at one end of the bridge that spanned the marsh-creek, past the house of François Lirette, the cobbler, at the other end; past the Convent and the carding-mill and the feed-store. Across the road, behind its trees and hedge and guarded by its white-sentinel gateposts, Melpomyne's Bower showed mellow light from upstairs and down. He heard music, a girl's voice, *her* voice, singing, and the beautiful night was crowned with beauty.

He crossed the road, stood in the shadow of the hedge and listened, his heart beating faster, his lips parted, eyes bright with that mystic glow that Emilie had discovered in them already. That voice, sweet, strong and clear, was a disembodied thing, in itself satisfying, enthralling. *A la claire fontaine*, she sang, a lilting, lovely folk-song that for centuries had echoed in New France—

“Since the pale dawn I have longed for
The one I love, my heart's beloved.
Since the pale dawn I have longed for
The one I fondly adore.
Nightingale, sing lightly, your heart is so gay
Your heart is filled with laughter; mine with tears is grey.”

Paul closed his eyes, better to hear it, better to let it find its way into his spirit—

“Oh, I would the rose-blossoms were in the deepest sea,
I would that my beloved had not forsaken me.”

There was a fullness in his heart that was a bursting joy. Had ever moment in his life been lovelier, holier than this. Had anything so fair, so beautiful as she ever before come his way or ever would again! All his world was changing, had changed. Purposeless, aimless, empty, seemed his life

before this time, before she had come so brightly into it, dancing, smiling, full of the sheer joy of being.

The music had stopped. Still he stood, hoping it would recommence; stood dreaming, to be awakened by a footfall on the gravel of the drive. He had heard no door open or close, but there, only a few yards from him, she stood, hatless, her hair a glory in the wondrous light to which her face was uplifted.

He feared to startle her, yet when softly he called, “Léocadie!” she did not start; she looked slowly around and saw him standing there and said, “*Bonsoir, monsieur*. It is a lovely night, this. It is a night when the whole world seems too small to travel over, when one could go on and on forever.”

“Yes,” said Paul. “I feel that too. I hope you don’t mind my being here. I was walking. I heard you singing as I passed and I could go no further. It was—” He spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. “What can I say of it—so beautiful, so gay.”

“But the song was sad, the last one.”

“Yes, but you sang it gaily, because, of course, you have never known that sadness.”

“Not the sadness of that loss,” she admitted. “I have not lost a beloved, that is sure, because I have not found one.”

“Then you are not so fortunate as I.”

“You!” She looked up at him. “Oh, yes, I understand. I saw you with her in the blue car this afternoon. My uncle told me—”

“Not she.”

“No! Then—” She laughed nervously. “Let us talk about something else, Monsieur Allain—”

“Paul.”

“But I have known you such a short while, to call you Paul! And perhaps she, that other one, might not like it.”

About that, Paul could have told her, she was right. Emilie did not like it. But what matter? Nothing mattered now save the night and this wonder in his heart and—Léocadie.

“Come,” he said. “Won’t you walk with me over the marsh tonight—please?”

"I should not." Hesitantly. Monsieur Plamondon at his rosewood piano was playing now, "*Qui n'a pas d'amour*—

"Whose love is not fair
His days are so bare!"

Monsieur Plamondon was doing wonders with the simple melody. He was Pan, was Monsieur Plamondon this night, playing the magic flute, drawing her away from him, her whom he loved. But, even had he known, it is doubtful if he would have played otherwise.

"Do come, Léocadie!"

"*Eh bien!* I will go with you."

He sighed. In silence they walked up the village street past the church and turned down the long road that arrowed across the marsh to Pont Lefebvre and the hills on the far side of the Memramcook Valley. The echo of her song, of Monsieur Plamondon's music, was still in their hearts, going with them all the way over the white road, over the echoing planks of the bridge.

"To think," he said, "that only last year I was in Paris, and that at the same time you were there!" The thought appalled him. She had been so near all that time, perhaps only a few blocks away from him.

"Perhaps you passed me a dozen times, Paul; no doubt you did, and never noticed me. I was just a *gamine* in Paris, and I was very wicked. Aren't you afraid of me?"

He smiled. "Not very."

"There I used to run and dance in the street with the young ones of the *quartier*. And the songs we sang as we danced there on the cobbles! And there was always *la soupe* for dinner and not much of that. My mother sang at cabarets until her health gave out; after that, it was hard. I took her place and sang too, but I was no great success. I was glad to come away from Paris."

"And I am glad you came. For me, you have made this a different place. It could never be dull or stupid now."

"For you, too, I have done that? You make me think I am a great person, you and Monsieur Plamondon, *mon oncle*. For him too the world is a better place to live in now that Léocadie has come. Soon we shall hear that Paris is sunk in desolation and there is no life in Mont Parnasse, since I came away. You would turn my head, you two, if I did not have the Frenchwoman's

shrewdness, if I did not realize that men are seldom to be believed in anything and almost never in—in—well, when they talk to a girl,” she finished in confusion.

“But you must believe me, Léocadie. You must believe all I say to you, for it comes from my heart and it, I think, does not lie. I—since the night I saw you on the train I have thought of you; I have not been able to stop thinking of you. When I am with you, as now, I am happy. I ask no more of life; away from you I am lost, discontented, miserable. And that, I think, is love, Léocadie.”

He took her hand, held it as they walked, felt its smallness, its warmth, felt some bright magic course from her body into his and back again as they walked thus hand-in-hand through the quiet village of Memramcook Ouest. And they were content.

Few lights burned in the cottages along the way. They passed the blacksmith’s shop with its white wooden horseshoe swinging in the wind, passed the wheelwright’s where mighty old cartwheels weathered and gray leant crazily against the wall. A dim light burned outside the inn beyond the railway tracks, which they crossed and entered then the covered-bridge that spans the Memramcook River at that point.

There in the darkness of the bridge, pencilled and dotted by the moonlight that came through the cracks and knotholes in the weathered boards of the structure, they stopped, breathless, waiting, feeling the waves of a great ocean rise up around them, feeling themselves lifted higher and higher until they were carried to the stars and the spray of that ocean drenched the stars with silver.

Not once had he relinquished her hand, and now clumsily, tenderly, he groped for the other one and finding it carried both to his breast where, so urgently, so tumultuously, his heart was beating. The white oval of her face glimmered up at him and through her hands he could feel the trembling of her body. Slowly his lips came down to hers and lingered there lightly. Their hands unclasped, his arms encircled the pliant slenderness of her, her hands pressed his cheeks and moved lightly into the thickness of his hair.

They stood thus for moments that were unmeasured ages of bliss in which, for them, all life was lived, all experience epitomized. “I love you, Léocadie,” he whispered. “This is love that we have found, a precious thing.”

Her hands smoothed his hair. She thought of that other girl, fleetingly. She did not matter, that one. Nothing mattered but this moment, this wonder

she knew in his arms, this melting of her whole being into an ecstasy that was fire.

Suddenly, white light flooded upon them, dazzling them, driving them apart. Wheels thundered on the loose planking of the bridge and a horn sounded deafeningly. They cowered back against the dusty walls where wisps of hay and straw from passing loads were stuck in the crannies. The car rushed by and shot out of the far end of the tunnel of darkness onto the marsh-road. The spell was broken now. He held her, kissed her, but it was not the same, though wondrous still.

“I must go now, Paul. My uncle will wonder about me and I—I do not like to tell him of this just yet.”

“But why not? You are not ashamed—!”

“I am proud.” Her fingers pressed his. “But he is so kind, so good, and the thought of losing me seems to make him unhappy.”

“But we love each other. Soon now we shall be married—”

“We can talk of it later. We must hurry now.”

They were gay on the homeward road, laughing, light-hearted. It was their world tonight, all of it, all of its happiness. The moon beamed upon them as they passed the sleeping farmsteads; the watchdog’s bark was a friendly one. Arm-in-arm they walked and the long miles to Melpomyne’s Bower seemed only a few paces, for her hair brushed his cheek and his arm lay warm against her side.

“Goodnight,” she whispered. He kissed her lingeringly, and again. “Goodnight, Léocadie. Dream of me. I love you.”

She ran up the path. Monsieur Plamondon was still awake, the light burning brightly in his study. Paul saw his shadow on the blind, a tall and slender shadow. It came to him that Ulysse Plamondon was a good man, a fine man, and that there was much that was noble in his life. His songs, his poems, his stories yielded pleasure to many thousands of people and in his march through life he gave no man the elbow.

There were lights in his own home when pensively, slowly, savoring this new-found bliss, he walked up the drive. He relished very little the prospect of facing the eagle-eye, the relentlessly probing tongue, the judicial slowness that always made him feel that he was innocent, assumedly, but would very soon be proven guilty.

The judge was reading Fénelon. He finished his paragraph when Paul came in, laid down his book, removed his glasses on their black ribbon and set them on top of it; then he looked at Paul in much the same way as he inspected the various accused who came before his tribunal. "The Mill of the Gods," the gentlemen of the bar and his fellow jurists called him, and he gazed now upon Paul as upon so much grist.

"You walk late tonight. Where were you?"

"Oh, I took a stroll across the marsh. It is such a beautiful night, I found it impossible to stay indoors."

"Impossible?" The judge frowned. "Rather a far-fetched word, don't you think? How do you progress with the case of Pettipas vs Bilodeau, the dispute over all that piece and parcel of land lying between—"

"Slowly," interrupted Paul. "It is very much involved, very intricate. Both of them think they own it and in the period of their quarrel the land lies idle and benefits no one except the lawyers."

"A most fascinating case," said the judge. "I do not see how you could tear yourself away from it to spend the evening in an idle stroll over the marshes."

"I managed to tear myself away," said Paul thinking of Léocadie, wondering what she was doing at this moment, envying Monsieur Plamondon because he was so near her, envying Uldège and Rosalie, yes, even Pégase, because they were in her immediate world, while he—he was in the world of Pettipas vs Bilodeau.

"Yes," rumbled the judge, "it is like a nice problem in chess, that business. We might have a game of chess and perhaps in the course of the play we may chance to strike upon a situation that parallels the one in the case."

Obediently, Paul got out the chessmen and moved the little table with the inlaid board to a place between his father and him. Tonight he fretted more than ever at this interminable game which his father insisted on when he wasn't in the mood for cribbage. The judge, tugging at his great moustache, considered each move as if it were some deeply involved point of jurisprudence and always he moved slowly and reluctantly as one who makes the best of a bad bargain; as if, given a bit more time, he might have done something vastly more correct.

King, queen, knight, bishop, rook, and pawn were swept away before his onslaught. He frowned at Paul. He loved to win, but he liked to win over

opposition; and there was little opposition here. It did not occur to him that Paul's thoughts were far away, far off on that white and winding road that skirted the edge of the great marsh, that led past inn and farmstead, hedge and garden—the road to heaven for him this night—the road that one walked with silver-shod feet under the round white moon. The judge didn't approve of the moon.

"This is most onesided," announced the chief justice after a succession of easy victories. "What is wrong with you?" He did not wait for an answer but got up and walked over to arrange the logs on the fire a bit more systematically. After the rattle of the tongs ceased, there was only the sound of the flames in the chimney and the wind moaning low around the house. Paul felt those deep-set, all-seeing eyes fixed upon him. He turned and looked inquiringly at his father.

"That straw, those bits of seed on your shoulder—they did not by any chance come from the covered-bridge at Memramcook? Ah!"

"Why, I—!"

"Your consternation—" The Judge smiled dryly—"can be assumed as an evidence of guilt. I saw a man and a woman in the beams of the headlights, but they moved back quickly and, anyway, Jean Morand was driving faster than the fifteen miles allowed by law on bridges of that type. But it was you?"

"Well, then, monsieur, it was I."

"And the girl?" The judge's eyes were bleak. "I do not need to ask."

"The girl was Léocadie Perron, Monsieur Plamondon's niece."

"You are a fool!" said the judge harshly, his great hands clenched. "A bigger fool even than I thought you were. What do you mean by this conduct? Where do you think it can lead, eh?"

"To my marrying her, I hope."

"To your—! Why—why, of all the insane things I ever heard! You can't marry her; you are going to marry Emilie Plaunte. I decided that long ago."

"Which was good of you and very thoughtful, no doubt. I appreciate it; at the same time I must tell you that I do not love Emilie, never could love her; that, beside this girl, Emilie is as nothing."

"Monstrous!" The judge hitched his shoulders. "Preposterous! Emilie has a half-million dollars and a lot more—a hundred thousand, I believe

when Dame Laurin dies. And what has this girl? What do you find in her?”

Paul smiled and sighed wearily. “That which is more precious than all the gold in the world, all the treasure that man has hoarded through the ages—love, my father, the awakening of some hunger of the soul that nothing else but her beauty can satisfy. It is too new to me, too wonderful, for me to be able to tell you much about it at the moment.”

“I do not wish to hear about it!” thundered the judge. “It will end here and now.”

Paul shook his head. “I do not know what could end it, *mon père*. It is too great, too powerful, for even the Supreme Court to stay it.”

“Poppycock!” growled the judge. “Do you think I know nothing at all about it! I was once in love, you know.”

Paul said nothing. Indeed he could say nothing: the picture of the judge in love was too much for him. Nothing, Paul felt sure, had ever stirred his father so deeply as a good lawsuit, and even in his heyday he would have forsaken the beauty of Cleopatra for the charms of Pettipas vs Bilodeau. For a while longer, the judge glared at him, then deliberately he picked up Fénelon and his glasses and paraded out of the room.

Paul walked to the window and gazed down the hill. Yes, there was a light there among the trees—her light. She would be thinking of him now, dreaming those “*rêves dorés*,” those golden dreams they shared together. For a while he watched, until the light went out. “Goodnight, Léocadie,” he whispered then and went up to his room. In the library, as he passed, he heard a book thud on the desk and the rustle of papers, and deduced that Pettipas vs Bilodeau was yielding the judge some solace.

CHAPTER IV

“Ah, Cerbère! Good morning, my excellent young dog, my companion on many a long and pleasant walk over hill and moor, joyous sharer of beautiful evenings beside the warm fire when the wind howled without and the snow banked itself high against the fences. You were always kind, Cerbère, always a gentleman and a friend. It is now nine years since you are dead, my canine Achates. I salute you.”

Monsieur Plamondon rubbed his eyes with one hand and with the other laid an oval biscuit under Cerbère’s nose and stroked his head, from which the glassy eyes looked benignly at his master. It seemed, too, that the little stumpy tail wagged there in the shadow of the mantel on which he stood. He had been a good friend and in Ulysse’s heart his memory would be ever fresh and green. Regularly, biscuits were laid before him, and as regularly thrown out by Uldège or Rosalie. On many grave matters did Ulysse consult him, and any new poem, any new composition for the piano, was performed first for him.

“Now, my ancient friend,” said Ulysse, “what is to do about this so beautiful and bewitching little girl, Léocadie? You love Léocadie, is it not? Ah, I could see from the start that you had an eye on her, that you shared with her the warm affection of that heart of yours, given primarily to me alone. But do you know all that is afoot here since she came? Yes, I think so. I think you know more than I do, for your spirit jumps down from the mantel and follows at her heels.

“Did you follow last night—last night when I was playing and she slipped out of the Bower into the moonlight. Where did she go last night? More important still: whom did she meet? Ah, I see in your eye that winks that you know the answer. ‘It was Paul Allain she met,’ you say, ‘and they went for a long walk under the moon.’ And you add, ‘It is nothing to go for long walks under the moon: we used often to do it ourselves, you and I, in those brave days long ago. Remember the rabbits that would dart from the thickets. Remember the night the fierce gray owl pounced upon me and tried to dig my eyes out with his beak and you routed him with your good stick of hornbeam. Remember how the shadows on the white road were ghosts and gnomes and trolls and witches and how the poplar leaves rustled in the wind

like a million little whispering tambourines. Ah, truly it is nothing to go for long walks under the moon. Who can resist it!”

Monsieur Plamondon pursed his lips and stroked his moustache and tugged at his little Vandyke. “But you have not mentioned the thing that agitates, my old dog; you have slyly ignored the point—which is the matter of love. A very serious thing, love, for young persons like my lovely Léocadie and this handsome youth. What is it you say? ‘Youth will find love and ways to love and there is nothing an old fool like me or even a sagacious and brilliant animal like you, can do about it. So the best thing for us is to let love take its course.’ But, ah, there are some things you do not know, wise as you are, Cerbère, and which, beloved as you are, I cannot tell you. He is of a proud family, this Paul—a family of statesmen, soldiers, even cardinals. His father, a man of weight, alluded once to me as ‘an organ-grinder!’” Ulysse ground his teeth. “Well, say something, Cerbère! Shall we let this niece of an organ-grinder fall in love with the son of the Allains? ‘We can’t do anything about it,’ say you. And you are wise. Ah, she is out of bed; she is coming down stairs. Breathe no word to her of what I have said to you or I will most certainly take back the biscuit I gave you and twist your tail into the bargain.”

He gave Cerbère a warning look and turned to greet Léocadie, with hands outstretched, a smile, gentle and tender, illuminating his face, his eyes twinkling. “So like a rose,” he said slowly. “So fresh, so pure, so sweet.” He kissed the wide white forehead, smoothed back the bright waves of her hair and held the cluster of curls that lay so thickly at her neck. She watched him intently, her eyes never leaving his. Wide her eyes and bluer than the bright sky above the marshland, and long and darkly lashed.

“How old are you, *mon oncle*?” she asked suddenly.

Ulysse dropped the handful of golden silk, straightened and stared at her with eyebrows lifted. “Eh? What is this. I am about forty-two.”

“Then you were but twenty-one when you were in Paris, when you—when you married my mother.”

Ulysse nodded. “I was but twenty-one, my Léocadie.” He smiled faintly. “Ah, that is an age—twenty-one—

“With pensive eyes the little room I view
Where, in my youth, I weathered it so long;
With a wild mistress, a staunch friend or two,
And a light heart still breaking into song;
Making a mock of life and all its cares,
Rich in the glory of my rising sun,
Lightly I vaulted up four pair of stairs
In the brave days when I was twenty-one.”

“I should like to have known you then, monsieur.” She laid her hand on his arm, stroked the blue velvet of his jacket lovingly. “But you are as gay, as young now, I am sure, as you were then. Did you wear a cloak and let your hair grow long and did you have a great slouch hat that made you look like a brigand? And did you make ballads like François Villon or Béranger or Pierre de Ronsard, and go around singing them under her window?”

Ulysse had nodded and nodded and nodded. “You are then a little witch, Léocadie. I swear you are a witch. No, you are *la fée Morgane* and you can read the histories of all men’s lives. You see me clearly as I was then when I dwelt in Mont Parnasse—the long hair, the incipient beard, the cloak, the great black hat—even the ballads! And the wine we drank! And the pictures we painted! And the things we did—‘in the brave days when I was twenty-one.’”

He had not questioned her when she came in last night. He did not do so now. It would be too hard to question her. He could not bring himself to it. He told himself it was his duty, his responsibility, as a parent, a guardian. “But oh, *mon Dieu*,” he muttered, “I cannot bear it, I cannot bear to hear of her—her with him in the moonlight, in the velvet shadows, in the magic. I know what the moon is, and dear God, I know what love is! Who knows better? Who was taught by a harder master than was Ulysse Plamondon—in the bitter cruel days when he was twenty-one?”

“Ah, you frown, Monsieur Plamondon. The thunder clouds darken on your brow and the world begins to tremble and shake—” Rosalie, at the moment, dropped the wash-copper in the kitchen with a tremendous clatter and bang. Ulysse jumped.

“This terrible power of mine!” he said. “I must forebear to frown, even to think of frowning. Just the beginnings of my wrath have caused that poor Rosalie to drop the copper.”

“Your wrath, my uncle—” She looked at him almost timidly—“it—it is not directed—?”

“At you!” He shook his head, smiled at the absurdity of her fear. “Never at you, my child. Do not fear. Of course, I am in a bad mood today and I have been thinking of denying you your breakfast. I am in a cruel mood. You see Cerbère. Gaze upon him. He looks quite subdued and crestfallen this morning, does he not?”

Indeed he did: the moths had begun to get into his wiry red hair and a cat named Félice had chewed off part of one ear.

“He looks abashed,” agreed Léocadie. “Yet I see he has been presented with a fresh biscuit.”

“He has it,” said Ulysse sternly, “on sufferance; only on sufferance, and there is a condition laid down, which, if he violates it, will most certainly cause him to lose that good biscuit and have his tail twisted into the bargain.” He looked darkly at Cerbère. “Come, Léocadie, I will not deny you this morning your poor little breakfast of crêpes and honey and chocolate. You may have it. But do not be too gay on that account: before noon the demon may conquer me and your dinner will go along with that poor Cerbère’s dog-biscuit and I will pull your ears, likewise.”

“I shall walk cautiously, Monsieur. Never fear. I know too well the danger that is always imminent when one lives on the slope of a volcano.”

Ulysse laughed uproariously at being likened to a volcano—laughed till the tears came. He guided her ahead of him and as she walked, so straight and slender, so young and gay, his laughter vanished and the cruel, terrible truth that lay, all unknown to her, beneath her jesting words, struck horror into his heart. With lion-courage he drove it away; with lion-strength he stood arrayed against aught ever that should threaten her, and like a lion, a mighty little lion, he bit into his brioche.

Heaven, he thought, gazing brightly, lay just across from him. Lovelier than any heaven Ulysse’s good heart had ever pictured. One could look upon her face forever, and never weary of it; in her eye one could see more of beauty, more of light than if one gazed upon a kaleidoscope made of the brightest scenes in the firmament; passion’s promise and allure were on her parted lips—passion’s promise—and was there, too, perhaps something of passion’s fulfillment?

She looked up and found him gazing at her. She smiled and returned the fullness of his regard and in her own eyes was worship. She marked his crisp graying hair, his strong, ascetic face, the clearness and directness of his eyes. She thought: he is of another age; he has courtliness and grace and he

knows life and knows how to live. She must have adored him. No woman could help adoring him, if only for his gentleness.

“We feed upon gazing, you and I, Léocadie.” He arched his gray brows above the napkin with which he dabbed at his lips. “A soul-satisfying diet, anyway, is it not? But, as Shakespeare says, only love is fed by gazing.”

“And that is why I gaze, monsieur. I love you so.”

“Ah!” Ulysse let his breath escape sharply. “Was ever man so blessed as I, then, since you love me, my child!”

“You are so good, so tender; that—that is why I feel I must tell you—”

“No! No! No! No!” He held out the palms of his hands as if he would push back any words she said. “You must not feel so. You do not have to tell me anything. I know—I know, mind you, that you could do nothing, be nothing, but what was good and noble. Anyway, you would fear to be wicked, knowing of the awful punishments I would put upon you.”

“But you—you are concerned a little. I know it. Do not ask me how I know it. But I felt it when I came down this morning.”

“Ah! You learned it from that brigand, that killer of hens and destroyer of defenceless cats, Cerbère! He whispered it to you or made signs with his tail. He told you I had been discussing you with him. I can trust him no longer.”

“It was not Cerbère.”

“Of course it was.”

“When I—when I went out last night, *monsieur mon oncle*—I had to go out. The music was so wonderful, so beautiful, that there was a terrible pain in my breast and I just had to go out into the world where the moon shone—he was there, Paul—Monsieur Allain, I mean—standing by our gate. He had heard your music and my song and he begged to be forgiven for stopping to listen.”

“And you forgave him.”

She bowed her bright head. “I forgave him, monsieur. He—then he asked me if I would walk with him under the moon. I hesitated, I knew I should not. I feared that you might not like it, and yet—and yet—and you played then and sang, ‘*Qui n’a pas d’amour*—

‘Whose love is not fair,
His days are so bare.’

and I knew then I had to go. So we walked to Memramcook Ouest and it was heaven and—and I am afraid he loves me, Monsieur Ulysse!”

“I too was afraid, Léocadie.” Ulysse stirred and sighed. “He loves you. And you love him?”

“I am afraid of that too.”

“Be not afraid, small one. Love is without fear. Love is above fear because it is far stronger than fear.”

He wished, how he wished, that she had not told him this. Of course, in his deep heart he had guessed it, known it even, but in his deep heart it could lie buried deep along with other things that were, but which he wanted to think were not. Here was the issue, the concrete thing, confronting him. Love—so soon; and love that was bound to be so troubled, so fraught with pain and difficulty, for her and for him.

“You are not angry now?” It was a small voice, her eyes were pleading.

“I am not angry now. I am happy for you, my Léocadie. You are made for love, for beauty, for happiness.”

“I am happy that you are not angry.” Her smile was like a sunburst. Ulysse clapped his hands and smiled too. “*Voilà!* There is what I waited for—that smile. You have been so grave all through this meal one would think it was a funeral and not a love-affair that agitated. Now you are yourself. You are a little fairy from the sun, and you just came down in a sunbeam and took shape here, all but your hair—it is still the sunbeam. After a little, eh, you will walk with me—after I work a while in my study?”

“I shall love to walk with you.”

“Then we shall walk, *ma mie*.”

They got up from table. At the stair foot she left him, to go to her room. He watched her to the stair-head, then went into his study. He walked briskly, stiffly, as a man driven by a cruel, implacable determination; his jaw was set and his eyes were as cold as they could ever be. Deliberately he strode to the mantel-piece and, without saying a word, snatched the biscuit from under Cerbère’s nose, twisted his tail and gave him a look of ineffable scorn.

The marsh-road was hard as iron and the ferrule of Monsieur Plamondon’s stick made a ringing sound where it struck. The wind was crisp, stinging, as if filled with tiny particles of ice. And all the fields were

dun, the dikes stark and dreary and the haycocks forlorn. The sombre crows flew more briskly and only the sturdy, warm-feathered chickadees in their black caps seemed to care nothing for the threat of winter, but hopped about and chickadeed away right merrily.

Ulysse thought of her walking this road last night. He looked at her and rejoiced at the rose-flush in her cheeks, the brightness of her eyes, the beauty of her hair that peeped from under the Cossack hat with its silver sickle. And how trim she looked in her gray fur coat and sturdy brown brogues. He had noted the interested, friendly glances of the villageois as they passed through St. Gudule. "Ah, behold Monsieur Plamondon and his lovely niece, who go for a promenade this fine morning! Is she not beautiful, this Parisienne! What happiness for Monsieur Plamondon to have such a pretty companion!"

What happiness indeed. There was a song in his heart, a spring to his step, a glow in his eyes, a warmth in his blood, that even this so wondrous day could not entirely account for. Youth had returned to Ulysse Plamondon, and he walked with Youth.

"All this lovely Valley of Memramcook we shall explore together, you and I, Léocadie. We shall climb the Beaumont to where, against the sky, you see the spire of the little white church of Lourdes. We shall tramp to Dorchester, we shall visit Cormier Village, we shall cross Belliveau Hill and gaze upon the broad Petitcodiac River and the little villages along its shore. I shall point out to you lanes and byways and sylvan retreats of beauty unsurpassed."

"And I shall love it all. Even now I love it. In Paris, in the narrow, crowded streets, in the eternal noise, I did not dream of this peace, this happiness. Never did I think in all those years when I was a little girl—just one of a million little girls—that one day I would be walking over the Marshes of Memramcook, in the Acadian land, that I would find here one so good, so kind—"

With a wave of the hand he stilled her, but in his eyes was a warmth that showed how pleased he was to hear her say these things.

"It is not hard to be kind to you, my child. I beseech you to think no more of it, to speak no more of it. You have brought me great joy and I pray that nothing may ever mar it." He frowned, musing on things she could not know nor dared question him about. With a shake of the head he put them from him. "Ah!" he said. "What then is this!"

This was a vehicle of vintage long unknown, a black barouche with the top up, drawn by two coffee-colored steeds with bobbed tails and gleaming

harness, who jogged along at a staid and respectable pace but gave the impression that they could, if they wished, show clean pairs of heels to any streamlined motorcars that dared challenge them. On the box sat a coachman in a huge bear-skin busby and cloak of the same noble fur, of whom only a red nose was visible, and who looked very much like a Boreal Robinson Crusoe. Within this affluent-looking equipage was a suggestion of lavender and snow white hair and scented snuff and gleaming old rings on faded fingers.

“It is Dame Margot Laurin,” announced Ulysse, “O.B.E., Order of the British Empire, Léocadie. She was honored for her war-work and given the title of ‘Mother of the Canadian Expeditionary Force’. It is an exaggeration, that.”

The barouche drew up with a creak and jangle and a sharp, superfluous crack of the whip. The door opened. A hand beckoned. They advanced.

“My dear Monsieur Plamondon!” The voice still had flute-like notes, rich and startling. “It is an age since I have seen you. Do, please, come and drive with me, you and the lovely young person I see with you.”

“But you are too kind!” The gallant Ulysse pressed his black fedora against his heart. “I would with your gracious permission, Dame Laurin, present to you my niece, Mademoiselle Léocadie Perron, newly arrived from Paris. Léocadie, this great lady is Dame Laurin. Come, we shall accompany her for a little.”

A hand soft but strong drew Léocadie into the barouche and made her sit on the cushions next to its owner, so that Ulysse perforce took the seat facing them. Léocadie glanced at the snow white hair under the big picture hat, at the keen green-blue eyes and the face that had fought a thousand wrinkles and defeated only nine hundred. Withal, it was a good face, strong and forceful.

“This lovely child!” said Dame Laurin, as Hébert got the horses underway. “What a lovely surprise to spring upon the countryside, Monsieur Plamondon! Why, none of us dreamed that you had a niece, let alone one whose beauty is already the chief topic of conversation from Memramcook Ouest to Dorchester.”

Monsieur Plamondon thought, “I didn’t dream of it myself.” But he said, “I know it is a happy surprise. I know you are going to like Léocadie, just as she cannot fail to like you.”

“Ah!” Dame Laurin tapped him with her glove. “She is in good hands when she is with her uncle. Always the right word, monsieur, always the correct and graceful thing. When I talk with you, I feel anew some hope for the world, some resurgence of belief in its inherent goodness. You bring back to me the days of gracious living, when Sarah Bernhardt trod the boards and Camille was, as it should be, the acme of theatrical excellence.”

Monsieur Plamondon bowed and tried to look pleased. Dame Laurin was close to eighty and it was rather a dubious complement she paid him. He saw Léocadie’s lips twitch and vowed that she should have no dessert this night.

“You are a singer, I understand, child?” Dame Laurin turned to Léocadie. “You will study under the master, your uncle?”

“Yes, madame. I like to sing and my good uncle has been kind enough to say that there is some hope for me, even though at times I sound like the curé’s goats having an argument.”

Monsieur Plamondon shrugged. Dame Laurin laughed. “One of your compositions came over the radio from Montreal last night, Monsieur Plamondon ‘Le clocher de St. Ives’. It was lovely, very lovely indeed.”

“You are most kind to say so, Dame Laurin. But then you have always been kind to my work.”

“Because I have always admired it. You bring out the beauty of the things around you—the hills, the fields, the rivers, the dikes, the church-bells, the little children singing. Is it not, mademoiselle, a noble thing to be able to give those beauties to the world?”

“It is truly noble, Dame Laurin.”

“Oh! I can see you appreciate its nobility. You will come and have luncheon with me, the two of you.” It was a command. Monsieur Plamondon’s protests were brushed aside on a breeze of lavender mixed with a bit of snuff that set him to sneezing violently. “I want this young Parisienne to meet my niece Emilie Plaunte. I know they will be charmed with each other.”

Léocadie wasn’t quite so sure and Ulysse, knowing some little about girls in love, was decidedly dubious; but one could no more escape from Dame Laurin’s barouche than could the French aristocrats from the tumbrils that bore them to the guillotine; so, with a sensation remotely, at least, akin to those of the condemned, Léocadie and Ulysse sat back against the glazed

leather cushions and were borne, at a good six miles an hour, towards the gray rooftops of the shiretown of Dorchester.

Dame Laurin lived in a red-brick house, very square, very formidable, very tomblike, on the outside, but extremely comfortable and liveable within. She had a penchant for going to auction-sales, at which she bought only books, with the result that the room set apart for a library had long since overflowed its heterogeneous contents into all the other apartments, with the startling result that one was likely to come across Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in the kitchen and Mrs. Beaton's *Cook Book* in the drawing-room.

Emilie Plaunte was sitting in the big bow-window when Dame Laurin ushered her guests into the sitting-room. Emilie's greeting of Ulysse, whom she had met before, was cordial and sincere; Léocadie she met with a warmth that startled Ulysse and puzzled Dame Laurin. They were like blue night and golden noon meeting, these two, Emilie like a dark rose in a vase of ebony; Léocadie like sunbeams in a vase of gold. Monsieur Plamondon studied the lovely contrast with aesthetic delight. He was glad that this girl liked Léocadie. But who could help liking Léocadie? Who could keep from falling under the piquant spell of her beauty, her ways that were at once a child's and a woman's.

Emilie had been to Paris: they talked about Paris, and thought, each of them, of Paul Allain.

"I loved Mont Parnasse. So quaint, so picturesque and the people more picturesque than the places," said Emilie, thinking, "She is too lovely. She would turn a steadier head than Paul's with those eyes, with the way her mouth is formed, as if it had just been kissed. And it's not affected, which is so much the worse."

"I like your hills and marshes better than I ever liked Mont Parnasse," said Léocadie. "Those picturesque houses have poor sanitation and those more picturesque people are not too interested in soap. Here all is clean and spacious and wholesome." And she thought, "He turned from this lovely Emilie for me! Why, it is as Monsieur Plamondon said, 'She is blue night and moon and stars!' And she has poise, wealth, everything. And I am just Léocadie Perron—"

"Well, you two!" Dame Laurin had emerged from sables and picture-hat and was a stately figure in lavender and yellow lace with silver-headed cane and silver snuff-box, attended most gallantly by Monsieur Plamondon, whose morning-trousers were pressed to a knife-edge crease, whose shoes

were dazzling, whose black coat and waistcoat were without flaw or wrinkle.

Dame Laurin looked benignly on her niece and the niece of Monsieur Plamondon. Her chief purpose in bringing these guests had been to observe Léocadie and Emilie Plaunte together, and now that she had them side-by-side, she was quite at a loss for any basis of comparison; they were as different as night and day. She thought of bringing up the subject of Paul Allain. That might set off some fireworks and show who was who. She mooted it quickly in her nimble mind and decided against it. Emilie, she knew, had a temper that could be devastating, and there were reddish lights in the Perron girl's glorious hair. Ah, that hair!

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Dame Laurin. "I have never anywhere seen such gorgeous hair as yours, child. Have you, Emilie?"

"I have not, *ma tante*."

Monsieur Plamondon glowed with pleasure. Léocadie colored slowly. She found it a little hard to become used to the forthright ways of these people of New France. Dame Laurin was, of course, an Acadian; Emilie Plaunte and Ulysse were Canadians—Quebecois, though Ulysse had lived in Acadia for many years.

Dame Laurin took snuff, maliciously offering her box to Ulysse and laughing with great glee when he sneezed at sight of it. "Please, then, monsieur, play something for us—some of those gracious songs of your own composing. When I hear your music I am carried back to those dear dead days of the Comédie or the Opéra and I can see again *la divine Sarah* reading her lines in her coffin or sitting with her pet turtle on her knee. 'But where are the snows of yesteryear!'"

Monsieur Plamondon did not know, but looked as if he too were very much concerned about the location of those snows, which soulful people like Dame Laurin have been seeking so long, even in Canada, which is usually buried in snow from November to April. He crossed to the piano, a fine old Steinway that he loved to touch.

"I will play *A la claire fontaine* for you," he said. "Though you ask for my own poor things, *chère madame*. I know you love best the old songs of our land. I do too." So he played and sang the lovely old folk-song—

"Nightingale, sing lightly, your heart is so gay,
Your heart is filled with laughter, mine with tears is grey."

And he thought, “Last night I played it and she sang and my heart was filled with joy, with such happiness and there were tears in these foolish eyes of mine and an ecstasy in my heart. And all the time, he was listening outside and it was to him, though she did not know it, that she sang. I am a fool, I know. And there are dreams that should be stifled before ever a breath comes in them. But, *hélas*, what is one to do!” And he played “*Simone O ma Simone*,” and from that drifted into “The Grey Jackass of Jean Bedard,” and wondered why, when Judge Geoffroi Allain, with Paul following, walked into the room, Dame Laurin turned purple and all but burst into laughter.

Ulysse at once ceased. The great jurist bowed ironically and waved a forensic hand. “Do not, I beg you, let me interrupt the minstrel. Music has its place. I may say, a very high place in the life of the nation. I approve of music—at times.”

“Music is all right then,” muttered Ulysse. “Behold who has spoken! He knows not one tune from the other.”

Dame Laurin was having an enjoyable time presenting Léocadie to the judge. “Madame Machiavelli,” mused Ulysse. “Or the Lady of Misrule. She knew very well, that old witch, who would be here for luncheon. But if she thought to see my Léocadie discomfited, she is much disappointed. It is only poor Paul who seeks a passage direct through the earth to Australia.”

Paul was, indeed, the happiest and most uneasy of mortals. She was here, Léocadie, and his eyes found beauty and utter contentment in gazing upon her, and his heart went out to her and there was a song in it as he thought of last night. Only the judge, he thought, and maybe Ulysse Plamondon, knew of last night, and none of them could know all, none of them could know of the love that was between her and him, that bridged this room, as it would have bridged the seas and the continents.

The judge went into a dignified trance. He did not approve of these people. Most certainly, had he known they were to be at Dame Laurin’s, he never would have accepted her luncheon-invitation. He looked sharply at Paul from under the mighty brows, wondering if Paul had known they were to be here. He thought not. Paul was rather subdued, sitting on the davenport with Léocadie on one side, Emilie Plaunte on the other, like lovely guardian angels.

“Perhaps you will continue your song now, Monsieur Plamondon?” said Dame Laurin with her handkerchief to her lips. “The one about the jackass, was it not?”

“Perhaps, madame, we have had enough music,” countered Ulysse from his perch on the piano-bench. “Had you an organ now—a hand-organ—I should perhaps be willing—”

The judge sat stiffly, staring out the big window at the marsh. He coughed impressively. “I am gazing,” he said, “at a piece of marshland that is the subject of one of the most involved litigations that has come before the court since, I think, 1876—Lapage vs Bastarache. This present case is that of Pettipas vs Bilodeau. It has been two years in the courts now. In it are involved points of law that go as deeply into our legal code as I think any such case is likely to penetrate. I presided at the first hearing and there was presented such a wealth of evidence that it took me almost a month to sift the matter.”

“It must have been fascinating,” said Dame Laurin, yawning.

“In the highest degree, madame. Most fascinating. Paul now has the dossier on the case, but I regret to say he does not find in it the same absorbing interest that it held for me.”

“Odd!” said Dame Laurin. “What is wrong with you, Paul?”

“He is suffering from the moon,” said the judge in the same tone as he would have said, “from the measles.” And, just then, Hébert appeared in the door and announced that luncheon was served and the misery ended its first spasm. But at table Paul found Léocadie at his right hand with Emilie directly across from her. The judge got back on Pettipas vs Bilodeau, Ulysse put in running comments on the genesis and history of the barrel-organ with a light dissertation on monkeys.

Paul talked commonplaces to Léocadie. He manœuvred the letters in his soup to make them read ‘I love you’ and saw that she noticed and that a flush came to her cheek. He felt Emilie’s eyes watching them both and did not look at her. In spite of minor miseries, he was happy—happy because she was so near, almost touching him, and he could watch the sunlight in her hair and the sweet piquancy of her profile. And when he spoke to her, she turned and their glances met and merged and in those moments they forgot all the others, forgot the place and the time and thought only of last night’s eternal moments.

Thus it was that Dame Laurin said twice, “You will find it dull here after the gay life of Paris, Mademoiselle Perron,” before Léocadie heard her. There was pretty confusion when at last she came to earth and saw the sudden darkening of Emilie’s eyes.

"But no, madame! I do not think I will find it at all dull."

"There are compensations," said Emilie.

"Such as the moon," said Ulysse, wishing devoutly he were there.

Dame Laurin looked from Léocadie's bright cheeks to Paul's darkening brow. The judge had spoken of the moon in connection with Paul; now Monsieur Plamondon mentioned that delightful and romantic planet as a compensation to Léocadie for the loss of Paris. What was one to think?

The great Judge Geoffroi Allain had some business at the county-court and begged to be excused as soon as luncheon was ended. It was a relief to have him go, but it did not much mend matters. Ulysse was next to suggest departure and, as Paul had to wait for his father, Hébert drove them home in the barouche.

Ulysse leant back against the cushions in the seat facing her, closed his eyes and sighed deeply. After a while as the barouche creaked and jangled along, he said, his eyes still closed, "You have enjoyed yourself, Léocadie?"

"Yes," she said softly. "I enjoyed myself."

"Where thou art, there is my paradise." He opened his eyes. They twinkled at her. "He is deft with the soup-spoon, that Paul of yours. So deft that, of course, no one would ever guess what he was spelling out with the letters. I could hazard a guess though—"

"Ah, no! Please—"

"*Eh bien!*" He laughed gaily. "It would no doubt be a wrong guess. Everything at that party was wrong. That judge—that insufferable—Pettipas vs Bilodeau—bah! To think, when there are such creatures on two legs, that I, this very morning, deprived my poor four-footed friend, Cerbère, of his little biscuit. When I get home I shall return it to him at once with maybe a chop-bone to boot." And, his equanimity restored at the prospect of thus making amends to Cerbère, he hummed softly as the barouche rolled over the hard road and rumbled onto the bridge at Pont Lefebvre—

"Since the pale dawn I have longed for
The one I love, my heart's beloved.
Since the pale dawn I have longed for
The one that I fondly adore.
Nightingale, sing lightly, your heart is so gay,
Your heart is filled with laughter, mine with tears is grey."

CHAPTER V

“Paul, my dear boy,” Dame Laurin snapped shut the lid of her snuff-box and gazed benignly at the dark and brooding figure in the bow-window. Emilie had gone to her room, the others had departed. “Still you watch when even the dust of the carriage-wheels must long since have settled.”

He started, turned from the window and met the old lady’s gaze with one that was both ecstatic and forlorn. “Even when the dust has long since settled,” he repeated. “Ah, well—”

“You are an imbecile, young Paul,” said Dame Laurin amiably, shaking her head. “But then, all young people are, and those in love a thousand times more so. You are a nice imbecile, Paul.”

“You are good to me, Dame Laurin.”

“La! La! It does not matter about me. But have you thought about your eminent father, who looked like the Wrath of God today, who buried his thunderbolts, it is true, under a lot of fields and lawsuits and Pettipas vs Bilodeau’s, but who, nonetheless—”

“I shall hear from him,” said Paul wearily. “Indeed, I have already heard.”

“Already!”

“Yes, he knows I have been with Mademoiselle Perron a few times, and he has spoken about it. Last night, interrupting an enthralling game of chess —” Paul shuddered, “he spoke about it at some length and gave an illuminating dissertation on love. He knows all about it. He was in love once himself.”

Dame Laurin laughed until Paul thought it would be necessary to thump her on the back or else see her die of apoplexy there and then. She recovered somewhat, enough to say, “Ah, *mon Dieu!* What a Don Juan he must have been in those days when he was in love! I can picture him spreading his handkerchief before he knelt to say, ‘Will you be mine?’ Then carefully folding it afterwards and putting it in his pocket.”

“So can I,” agreed Paul.

“But it does not alter the fact, Monsieur Allain, my young lawyer who has not even begun to be a rising one, that you are in the soup.”

“In the—”

“Alphabet soup. No one ever succeeded in doing soup-writing, as you were trying to do it at noon, without the others at table guessing the words before they are even started.”

Paul grinned. “So! Do you suppose the judge caught on?”

“I should not be surprised. He is a slow machine, but no one can deny his efficiency. It goes without saying that he does not approve of any intimacy on your part with the beautiful niece of Monsieur Plamondon?”

Paul nodded. It cost him an effort to listen to Dame Laurin. Too, he had promised Emilie that he would go for a walk with her, and he was not looking forward to it. He liked Dame Laurin well enough: she was so alive, usually, and so entertaining in a startling, unexpected way, saying the most blunt and outrageous things. Today, she was merely tedious. Everything was tedious, now that Léocadie had gone. Even the sky had become gray and sullen clouds raced across it, driven by an easterly wind. The houses of the old shiretown looked mean and drab, only the huge, towering bulk of the prison, oddly enough, afforded any solace to his roving eyes. Fine and strong and immobile looked its massive stone walls and high-flung turrets.

“The penitentiary is the only thing that doesn’t look like a blot on the landscape,” he observed. “Something clean-cut and reliable about it.”

“Oh, it’s reliable enough,” agreed Dame Laurin. “I’ve always rather admired it myself. Like to have it to live in if I could be sole proprietor. Maybe that’s why it appeals to you, Paul—if you were shut up there with her, those stone walls would prevent any reproaches or opposition from reaching you.”

“May be. But one can build his own walls.”

“Have you started to build yours?”

“Yes. I’ve started and already the enemy are right on hand with battering rams and catapults. At least, that’s the way it seemed last night when the judge cut loose.”

“It would. But what I can’t understand is—”

Paul was not to know what the old dame could not understand, for Emilie came into the room, wearing coffee-colored tweeds and a fawn

Alpine hat. He was glad of the interruption. He did not quite know what to make of Dame Laurin; was not quite sure how far one might trust her. She was Emilie's aunt and, with the judge, had always taken it for granted that he would marry her niece. She was proud, too. She came of fine old stock, of families who had lived in this land since Nicolas Denys came from France and built his fish-stages and trading-posts along the gulf-shore and up to Gaspé. She might feel it a wound to her pride that he should prefer a little, unknown French girl to the daughter of Senator Gaston Plaunte, her sister's child.

"Have I interrupted something momentous?" Emilie's big black eyes looked first at Paul then at her aunt.

"Oh, no." Dame Laurin got up with the aid of her cane and adjusted her lace cap prettily enough. "We talked of nothing momentous, Paul and I—no shoes, no ships or sealing-wax, no kings or cabbages—merely alphabet soup. Eh, Paul—eh?" She touched him with her stick as she passed, chuckling pleasantly. "Go on for your walk, the two of you. Good thing, walking—knocks the cobwebs off."

Emilie's face was not to be read. If she had caught the significance of the old lady's allusion, she did not show it. They went out of the house, down the drive and through the town. They crossed the covered-bridge, a long bridge, that spanned the Memramcook River there. Paul thought as they traversed the shadowy tunnel, of the bridge at Memramcook Ouest where last night he and Léocadie had stood clasped in each other's arms, their lips warm together, their hearts beating close, close.

"We used to have lots to talk about, Paul," said Emilie. "Now there seems to be nothing. And it's not as if silence were all-sufficient for you and me. It's not as if—"

"Perhaps it's the day or Pettipas vs Bilodeau or—"

"Or the moon."

"The moon," he said coldly, "seems to have taken on an importance out of all bounds. First the judge brings it in and sets it down, then Monsieur Plamondon takes a boot at it, now you get it and try a little drop-kicking. I tell you I'm tired of playing goalie for everybody who wants to have a game of soccer with the moon."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"It's all right, Emilie. I shouldn't be so impatient. Smile, Emilie. You do not look happy."

“Because I am not happy.”

“But why not?”

“Because—” She bit her lip. “Oh, I don’t know.” She did know, and wondered at his own obtuseness. She had an ache in her heart, a pain that was almost a sickness. She had not slept well since she had seen that light of worship in his eyes when he gazed on Léocadie. And he did not know. She had dreamed her dreams about him—dreams no less fair for that she was so sure of him. And he did not know. Nor had she known up to a few days ago how much he had come to mean to her—he or the idea of being his wife.

It was strange, she mused. There were so many men who would be eager to have her, men who had already made their mark in the world, men of talent, of culture. She had met such in Montreal, in Paris. And Paul Allain, after all, despite his years in the universities, was only a brown, broad-shouldered Acadian boy, son of a man who, by sheer bull-like determination, had raised himself above the herd. And Paul, like his father, knew quite as much about short-horn cattle, Willshire bacon-hogs and prime Canadian cheeses, as he did about torts.

Still, she loved him. She knew it now as she studied his lean profile, the somewhat long and arrogant chin, the rather aquiline nose and high forehead. He was Paul. He was the first boy she had really noticed, and in the years after her mother’s death, when Dame Laurin had taken on the burden of her upbringing, she and Paul had played together, studied together, quarreled together. Then one day, looking at him, she had felt towards him an emotion far different from any she had known before, and when, in rough play, he caught her up in his arms, she broke away from him and ran, her face burning, away into a corner of the garden, where, trembling and afraid and happy, she had stayed hidden while in vain he called and hunted for her.

“I suppose you will start your law-practice soon now?”

“Eh!” He looked at her as if he had forgotten there was someone with him. “Oh—oh, yes.” He smiled grimly. “I have an idea I shall be starting it immediately, my dear. Perhaps tomorrow.”

“Why so soon?”

“I think my father will recommend it. Perhaps it is just as well. I must—well, I must get to work.”

“You don’t seem so keen on it as you used to be.” It was malicious. She could not help it. She remembered his high enthusiasms of old. How he

would become a great pleader and hold courts spellbound with his eloquence and snatch his clients from the very steps of the gallows. Or how he would go into politics and be as great a leader of his people, and as beloved, as had been Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

“But I am,” he protested. “I have to be.”

“Yes—for her, I suppose.” Emilie’s nostrils twitched and there were pinpoints of fire in her eyes. She turned abruptly and he turned too. She held her chin high and walked very fast. Paul felt an urge to shake her. He grinned, remembering how once he had done it and she, after trying in vain to murder him, had flung herself on the grass and all but kicked the toes out of her shoes. That was ten years ago but he had a pretty good idea that if he shook her even now she would do the identical thing. It would take more than a few convent-schools, more even than the oh, so genteel ladies-seminary at Montfaucon to eradicate Emilie’s strong temper.

“Well, and if for her,” he said coolly. “What then?”

“I am glad she fires you with such ambition.”

“I wonder if you are.”

“Paul, sometimes—sometimes I think I hate you.” Her mouth trembled. With her stick she cut viciously at the faded goldenrod by the ditchside.

“Picturing my head in the goldenrod,” mused Paul. “But you must not even think you hate me. Why, we have been friends, like brother and sister, so many years that—”

“That you have learned to take me for granted. That you can see nothing in me—” The storm, long brewing, had burst now, “that you treat me as dirt when this little grisette, this guttersnipe from Mont Parnasse, happens along and makes big eyes at you. Fool—what do you know about her? What does anyone know about her? Nothing. But I’ll wager they will. Remember that I told you this—they will. You can’t tell me she left Paris and came to Memramcook just to learn music from her dear Uncle Plamondon—”

“Please, Emilie!” Paul’s face was white under its deep tan. “You do not think what you are saying. That explosive temper of yours will do you harm yet—and others along with you. If I know nothing about Mademoiselle Perron, my sweet, neither do you. My conjecture then is every bit as good as yours. And I have a little more than conjecture. I know that she is as good as she is lovely, as kind as she is fair.”

“*Sapristi!* It didn’t take her long to find a stalwart champion.”

“No, nor a dragon,” growled Paul. “That is what you are being, Emilie—a black-eyed dragon. I would pull you by the pigtails if it were ten years ago.”

Suddenly she cried. “I—I wish it were ten years ago,” she sobbed. “I was happy then. I didn’t know then that—that you could be so beastly to me, that you could suddenly kick me aside and, seeing nothing in me, find all things in some stranger.”

“Ah, *ma belle!*” He put his arm about her shaking shoulders but she shrugged it off. She dried her tears angrily, her mouth stubborn, the black eyes staring fixedly ahead. And she did not say another word. Dame Laurin saw them from her window as they came up the drive, and she looked hard, took off her spectacles, polished them, put them back on and looked again. She drew a deep breath. “Ah, one would say that not only were they in love but that they have been married seven years. Emilie looks like a typhoon and Paul like a tempest. I think I shall pretend to be asleep.”

But Paul did not come into the house and Emilie flashed by the door and ran upstairs, so Dame Laurin opened her eyes and took a pinch of snuff.

She saw Paul striding down the drive and could read his state of mind quite readily from the set of his wide shoulders, the tilt of his gray tweed cap, the way he put his feet down. He had had a dark parting with Emilie, a curt, bitter parting that had something of finality about it. Better so, he told himself, better that this romance, if ever it had been such, should end right here. Yet the thought of its being ended depressed him a little. He wondered why it should. They had always been friends, of course, and it was the fear of losing a friend, he told himself, that gave him now this let-down feeling.

“But I won’t lose her. She has had black fits before this and I have been the cause of them. There was the time I danced too often with Saara Landry—Emilie threw fits then. And the time I told her I had a girl in Paris—She will get over this spasm as she got over the others. Just the same, dammit, I like Emilie. I’ve known her a long time and I still like her. But when she acts the woman scorned and trys to lay down the law like the judge’s understudy —”

He arrived at the county-court just as his father with a blue bag under one arm and three ponderous tomes under the other, was coming out. The judge’s huge black hat looked as if someone had put it on for him: it sat squarely on his head like an extinguisher and made his white locks fluff out on either side.

Paul relieved him of the legal burdens and led the way to the car. He could hear the slow heavy footfall behind him on the flagstones, deliberate, measured, majestic. He thought of the Hound of Heaven, and grinned wryly. The judge would make an admirable Hound, though running rather to the Great Dane or Mastiff, what with his heavy pendulous jowls and outjutting brows.

Now Judge Allain settled himself down on the ancient plush cushions of the limousine and frowned at the Memramcook Valley, five miles of it. He did not speak until they were well on their way to Pont Lefebvre; then he said, "What have you been doing?"

"I went walking with Emilie."

"Ah! The first sensible thing you have done today. Today—" The judge lifted his chin out of his cravat and seemed to be looking in vain for something adequate to say about today. "I had to make some effort to show restraint and forbearance today. Some considerable effort. Had you any foreknowledge that the flute-player and his niece or whatever she is would be present at Dame Laurin's?"

"None whatever."

"I thought not. I did you the justice to think not. Had I known they were to be there, I should certainly have made my excuses to Dame Laurin and stayed away. What times! What customs! When a lady like Dame Laurin invites harpists and the like to sit at table with her friends!"

"Monsieur Plamondon is not a harpist, *mon père*; nor yet a flutist."

"No matter," said the judge darkly and by his darkness leading one to infer that there was no limit to Ulysse's evil proclivities. "He wears a velvet coat."

Paul rolled his eyes heavenward. He was making the old vehicle go as fast as he dared. The speedometer was slow, he knew, for he had helped Jean Morand doctor it in order that they might go forty when the instrument showed the thirty-five that was the judge's absolute limit. It was over thirty-five now and the judge pointed at it with a great blunt forefinger. Paul slowed a little.

"What were you doing with the soup?"

"O heaven!" sighed Paul. "I'll never eat soup again. Never look at soup." He said, "Why, nothing in particular, except eating it."

“You were doing more, young man. You were manipulating the letters of the alphabet to spell out some term of endearment or sentiment of affection to that young woman whom Dame Laurin, in exceedingly bad taste, had seated next to you.”

Paul shrugged. They were over the bridge at Pont Lefebvre now. Another mile only.

“I won’t have it,” announced Judge Geoffroi. “I will not tolerate it. The way you devoted yourself to this—this person and neglected the girl you are going to marry was shameful in the extreme. If you do not cease all attentions to this girl, I shall cause investigations to be made and have machinery set in motion that will move her from here forever.”

This sounded good. The way the judge said it one got the picture of his pressing a button that made a contact that set great wheels to turning and grinding and huge belts to moving until Léocadie, and maybe Ulysse Plamondon, with all his minions, Uldège, Rosalie, Pégase and Cerbère, came sailing along on it and were carried off into some distant sphere. But Paul didn’t see how it could be done. He discounted it.

“You can have nothing against Mademoiselle Perron, *monsieur*, nor against her uncle, save the interest I have in her.”

“And that suffices.”

“It is most unfair.”

“Unfair!” the judge exploded. “What an illogical mind you have! What a mess the universities have degenerated into! Unfair! It is you who are unfair: here I have arranged for you—I and, tacitly to be sure, Dame Laurin—a match which is in every way suitable—with a girl of beauty, wealth and culture, a girl of your own country and your own class, a girl whom you have known since childhood. You leave all this for some unknown little chit with designs you may not even guess at—and then you tell me I am unfair. It is too much, far too much.”

Home at last. Paul, unspeaking, left the car to Jean Morand and walked down the drive. The judge with books and bag under arm took a disapproving look at the weather and went into the house. He had to prepare a decision on a case in which a doctor was alleged to have left a forceps inside a patient, and right now it looked bad for the doctor and might even end up with his being found guilty of having left a whole chest of tools.

On the stone gatepost was a pink poster that Paul had noted as they drove in, but that certainly had escaped the judge’s eye. He did not approve

of posters at any time and Paul wondered who had been so rash as to risk an action for damages by sticking the gaudy broadside on that hallowed stone.

Paul read it and whistled. "I think, for the sake of peace," he mused, "it should never have been put there. But I shan't be the one to take it down." The poster informed the world at large, and in particular the villages of St. Gudule, Pont Lefebvre, Memramcook Est and Memramcook Ouest, that there would be given this evening in the parish-hall of St. Gudule, a recital of folk-songs, dramatic pieces and the like, by that eminent and beloved artist, Monsieur Ulysse Isaure Jacques-Marie Plamondon, Maître-es-arts de l'Université de Paris. At eight o'clock. Admission twenty-five cents. In aid of the curé's new hot-water boiler. Everybody should be there.

"She will be there," thought Paul. "And I think I shall be there myself. The curé's hot-water boiler shall not be endangered while Paul Allain has twenty-five cents."

The prospect of being present at this dramatic feast or of helping the curé or, anyway, of something, cheered him up immeasurably, and he whistled as he walked down the hill and up the street, past Melpomyne's Bower. There was no one about except Uldège who in the little stable-yard was giving Pégase a bit of exercise and a grooming. Paul listened intently for the music of voice or piano, but heard neither. Ah, well, eight o'clock was not far away.

It was, alas, farther away than he thought. After a long tramp, he returned home to find the judge in the living-room bulwarked by law books, dry-as-dust papers, scrolls, files, inkpots and pens. Paul's heart sank far down into his shoes. This certainly boded no good for anyone. He tried to slip past the door, but there was no escaping.

"Paul!" The huge head came up and the accusatory eyes transfixed him in his passage. "I shall need your help now and this evening after dinner. Tomorrow I have to deliver my judgment in the case of Dessault vs Malenfant, in which, as of course you recall, the plaintiff alleges that a forceps was left in him at the time the defendant performed an operation, and seeks on that account and because of subsequent illness and inconvenience, damages in the amount of five thousand dollars."

"I recall it," said Paul. "I have wondered why the doctor didn't bring a counter-action against Dessault for stealing his forceps."

"It is not a matter for jesting." Judge Allain looked severely over his spectacles and gave their black riband a hitch. "Come, we shall review the evidence."

So they reviewed the evidence, tons of it, and looked into similar cases, scores of them, until Lucille Breau appeared in the door to announce dinner. The jesting gods had put on the menu for this night, of all things, alphabet soup. Paul looked at it and put it aside. The judge glared at it for long moments, picked up his glass of vintage port with grim resolution and dumped it into the soup as if anxious to drown every letter from A to Z. Paul waited miserably for another philippic, but it did not come. In silence they ate the roast, passed in silence to the dessert and the coffee and from them back to Dessault vs Malenfant, and the thrice-accursed forceps.

At eight o'clock they were in the factory where the forceps had been made; the rest of the village was in the parish-hall, filling it to overflowing. In addition to the posters advertising the séance, the curé had put in a word for it, not forgetting to dwell on the urgent need of a new boiler, from the pulpit last Sunday, hinting that if the new boiler were not soon forthcoming there was acute danger of his own reverend person, along with his *petit vicaire*, his housekeeper and his man-of-all work, being blown to heaven before Christmas. The country folk had come from all over the Valley and from beyond the hills, some in wagons, some in ancient motorcars, a good many on foot; and the empty coffee-tin on the deal-table at the door played a merry tune as the coins showered into it.

Monsieur Plamondon, peering from behind the red velvet portières that shrouded the stage, was greatly pleased. He liked to have a good audience everywhere he went, but he liked it best in his own village. He gazed upon Léocadie sitting with the curé, Père Dollard, and his *petit vicaire*, Père Grignon, a Frenchman, who often came to fence with Ulysse. She was smiling. She was bright and gay. Ah, his recital, his rendition of "The Belfry of St. Ives," of "The Building of the Dike," of "The Shepherds of St. Urban" would be this night a thousand times better, since she was there to listen to it.

The first time, he thought, she has ever been to one of my séances. How happy she looks! How pleased she is that the good people of Memramcook have come here in hundreds to listen to her uncle, to applaud him, to make the rafters echo with their praise.

He felt good. On his return from Dorchester and the dismal luncheon at Dame Laurin's, he had become fully reconciled with Cerbère. The restored biscuit and a tiny chop-bone had completely effected that rapprochement and restored between them the peace and friendship that had been theirs so long.

He watched the door, wondering that Paul Allain had not come. He was not eager to have Paul, but he was surprised at his absence. He hoped that good youth had not suffered on account of Léocadie any reproaches from his evil father. A splendid young man, Ulysse agreed, with a certain strength and nobility about him that one could not but admire. And he adored Léocadie, which further marked him out as being sensible in the extreme. Where then was he? Ah, perhaps now—perhaps he was with the dark Mademoiselle Plaunte, who came into the hall. But no, she was alone. She sat near the door.

It was eight o'clock. Ulysse signaled to Simon Perrier, the verger, seated himself at the piano and as the curtains jerked back with a St. Vitus-like motion, rose from the stool and bowed low to the sturdy applause that greeted him. Then, without further ado, he resumed his seat at the piano and gave them "Floribert Hudon's Goat," which, he knew with his innate sense of showmanship, was just what they wanted and expected.

Ah, rapture! The whole house swayed and rocked to the rhythm of the ballad about that excellent goat who had been so grieved at the thought of losing his master to a widow that he had, on the morning of the wedding, bravely consumed not only Floribert's pants, but his hat and waistcoat to boot, had suffered acute indigestion and all but died therefrom. Ah, that most admirable beast! As always, as ever, from Cape Breton to Northern Quebec, his exploits were received with the awe and rapture they deserved.

Monsieur Plamondon went into the hearts of his listeners. Well he knew how it was done, yet there was nothing affected or overly histrionic about any of his chosen *morceaux*. He sang of the village-bells, of the red furrows, long and deep, stretching across the marshes, of the slow cows waiting by the pasture-bars, of the milkmaid in the dewy grass, of the roaring wood-fire on the hearth and the black frosts and the howling gales that swept up out of Fundy and tore trees from the ground but could not budge an inch the sturdy roof that Jean Gautreau had builded with his own brown hands.

Ah, c'est beau! C'est divin! C'est tout-à-fait admirable, Monsieur Plamondon! What an artist! What a man! What a fortunate village to have dwelling in it such a genius, such a lover and interpreter of beauty! Léocadie's eyes grew brighter and brighter until, to Ulysse's bemused gaze, they were as stars that had come to earth. Tears rolled down the old curé's plump-cheeks and not entirely on account of that shining new boiler. No, Monsieur Plamondon had brought back to him, as to so many of the old ones there, the memory of his own boyhood, of eggs in maple-syrup, of *poutine râpée*, of square-dances and of, who knows, a dark-eyed gentle girl

with whom once of old he whispered in some leafy, shadowed lane under the moon.

They could have listened to Monsieur Plamondon forever, those people, and he could have entertained them he felt, for just as long. But there was the programme mapped-out, and already he had given a dozen encores that he had not counted upon. Soon now he must finish. One more perhaps and then *Dieu sauve le roi*. As he turned to the piano for that final rendition he saw Emilie Plaunte get up quietly and leave the hall. Disappointed; he knew she was disappointed. She had come not so much to hear him, he knew, as in the hope that Paul would be there. Well, Paul had not come. And perhaps—he thought of Léocadie—there was still another who was a little dejected on that account.

Monsieur Plamondon did not reach God Save the King this night. In the midst of *Mère Michel* he was interrupted by a great commotion. He heard the noise of many feet, the sound of quick-spoken words, restlessness, movement, alarm, finally a general exodus. Alarmed himself, he jumped up from the piano. *Bon Dieu!* what then was afoot! His house, Melpomyne's Bower, was it then afire, his books, his manuscripts falling a prey to the cruel flames that devastate! And Cerbère, alone there and helpless! Ah, God

He leapt down from the stage and clutched Léocadie's arm, seeing in her eyes a reflection of what he knew must be in his own. "It is a disaster?" he demanded. "Speak, Léocadie! Be calm!"

"I do not know. I am not sure. Someone has been killed, they say—"

"Mademoiselle Plaunte"—Words, snatches of sentences in a score of voices floated back to them from the crowd that pressed at the door. "She is killed. It was Paul Allain. The judge's big car. He goes too fast, that one. He is distraught. He is saying wild things. He is incoherent. She was so lovely —"

"Ah," whispered Léocadie, coming close against Monsieur Plamondon, "She was so lovely. Surely—" She trembled. Monsieur Plamondon's arm was strong about her for a moment, then relaxed.

"One is excited!" he said, dancing up and down. "One gives away to panic." He sought to push Gregoire Bourgeois, the two hundred and fifty pound blacksmith from Cormier Cove, out of his way. "One cannot believe all that is said in such a moment. That poor, lovely, broken flower, that Emilie Plaunte. Ah, heaven, let us pray that her soul will rest in peace!"

“She lives!” Someone called. “They have taken her to the doctor’s. One can only hope. She ran in front of that car, but he was going at a speed too great, that Paul.”

Yes, he had been going at a speed too great. Release, at long last, from the interminable and involved and utterly conflicting evidence in the wretched lawsuit, had sent him out into the night, eager, burning to go where all evening his heart and soul had been—in the parish-hall, where she was, where there was warmth and beauty and not these dry, bleached bones of facts, not this colorless, stodgy succession of indirect question and vaguer answer. He had known all along that he was not really wanted, that his father had simply decided to keep him at home tonight; in order to punish him perhaps, to discipline him. The judge did not need his help; any suggestions he made were laughed at, frowned upon, torn into shreds and cast aside.

“I am of no use to you, monsieur,” he said as the hour neared ten. “I do penance here—merely that.”

“Penance!” The judge raised a thick eyebrow and glowered at him. “I think the real penance you do is not from this work, which after all is by way of being in your province—but is rather something you impose upon yourself. Your thoughts, I think, are elsewhere.”

“Yes, and I shall follow them at once.” He got up, left the table, ignoring the outraged judicial countenance, the slow tapping of mallet-like fingers that was a sure sign of inward rage.

“I forbid you to leave this house, you young fool! Have you lost what little sense you had!” The judge’s sneer was a ponderous affair. “This girl has surely made a greater imbecile of you than I thought possible.”

“There may have been a foundation for it,” called back Paul, “through inheritance.” And he was out of the house before the crash of the judge’s chair, as it toppled to the floor, had ceased to echo in the great hall. Out of the house and into the car and away at a wild pace down the hill.

He trembled still with the memory of this evening’s indignities, of the taunts thinly veiled, the heavy witticisms, the slow, persistent torture, the final broadside. He was sorry for what he had said at last, but said it was, and it must stand. He slewed on the frosty clay into the village street and sped towards the parish-hall, still brightly lighted. It would be almost over now. It was too late to go in. But he could wait and see her, perhaps speak to her, perhaps drive her home. A few moments with her, a few words, and he would forget all this, and life would be good again. He loved her; yet deeply in him was something like resentment that she should have power to do this

thing to him, to drive him almost mad with longing for her. Yes, it was a madness, an intoxication, a fever in the blood—

“*Jésu!*” he screamed and stamped upon the brake. Too late. He had known it would be too late. She had sprung up out of the middle of the road, her fawn trench-coat one with the frosty clay. He felt a decade of years pass over him in that instant of the impact; he never after remembered getting out of the car, dashing to where she lay, gathering her into his arms, sobbing, saying wild, incoherent things—

“Emilie! Ah—” He clutched the crumpled figure close to him and she made a sound like a whimper, that drove him half frantic. “Oh, forgive me, Emilie! God forgive me and punish me for doing this to you I love, whom I have always loved! I—I will never cause you pain again, I swear it! I will cherish you always! All my life I will give to you. Oh, God, speak to me, Emilie!”

“Paul.” It was only a faint whisper. “Love—”

“Yes, love—love. I will love you, little one—always.”

“Ah—” She was like a dead thing in his arms. There were people all about him, trampling around, speaking in hushed voices—“She is dead—he has killed her—it is the Plaunte girl. The doctor—”

The curé came, speaking with the voice of authority. They tried to take her from his arms but he would not let them. He picked her up and followed Père Dollard and Dr. Frinette into the doctor’s house a short way from the hall. There he laid her down on the sofa and the curé drew him away with compassion in his aged eyes.

“Come, *mon fils*, there is nothing you can do now, except pray.”

Paul’s fingers twitched, his mouth was dry and bitter. He dashed a hand across his eyes and followed the old priest blindly to a chair in the hall. He sat there, his shoulders slumped, his dark eyes wild. Pictures chased across his mind like mad shadows playing a hellish game of tag—the judge pointing at him, glowering at him with terrible eyes, mouthing the words, “Manslaughter, manslaughter, manslaughter,” over and over again—Emilie’s face, white and with eyes that reproached and accused him, with a cruel wound across her pale brow and the mud of the highway ground into her cheek—Léocadie Perron singing—“Your heart is filled with laughter—”

“What have I done!” he muttered. “I have killed her. Yes, I have done that. And I had begun to kill what was in her heart for me. God, let her live! Let her live!”

CHAPTER VI

"It is bad." Dr. Frinette, after a few aeons, which were really less than a half-hour, came from the room where Emilie was, and looked gloomily at Paul and the curé. "Just how bad I do not know, but she must not be moved tonight. I think there are no grave injuries—at least none that I can find. But the shock and the internal hurts"—He shook his head. It was, as a matter of fact his second experience with an accident-case resulting from some person's being knocked down by a vehicle: the other mishap had occurred twelve years ago when the barber's horse had backed up and hit the barber with his own buggy. Motor-accidents were rare in St. Gudule.

"But she will live?" Paul felt light, giddily light. "She will be all right?"

The doctor nodded grudgingly. On such an occasion he would have preferred to speak gravely of amputated limbs, internal haemorrhages and fractured skulls, but, alas, one was a doctor and there was the Aesculapian Code. "You may hope for the best, Monsieur Allain," he said, "and thank God and your patron saint that it is not much worse."

"That I have done, monsieur; and will continue to do. May I not see her now?"

"Certainly not! In the morning perhaps—if complications do not set in." That was better.

Paul turned away. The curé had already telephoned to Dame Laurin at Dorchester, and already the ancient barouche and the bear-skinned Hébert and the old lady herself were well on their way to St. Gudule. Paul thought gloomily of what the judge would say to him. This would be a vindication for the chief justice and would prove his utter wisdom in keeping Paul at home, just as Paul's refusal to stay had shown him a fool and led him into all this mischief.

The news of Emilie's condition had already been broadcast to the crowd of villagers who waited at the door, and to Monsieur Plamondon and Léocadie, who were with them. Paul, when he came out, saw the artist and his niece walking down the village street. He did not hail them; tonight he did not have the heart to talk even to her. The white face of Emilie, the great eyes closed, the lovely forehead marred with blood and clay, thrust all other images from his mind.

“And I told her I loved her. Perhaps I do love her—perhaps this has happened to show me that I have wronged her. All these years she was led to believe, as I was myself, that one day I would marry her. And then suddenly I change, all seems different, she does not matter. But tonight she mattered, tonight I would give up anything that she might be spared this suffering and I the knowledge of having caused it.”

Slowly he walked home. Jean Morand and Lucille had been to the séance, he knew, for he had told Jean to fetch the car home; but he was quite sure that neither of them would report the accident to their master. The house was dark, all except the lower-hall, showing that the great legal-mind was given to slumber. Paul was glad. He went quietly up to his own room and sat for long hours in the old easy-chair that had accompanied him to Laval and Paris—sat and sucked at an empty pipe or tapped the bitt against his teeth and thought but found no satisfaction in his dreams. In the morning he would go to her, in the morning he would be able to think clearer; things would look better in the morning.

Monsieur Plamondon and Léocadie sat very late too in the firelit peace of the Bower. On either side of the stone hearth they sat and the ruddy light waxed and waned on their faces and danced over the lovely old mahogany and brocade: it mellowed the bindings of Monsieur Plamondon’s volumes of Villon, of Racine, of Molière, of Calderon de la Barca, of Dumas and Hugo; it flashed from the clean steel blades of the fencing-foils crossed above the mantel and glowed in the eyes of Cerbère who gazed adoringly down upon his master; and how it glinted, how it glanced, when it touched in beauty the thick tresses of Léocadie, and how warm it lingered in her eyes!

Monsieur Plamondon, despite the success of his recital, was very grave indeed. He had on the tabouret beside him, his little glass of cognac, his red china tobacco-jar with the golden dragons squirming across it. He smoked his big pipe with the bent stem and the jolly friar’s head carven on the bowl. These things always brought him his highest peace, but not tonight. In fact, he sighed.

“Misery,” he said, staring at the flames. “I feel misery, Léocadie. It is on its way. How, when, why, where, I cannot just now tell you, save that this night’s accident is the beginning. As you know, I have many occult powers, one of them being the ability to foretell the good or the evil. I cannot see them clearly, not as Cerbère can or as Pégase can, most certainly. But those brigands will never tell one.” He scowled at Cerbère. “No, they will not forewarn even him who has devoted his life to their comfort and well-being.”

“But what evil could come, monsieur? Surely nothing can happen to destroy this peace, this beauty that you have created about you. Nothing must happen. I will not let it happen. It is I—I who have brought these shadows of dark things to you. I know it.”

“Be still, Léocadie.” He gazed reproachfully at her. “What could you bring, beautiful one, that would not be good and noble! Please do not say such things nor ever reproach your innocent self.”

“But—”

“Stubborn girl! Listen to me—” He hesitated, bit with his strong, even teeth on the stem of his meerschaum. “You have a great talent. You can be—I do not exaggerate—an artist, a singer of renown. You can stand before vast multitudes and awe them with your so sweet and lovely voice, you can make them laugh and weep and finally kneel before you in homage. But to do that you must work. It cannot come, that wonderful success, of itself. *Bien non!* The price of such fame is very high: work, sacrifice, weariness of body and soul, discouragement, fear—But in the end—Do you think it then worthwhile?”

“Do you, my uncle?”

He nodded slowly. “I do, my Léocadie. It will be a hard road, but at the end of it, when you look back, you will say it was good, you will see that flowers bloomed in places along it, that there were goodly inns, warm and bright, and kind folk who cheered you and guided you when you were about to take the wrong turning.”

“Then—then I shall travel that long road,” she whispered. “With you, I shall not fear.”

“Ah, but I may not be with you all the way. There are places so narrow that one must walk alone, places so high that two dare not go abreast. In fairness to you, I dwell upon the dangers and hazards of the route, and keep silent about the shining summits, the white palaces with their windows of rose-tinted glass, that crown the pinnacle most high.”

“Why do you speak to me of these things tonight, monsieur?”

“Because I have thought of them long. I have thought it would be a good thing. You are so young, so little, so helpless. Of the world and its ways you know so little. And I, beloved, am your—your guardian. I have to think of you, direct you; and if you seem to be going a wrong way, why then—” Ulysse spread his hands and nodded to Cerbère, as who should say, “That is well put, my old one, eh?”

“Whatever you say is good for me, I shall do. It is—I fear it is that you think my friendship with Paul can lead to no good.”

“*Ciel!* I said no such thing. I would not have you think anything like that, nor get it into your lovely head that I was trying to drag you away from him. It—it is just that you are young—you and he both. And you cannot know, cannot realize—”

Léocadie was silent, gazing into the molten caverns of glowing crimson, listening to the moan of the wind about the eaves, the tap-tap of the frozen vines against the window. So lonely, so drear. She shivered. “I cannot know,” she said. “You are right, my kind, dear parent, as always you will be right. But I can know my heart. I can know that he is in the very deepest place in my heart, that all my life takes meaning from him and without him all is grey and empty.”

“One feels that way—for a while when one is young. It were wiser I think, child, to wait, to—”

“You speak from the wisdom that led you to abandon my poor mother perhaps before I—I was born; to leave her to starve, to perish. You counsel me to deny—to deny—” The fire in her eyes died suddenly for she was gazing on a re-enactment of Golgotha, of a man nailed on a rood. She did not know really that she gazed upon a crucifixion, but she saw in his eyes, in the way he looked at the fire and not at her, that she was doing something to him that was not good.

She stood up, went to him and knelt beside his chair, resting her head upon his knee, sobbing with grief that brought no tears. “Forgive me, kind, good and gentle heart—forgive me!”

Timidly his hand stroked her hair. There was no banter, no gay mimicry on his lips now; there was none in his heart, in that brave heart that used those weapons to hide its pain. “Do not ask for what is always yours, child; and from me, there is for you always, until life ends, forgiveness and love. Believe me.”

In silence they stayed thus till the fire burned low and the black shadows shouldered their way into the room, shutting out the compassionate eyes of Cerbère, closing in around the figures of Ulysse Plamondon and this daughter dropped from the skies. At last, she raised her head, looked at him and touched his cheek.

“I will go now,” she said. “Good night.”

“Sleep well, Léocadie. Good night.”

Gray light had glimmered at the windows before sleep came to close Paul's burning eyes; a thousand mocking, derisive, hateful images had danced a sarabande around his bed and, even when he slept, continued to crowd and flit about him. So his slumber was heavy when it came and the clock on the bedside-table showed almost eleven when he awoke.

The judge, Lucille told him, had left for Dorchester at nine, armed no doubt with the correct and final word on the case of Dessault vs Malenfant, involving the wretched forceps. How Paul loathed those forceps. In some strange way they seemed to be the whole root of the evil that had come to him.

"Has he heard of what happened last night, Lucille?" asked Paul over the coffee.

"Not a word, monsieur." Lucille was a tiny, black-eyed, black-haired, bird-like creature of fearful energy. "Not one word, I know; otherwise—" She spread her work-gnarled hands in a gesture of dissolution. "I would not tell him, Jean Morand would not tell him. But this morning, at Dorchester, he will most certainly, yes, find out all about it."

"And the heavens will tremble then," muttered Paul. "The thunder, the lightning, the snow, the rain—ah, *mon Dieu!*"

"Of a certainty, it will not be well for you, Monsieur Paul. You have not of course been advised that they have taken Mademoiselle Plaunte home to Dorchester this morning?"

"They have!" Paul set down his cup. "Then she must be better. If they could move her—"

"One says she is not well," said Lucille in anguished tones, tying her apron in knots like a conjurer about to produce eggs or rabbits. "She is pale like an angel, one affirms, and it moves one with pity to gaze upon her. Ah, she is so sweet, that Emilie. When you and she are wed, if it is your will, I will quit the judge and go to be your domestic."

"When—when we—"

"When you are wed. Last night, I could not help overhearing you: I was one of the first to leave the hall when it happened, I and Sophie Breau and Simone Leblanc and Julie Lirette and—"

"Yes, yes. But what—?"

“You say to her, to that poor stricken Emilie, and, ah, it is so beautiful to hear, as in a cinematic representation I once witnessed in the great city of Moncton—”

“For the love of—”

“You say, ‘Oh, forgive me, Emilie. God forgive me and punish me for doing this to you I love, whom I have always loved. All my life I will give to you.’ Ah, it was so noble, so inspiring to hear; and now your good father and Dame Laurin will be happy.”

“Yes.” Paul nodded slowly. “They will be happy. I—” He shook his head. “Well, I must take the bus to Dorchester. I suppose the whole village of St. Gudule knows by now what I said to Emilie.”

“Oh, yes,” agreed Lucille, “and there were a number of people from Memramcook and Dorchester there too.”

Paul looked at her a moment, saw no gleam of humor in her sharp eyes, shrugged and left the room. As far as Lucille was concerned, and, by now, everybody else in the Memramcook Valley, he and Emilie were as good as married. Had he really said those things to her, and had she heard them and would she hold him to such vows, uttered in a moment when he was not himself.

“What can I say to her! I do not know what to do. If she is badly hurt, suffering, thinking that I love her, I cannot add to her suffering by telling her it is not so. And I do not know even—I do not know my own mind. Last night, when I held her in my arms, when I looked at her there in pain, it seemed that she mattered most to me in all the world—”

He hurried down the road to the village, bent on walking a mile or so before the bus should overtake him. The morning was gray and frostily damp, a white mist, *la brume*, hung clammily over the endless-seeming miles of marshland and rolled in smoky clouds off the peaked roofs of cottages. A morning for his mood, the biting frost seeming to penetrate overcoat and jacket and needle into the very heart of him.

He was almost upon her, in a cloud of mist, before he saw her, walking in the same direction, across the marsh to Pont Lefebvre.

“Léocadie!” She turned, startled. Gravely she said, “*Bon jour*.” He fell in step beside her. He did not know what to say and she seemed uneasy, aloof, as if she had forgotten that only a few evenings ago he had held her in his arms, kissed her, spoken passionate, thrilling words to her; as if those things had never been.

"I am sorry for what happened last night, Paul." He was glad to hear her speak his name. Her voice sounded light, carefree enough. He glanced at her and filled his eyes with her beauty. He felt the old spell come upon him. He placed his hand upon her arm but found no yielding there. She did not appear to notice it. "You go to see her now, I presume. I heard from Uldège that Dame Laurin has taken her home. I pray that she is not badly hurt."

He did not want to talk of Emilie. He was hard-hearted, selfish, an egoistic beast, he told himself. But he did not want to talk of Emilie. It was of this little one, so trim, so petite, so warming to eye and heart, that he would talk this morning. He felt: "If only I can be again on the same footing with her, if only I can know I am her lover and that she loves me, why, then, nothing else matters."

"I too hope she will be all right. It was my fault, almost entirely. I was driving like mad, trying to get to the hall in time to—to see you."

"And it was fate that you should strike her down. Perhaps it was a warning. Have you thought of that?"

"I have not," he said doggedly. "It was purely a mischance."

"But she loves you."

He scowled. "I do not know."

"That is not the truth. You do know. And I know that—that it was all arranged that you and she should marry, that there was nothing in the way of it—until I came. A pity that I should have caused any misunderstanding." She laughed. "A great pity—when I was merely having a good time with you. Pouf! What is a little kiss in the dark or in the moonlight—!"

Paul stopped, seized her arm roughly, swung her about and stared hard into her eyes. Boldly, unflinchingly, she returned his gaze, even with a lift of thick crescent-shaped brows that was entirely Mont Parnasse.

"Say that again! Say it—"

"Why—I said, 'what is a little kiss in the dark or in the moonlight—!'"

"And—and you mean it!" His grip on her arm hurt cruelly.

"I mean it."

"Well then, it is nothing—nor is a kiss in the fog!" And savagely hard he snatched her to him and hurt her lips and pushed her away from him. "I suppose there were kisses in Mont Parnasse!"

She had the back of her hand to her mouth, her eyes were wide, furious and her teeth bit into her lip. "Many, oh, many! But country-boys are amusing—so naïf, so droll—"

He left her. She heard the crunch of his heels on the hard gravel long after he had been hidden by the sweeping mist. The great bus rolled by her, splitting the air with its horns. She heard it stop, heard the slow, rising whine and growl of its gears as it started again, and smelt the hideous reek of crude-oil from its Diesels. For long moments she stood there, unable to move, unable to cry even, feeling the whole world tumble in sad ruin about her, and helpless, forlorn, bereaven.

But it was better so. Monsieur Plamondon had spoken, counselling her, out of the goodness of his heart, to forsake the bright path she had started upon, to choose another, harder one. And she, cruel, ungrateful, uncaring for the thousand kindnesses he had done her, had said things to him that cut him to the heart, that made a greyness come into his gentle face, a look of agony smoulder in his kindly eyes. All night she had suffered for that; long days to come she would continue to suffer, and one day, though this she could not know, she would regret what she had done, with bitterness and awful self-accusation. She had scarcely slept last night, thinking of Paul, of what it would mean to renounce him, wondering how she could ever bring herself to lie to him, to tell him she did not care; that what he thought was love was only, on her part, a frivolous flirtation.

Well, he had believed more readily than she had hoped he would. He had been ripe for belief this morning, for his own spirit was crushed and humbled. So many were arrayed against him that it was not so hard to accept the fact that she, too, had gone from his side.

It was done now, she told herself—decisively done. Monsieur Plamondon would pity her, grieve for her; but he would in the end be glad and she, some day, would thank him for having advised her in this hour.

But she could not thank him now. She could love him, yes; she could never cease to love him. At breakfast he had tried to be his own cheery self, threatening dire things to Cerbère and Pégase, even to her. But it had not quite come off. Not this morning. There was still a tinge of that greyness in his face; in his eyes that same look of withdrawal, as if he shrank inward upon himself, to shield himself from hurt.

What she would not have given, as she tried her best to atone, to be better, gentler, fonder to him—what she would not have given to take back those words uttered last night in the warm glow of the fire, words spoken by

some hateful demon in her, barbed shafts that unerringly found their target, that could not be withdrawn easily, that must leave lacerations and scars for long, long years to come.

At last she turned about and walked slowly back to St. Gudule. Monsieur Plamondon must never know of this. No one must ever know. She would keep it shut up always in a dark little chamber in her heart, an oubliette from which it must never come forth into the light. She must smile and be gay now, she must laugh and sing, even though all her being was in agony and her heart as lead within her—

“Nightingale sing lightly, your heart is so gay,
Your heart is filled with laughter, mine with tears is grey.”

It had been appropriate, that little song she sang that night, the song Paul listened to, the song that was with them all those happy miles under the moon. She would always hear it, love it, but always it would bring sadness with it. Suppose she did attain those great heights Monsieur Plamondon envisioned for her, suppose she sang to millions and was acclaimed, what song could mean more to her than this quaint old ballad that she had sung one moonlight night in Monsieur Plamondon’s little room!

“And I would the rose-blossom were in the deepest sea,
I would that my beloved had not forsaken me.”

Paul walked slowly up the drive to Dame Laurin’s house. The few passengers on the bus had looked at him with sympathy and concern. How pale he looked, his visage like that of a ghost, this poor young Allain. His heart was broken without doubt because Fate had been so cruel as to cause him to strike down his beloved as she crossed in the path of his motorcar. His suffering is great indeed. One’s heart aches for him.

Perhaps one’s heart would not have ached so much, perhaps François Daigle, the tailor, and Alyre Blais, the corn-merchant, who looked at him with such commiseration, would not have felt so bad had they known the thoughts that brought that brooding look in his eyes, that made his jaw hard and his lips thin. It was not, alas, any great concern over Emilie Plaunte, though he was concerned for her; it was rather rage at himself for having justified the judge’s opinion of him, for having been quite the fool his father made him out, for having so fully believed this flip little Parisian when she had been merely toying with him.

Of course it was so. He knew Paris, somewhat. He knew Mont Parnasse and he was aware that to most French girls love is much like caramels, sweet, but, after all, no great thing. And there is always more where the last

came from. Well, he had found out in good time; certainly in an auspicious moment. He didn't care now what happened. He would marry Emilie if she wanted him. What did it matter, anyway! In his present mood he would have plighted his troth to Mademoiselle Anita Cloutier, the little hunch-backed seamstress who looked like a black cat in a rage and had a temper every bit as evil. Goodby, Léocadie! Adieu, Mademoiselle Perron! Country-boys are so naïf, so droll—

Dame Laurin herself opened the door for him and looked at him steadily, for a while not saying anything. Then, seeing his distress, his pallor, she took pity upon him. "It is time you came to have a look at your handiwork. Were you trying to kill her, to get her out of your way?"

"Please, madame, for the love of God do not talk like that. I—I have been punished enough."

"Really! How, may I ask."

"In ways I cannot tell you. But this is idle, to stand here—How is she? How is Emilie?"

"Do you care very much, Paul?"

"Do not torment me. I—I care more than I ever did."

The old lady studied him curiously. "I believe you do. Perhaps that is natural. Well, she is somewhat better. You may see her for a little while. Mind!" She prodded him ungently with her stick. "You are not to excite her, quarrel with her, depress her in any way. Lie to her if you must—it would be a charity. Tell her you love her. Or is there some truth in that story that is going the rounds, about your having made a Victor Hugo speech to her last night when you picked her up out of the ditch where you'd so gallantly sent her flying?"

"There is truth in it." He did not look at Dame Laurin. "I do not need to lie to Emilie."

"And you certainly do not need to lie to me, *mon ami*; but if you tell me you have, overnight, switched your allegiance from the little Perron back to Emilie, why, then—"

"I shall not be lying when I tell you it is so." He looked at her, frowning, angry. He did not like old ladies who thought themselves wise; he discounted the axiom that gray hairs and wisdom go together; the judge was snow white. He said, "If Emilie loves me, why then I love her. I told her so,

did I not? I think I have always cared for her. It probably was just that you and my father were so cocksure that we would marry—”

“You are an insolent young man, Monsieur Allain.”

“My apologies, madame. This morning, I am not quite myself. I have had an unpleasant time, a cruel time since I left here yesterday.”

“Pettipas vs Bilodeau?”

“Ten thousand times worse, madame. Do you know what a forceps is?”

Dame Laurin blinked. “A—a forceps! Why, what madness! You must be a fool to go around talking about forceps!”

“Tell that to the judge,” said Paul grimly. “Now may I see Emilie, please.”

Dame Laurin looked at him dubiously. She knew he did not drink, but his talk and actions were, to say the least, a bit eccentric. She watched him hang up his hat and coat, then led him up the wide, deep-carpeted stairs to the big front room where her niece lay, pale, big eyed, her hair startlingly black and glossy against the snowy pillow, her lips startlingly red in the pallor of her face.

“He says he was not trying to kill you, Emilie,” announced Dame Laurin. “And he insists that he loves you. But I think he is quite mad. He is going around asking definitions.”

“If madame will but listen—” pleaded Paul.

“You may tell it to Emilie,” said Dame Laurin sweetly, and closed the door upon them.

Paul stood, silent, looking down at her. She was lovely, lying there like a dark flower, a rose in the snow. He saw pictures of her: a gamine in pigtails and gingham, a long-legged, blushing convent-girl, a debutante fresh as a bud. So long he had known her, yet today she was as a stranger. He found it hard to address her; he groped about for something to say that might put them both at their ease. It did not come.

“Please sit down, Paul.” She indicated the chair by the bed. “And do not feel unhappy over this.”

“But it was such a cruel thing, Emilie. I was driving like a madman, I admit it. I am most miserable about it.”

“Don’t be.” She reached out and touched his hand. “I am not—not unhappy, not miserable.”

“You are not—when you are all broken up and stuck here in bed! What does the doctor say?”

“He is not sure. He fears I may be lame, that I—I won’t ever be very strong. But I don’t care. Paul—” Her voice was soft, “before I lost consciousness last night you spoke to me, you made me very happy, so happy that I did not care whether I lived or died. But now I want to live, I want to get strong again—because you love me. That was what you said to me, was it not? That you loved me—that you would always love me?”

“That was what I said.” He thought it would have been better on her part to have given him the chance to say it again instead of forthwith putting him on record. “It stands, Emilie. If you want me, and I am sure I cannot see why you wish to be bothered with such a fellow—why, then I am yours. It—it seems as if it were foreordained.”

“Yes, that is the way it seems. But—are you not unhappy about Léocadie Perron?”

It was on his tongue-tip to say, “Miserably unhappy,” but he thought better of it. “I think not,” he told her instead. “That business was by way of being a flirtation, I think. It seems to be ended.” He could not tell her that the flirtation had not been on his part, that its ending had not come from him. Better let her think that both of them had put finis to it. Better forget all about it. Emilie would be happy, and the judge, and Dame Laurin—and it didn’t matter at all about him. Perhaps after a time, after a fashion, he too would be happy. Just now, he didn’t think so.

“You do love me, Paul?”

He nodded, said with an effort, “Yes, *ma chère*. If just now I seem rather like a mourner than a lover, you must attribute it to what I feel for having made you go through this suffering.”

“For you, I can bear it gladly.” She closed her eyes and a little spasm of pain twisted her lips. Impulsively he bent and kissed her and with rather remarkable strength for one in her weak condition her arms went about his neck and held him close to her, until, red and uncomfortable, he loosed himself and stood up.

“I was ordered not to excite you,” he said gruffly. “Or does that excite you?”

“A little. What do you think?” The suffering seemed forgotten. “But you cannot leave me now. You must not. Oh, please do not, Paul. I want you with me. When you are here I can forget—forget the pain. When I am alone I brood and become morbid. I think, ‘Perhaps I shall not be able to walk. Perhaps I shall limp and the urchins will call me *canard*, for I shall look like a duck when I walk. Perhaps I will never be strong enough to be your—your wife!’”

“Of course you will,” he assured her. “That Dr. Frinette is a fool. I shall get a specialist, maybe Doucette, from Moncton, and he will soon tell you what is wrong and soon set it right.”

“Oh, no! You must not do that. Dame Laurin is attending to all that. I think she is having her own doctor. And do not worry about me. I will be all right. A few weeks in bed, and you coming to sit with me every day—why, you will be better for me than any doctor ever could be. Please talk to me. Tell me why you were so late coming to Monsieur Plamondon’s séance last night.”

“Forceps,” growled Paul, leaning on the back of the chair. “The judge kept me in to help him with a case where some lout is suing a doctor for having left a silly pair of forceps inside his tummy or something, after an operation. And, of course, we had to go into surgery, anatomy, plumbing, instrument-making and heaven knows what. I tell you I was half out of my head before we were finished. In fact, I got out before it was finished and I am very much in the bad books.”

“But you won’t be—now.”

“I do not know. And I do not care.”

For a moment hardness came in the black eyes. She could see quite clearly that he didn’t much care about anything, even her, this morning. She could tell that, even as he talked to her, his thoughts were elsewhere. Nor was it hard for her to guess where. A flirtation, he said—well, with him it had certainly been more than a flirtation, for he was not the type of man who loves lightly or easily forgets. With Léocadie—well one did not know, one could not be sure. But it was ended, at least for the moment, and before it could be resumed there would be no escaping for Monsieur Paul Allain.

“I really must go now, Emilie. It makes me happy to think that you are—are not badly hurt.”

“But we do not know. In one leg there is a numbness and in my ribs a pain that comes and goes—”

"I shall see Dame Laurin at once and we shall have expert advice. It is my responsibility more than hers. I am the cause of this. Ah, Solon has arrived!" They could hear the booming note of Judge Geoffroi's great voice coming up from the hall below and presently his thunderous tread on the stairs. The door opened and Dame Laurin ushered him in.

He walked over to the bed, putting his feet down as if chalk marks had been made on the rug in the exact spot for each step. Paul he ignored. He took Emilie's languid hand and held it briefly. "My dear child," he said in vibrant tones, "it grieves me to see you thus, grieves me still more to think that you are brought to this—this situation through a son's disobedience—a disobedience that has occasioned a father's deepest sorrow."

Dame Laurin made a gurgling sound, took snuff and sneezed gloriously.

"Paul has asked me, Judge Allain, to—to marry him when I get well."

"Eh—" The judge backed away. "Paul has—" He looked over his glasses at Paul and under them at Emilie. "He is, for once, then, to be congratulated. He has displayed by this act such good sense and excellent taste as should result from the upbringing and training he has received. If, for a while, he forgot that upbringing and departed in some measure from the precepts of that training, perhaps it can be overlooked." He bowed slightly to Paul. "I hope you will soon be well, Emilie. Good-day."

They left the patient, Dame Laurin leading the way, the judge following, Paul bringing up the sorry rear. Well, the judge's forgiveness had been purchased, at a price. Paul felt as if he had lost his grip, as if he were being swept along by a current and making no effort to stay his headlong course. And currents often lead to rapids and sometimes to falls.

The Allains regretfully declined Dame Laurin's invitation to eat luncheon with her and the old lady was able to conceal her great grief at the judge's refusal. He was somewhat disturbed. He had given a Solomonic judgment in the case of Dessault vs Malenfant, but the defendant's lawyer had forthwith served notice that his decision would be appealed, carried to the Supreme Court and to the Privy Council, if it were necessary to go that far.

"A most carefully considered judgment," he told Dame Laurin. "The plaintiff got twenty-five hundred dollars damages."

"And the defendant got the forceps," said Dame Laurin brightly.

"I'd say the ax," muttered Paul. "If I were judge I'd send the both of them to an uncharted island, as being public nuisances."

“However, they have served notice of appeal. The doctor claims they were not his forceps and that he can prove they are a pair stolen from the surgical laboratory of McGill University after the time the operation was performed. It is most confusing.”

“Perhaps the man swallowed them,” suggested Dame Laurin, winking at Paul.

The judge shook his head. “I think not. Quite impossible. They are far too large. We must bid you adieu now, madame. Come, Paul.”

“By the way, madame,” Paul turned to the old lady, “This Dr. Frinette is an idiot. I dare say he would go around leaving monkey-wrenches in people. Don’t you think you had better have a specialist from Moncton or let me send for one, for Emilie. She is suffering great pain. She has some pain in her ribs and a numbness in her leg.”

Dame Laurin stared at Paul, pursed her lips, shrugged, said, “And you, my boy, have a numbness in your head.”

CHAPTER VII

Paul had been driving for perhaps ten minutes, the juggernaut had almost reached Pont Lefebvre and the judge, it seemed, had decided to become a sort of lay-Trappist with a vow of perpetual silence, when, as if delivering the final word on Dessault vs Malenfant, the great man raised his impressive head and announced, "Dame Laurin is a peculiar person; I might even go so far as to say, 'A very eccentric sort of person.'"

Paul himself had been very silent, very pensive. He glanced sidewise at the square nose and bulldog jaw. Looking at the judge suddenly like that, you got the impression that a big bronze statue had been taken down from its pedestal in some park or other, doubled up a bit and set down beside you. He said, "Oddly enough, I too had been thinking of that lady, but my conclusions, monsieur, do not quite agree with yours. I have a sneaking notion that she is a woman of vast understanding and considerable wisdom, a sort of Acadian Sybil."

The judge coughed. "From what premises, what warrantable premises, could you deduce such a conclusion?"

"If from no others, then from the one that reads, 'Paul Allain is suffering from a numbness in the head.'"

"Hmm! I, of course, am not so fully qualified as you to pass judgment on that. I should however say that you are recovering from that numbness, inasmuch as you have put yourself right with Emilie and have been sane enough to realize where your best interests reside."

"Yes, that is sanity, no doubt." Paul's eyes were narrowed. "I think I prefer being a little mad."

The judge wore an outraged look and lapsed again into his Trappistic silence, preserving it all the way home, save once when, as they passed Monsieur Plamondon, who was taking a little promenade, a sound half-snort and half-sneer escaped him and he muttered, "Guitar-player!"

Ulysse bowed with great elaborateness and irony, being aware, by one or other of those occult powers of his, that Judge Geoffroi Allain's day was not made a bit more cheery by this chance encounter. Paul grinned merrily, though, and waved a hand at Ulysse, and the good Plamondon's heart knew

a deep melancholy. What had he done, he wondered, to that young man's happiness. He had ruined it, perhaps; imperilled it, most assuredly. Something was afoot, something of which even Cerbère and Pégase were unaware. Léocadie had gone for a walk this morning and, on her return from that walk, had not come in to his studio to visit him as was her wont. Instead, that little girl had entered the Bower quietly and slipped like a sprite up to her room. She had not come out of that room but had stayed shut up there, silent and mysterious.

"Eh bien! I shall encounter that young one now at luncheon," thought Ulysse, walking briskly homeward. "We shall then see what it is that this is. The world is topsy-turvy this grey and dismal day. I could compose nothing this morning; not a shred or wisp of beauty could I find anywhere. It is as if beauty had gone out of the world. And after last night"—he sighed—"it is no great marvel. The way she turned upon me, that Léocadie, so bitterly, so like a little lynx with balls of flame for eyes! But, ah, how sweet was her repentance, and her atonement, how humble it is and dear!"

Léocadie was sitting on the piano-bench when he entered his room. Cerbère was watching her with jealous, pensive eyes. She was leafing-over the artist's book, "Songs of Home." She turned from it and smiled up at him, bravely but with a wan and pallid air. "Beaten, abused and starved," mused Ulysse. "That is how she looks. And in what degree I am responsible for that, only the good God can judge. Not you!" He returned Cerbère's suddenly reproachful look with one of scorn and recrimination. "Not you, Cerbère. You least of all in this world, should reproach me. Why did not you watch over her? Why, with your superior wisdom and powers stronger than mine, did you permit her to become involved in this business? Stare not at me, my old one, or I will give you a swift kick."

"You improve your artistic faculties, Léocadie, with the compositions of the master?" He stood looking down at her, thinking how like small golden waves from a little sea of fairyland were the undulations of her hair; thinking how white and slender was her neck and how like Mimi's. She was much like Mimi. He frowned. Too much like Mimi. Impulsive, apt to be overly impulsive. What had she done now that made her so silent and drawn inward upon herself. Well, he would not ask her. He would not bring up the subject. He hated scenes, reproaches, hysterics. They might be in Cerbère's line. He rather thought they were. So then, let Cerbère find out all about it, supposing the low bandit and ruffian did not already know, supposing she had not made a confidant of him while his master took his little walk.

Rosalie touched the mellow bells that announced luncheon. Monsieur Plamondon wanted no luncheon; nor did Léocadie. But it is an institution, that meal, and the entire system of distribution, evil as it is, would be in still more evil state if all the people who did not feel like eating luncheon refused flatly to eat it. Ulysse and the pretty one did not refuse, though they had about as much desire for it as they had to go swimming in the icy waters of the Memramcook.

Ulysse almost wept over the lusty veal-chop that waited, brown and juicy in its tiny pond of gravy, with the plate making a blue shore for the pond and the parsley looking spruce and piquant. He glanced at Léocadie and found her studying her little chop with much the same mien of mournfulness. Their glances met. She colored prettily and laughed.

“Ha! It is not ashes, that good viand; it is veal, Léocadie. Tender, sweet, juicy, young veal. But you gaze upon it and so do I as if it were something evil and repugnant. What is amiss this morning? Why does all the world seem wrong and the sky so infernally grey that one despairs of its ever becoming blue again!”

“It will be blue again, uncle. Right now—”

“Right now I feel with you that its greyness is hardly to be endured. *Sapree!* It seems to seep into one’s soul, that drab old color. It is I who have brought it here.”

“You!”

“I, Ulysse Plamondon, lover of brightness and slave of gay colors—I have waved a wand like an evil, ugly crowbar and turned this good world into an accursed thing the color of pudding. Last night I did this when I—when I was so unkind to you.”

“You, unkind!”

“But of course! I was cruel to you.”

“But no, monsieur, you were not. You spoke to me wisely. And it broke your heart even to do what you had to do, and I—I made it all worse by being a little beast to you.”

“Enough! Do not talk like that. I made you miserable. That is what it arrives at, my little jewel, Léocadie. That, *in essentia*, is what it amounts to. I made you miserable, and I ask your forgiveness.”

“You are forgiven,” smiled Léocadie. “You will never admit that all the hearts about you are made warmer, gentler, more loving-kind, from your

very presence near them.”

“Certainly I will never admit that, and so subscribe to a great fallacy. I know myself.” But his smile belied him. “You are a foolish young girl!”

“I think, a very sensible young girl, in that matter, but a very stupid and ungrateful one in others. Why, I have scarcely told you how much I loved your recital last night. Ah, I was so proud! To sit there and listen, to see all about me those charmed and happy people, to watch the tears roll down Père Dollard’s cheeks and hear Père Grignon say, ‘What a master! Whether of the fencing or the music or the song, Monsieur Plamondon is the veritable master!’ And to think, as I sat there: ‘I have the protection, the love of that great one; at any time he will sing and play for me, I am of his world—’”

“Wrong, small one,” interrupted Ulysse quietly. “Quite wrong: you are his world.”

“I—” The two chops grew more forlorn and the grey ponds froze as she came around the table and encircled his neck with her slender arms. She pressed her cheek against his and her eyes glistened and Ulysse grabbed his fork as if it were a weapon which he must forthwith plunge into Cerbère’s vitals in order to vindicate himself and restore his reputation for fiendishness.

“*Assez!*” He said gently. “Enough! It is true you are my world, Léocadie—my world of light and beauty.”

“May there be no end to your world then, Monsieur.”

“I shall pray for that, little one.”

“And one day I shall be able to sing well enough to have a little place on your programme, to stand on the platform with you. Oh, I shall try so hard. I shall practice all day and all night to learn one song—even one little song—that you will think worthy to be heard with your own.”

“You want that very much?”

“More than—more than anything else in the world.”

“Then we will go about it at once. And you will not need to practice all night; merely all day. I shall stand over you with a stick and at each fault I shall give you a smart blow upon the knuckles. Ah, you will soon regret that you chose Ulysse Plamondon for a master, foolish and misguided Léocadie. Come, let us demolish these splendid little chops. If we do not, Cerbère will get them and eat them on us and die, as he deserves to die, of acute indigestion.”

So the chops, at last, got some attention. Léocadie was gay again. If she is acting, Monsieur Plamondon mused, why, then, she is a Duse, a Bernhardt, a Mrs. Siddons. She chattered like a little brook. She gave him the adoration of her eyes, the homage of her soft voice.

“If you work very hard,” he said over his good Turkish cigarette and his fragrant coffee, “I shall give you the opportunity of making your debut in the great city of Mo’réal. I have a recital to give there in about a fortnight. You shall come with me anyway, and if, in the meantime, you have not perished from my cruelty and abuse, you shall sing for those good people of Mo’réal. And they, stupid though they are, will mount upon their chairs and acclaim you. They will say, ‘Behold Mademoiselle Perron who sings with the voice of the nightingale, whose beauty is ravishing, who will surely set all Canada by the ears and upon whose neck the great American people will fall the moment they have heard her!’”

Léocadie clasped her hands and laughed gaily. Monsieur Plamondon laughed too; then, arm-in-arm, they left the dining-room and went to the studio where, for hours and hours, they sang and played and worked, until the little one began, after all, to think that there might be a grain of truth in Monsieur Plamondon’s reiterated denunciations of himself as a monster, a slave-driver, an ogre, a tyrant.

He shouted with joy at her woebegone face, her cramped fingers and reproachful eyes. He shook his fist at her and did a sort of tap-dance filled with fury. “So then! Kind and gentle, am I! Easy, am I! A veritable blanc-mange of a man when it comes to softness! Know better then, Léocadie! Realize it now! Join Cerbère, join Pégase, in the terrible knowledge that Ulysse Plamondon is an evil crocodile!”

But he was a very amiable crocodile when, the long practice finished, he set out with her for a walk along the fringe of the great marsh. The grey sky had become too heavy with the snow it was storing up and now, on a boisterous north-east wind, it began to empty itself, to cover road, field and house-top with dazzling white, to make Ulysse’s cap of black Persian-lamb, so jaunty on his head, a piebald affair that gave him the look of a sorcerer.

At a cross-roads, she tugged urgently at his arm. “We will go this way if you please, monsieur. This way the wind is not so bad and one can walk with more comfort—”

Ulysse agreed, despite the fact that on this road one walked directly into that black, bitter wind. But he had seen Paul Allain, a solitary figure in the snow, head bent against the blast, coming towards them. She did not want to

meet Paul. Ah, that was the misery. Ulysse's heart pained for her and for him, these two young ones who had found love's sweetness and were soon to know its sorrow.

"But it is best," he insisted to himself stubbornly. "Let her become a great artist; let her win fame, let her then marry whom she will. Why should she come under the judicial disapprobation, why be looked askance upon by anyone. Time will be the proof of this. Time will show that I am quite right in seeking to dissuade her from this. Why, what could they do? He is a young man starting out in life. He needs aid, influence—things which would be withdrawn from him in one blow—were he to—to marry—"

He looked at her. The little snow crystals were snarled in her wondrous hair and looked so happy there, like tiny jewels in a perfect setting; her cheeks were like the roses in the springtime and her eyes sparkled, the snow upon their long dark lashes. But she avoided his gaze too quickly, as if she knew that he had guessed why they had to take this road, and was no more happy about it than she. In this little village, she knew, Paul's path would cross hers very often. She could not always avoid him. But then, he would go to Moncton soon, to commence lawyer, and she with her good uncle, would be travelling here and there, and time would soften this sorrow in her heart.

"It will pass, most certainly," she assured herself. "Only a little while I have known him. It should not take years to forget what has happened in only a few short days." But she knew the fallacy of that even as she said it. No forgetfulness could she see; no peace anticipate from this that disturbed and depressed her.

"It is not necessary that you should avoid this poor young man," said Monsieur Plamondon, squinting along his stick at a crow in a bare elm tree. "No one could ask that, Léocadie."

"No one needs ask," she countered. "It—it will just be like that."

"But what will he think?"

"Does it matter—now? He will think that I do not care for him, that I never did care for him, that I was just flirting with him, that I am fickle, vain, unkind—"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" Ulysse threw up his arms and sent the crow off in the wind, swearing hideously in crow-talk. "That must not be. No one must think that of you. No one could think that of you."

"But they could." Her mouth was telltale; her voice moreso. Monsieur Plamondon's spirit was lacerated. "He—he does."

"He cannot!"

"I made him."

"You—when was this brought about? Do not weep now! Do not excite yourself! Do not feel chagrin! All will be well."

"I—I met him—Oh, I said I would not tell even you. I said to him, 'I merely flirt with you. I do not care for you. It was just that you amused me.' And monsieur, he believed and he looked as if he could kill me. I told myself I would keep it locked up in my heart, down in an oubliette."

"There are no oubliettes for such things, *mon enfant*. No grave deep enough for love; no tomb strong enough to hold sweet memories. It is I, Ulysse Plamondon, who tell this to you."

"I think I know it, monsieur. I try to tell myself I will forget all about Paul. Well, I will try. Let me try. I will lose myself in my singing. I will work and study hard. Let me try that for a while."

"That is what I wished for you. But if it must cause you this suffering so ineffable that I see in your eyes and feel is in your heart—why, then, even one so inhuman, so insensible to human miseries as I am, could not endure it."

"It was just—seeing him." She was calm now. "He looked so alone. He was so kind to me. He is so sincere, so trusting and honest."

"And are not you?"

"I, monsieur, am more inhuman, cruel, fickle, treacherous, base, than my father!"

"Ha! Ha!" Ulysse seized her arm and shook her. "I knew it. I was sure of it! You, then, are a vampire, Léocadie. What an excellent combination we are, to be sure, a fiend and a vampire. Ah, how the black shadows of our bat wings gather over the unsuspecting rooftops of St. Gudule. Two of us, eh! *Bon!*"

So the fiend linked arms with the vampire, and the two of them walked back to Melpomyne's Bower, to sit through the quiet dusk, warm by the fire, to watch the night creep down upon the vast marshlands, the dikes and the rivers, until even the snow that lay inches deep already upon the ground was blotted out and only a ghastly phosphorescent glow, rather suggested than

seen, spoke of its whiteness. The wind whistled and the snow swished and drove against the pane; in the great stone chimney was a mighty rumbling and Uldège came with big logs of Rock Maple to fill the fire-box that looked like the abandoned coffin of some giant.

“Pégase is well, my faithful one?” demanded Monsieur Plamondon.

“He carries himself very well, Monsieur Plamondon.” Uldège was a grey man with a great nose and negligible chin and a villainous squint that hid a kindly temper. “But I swear he knows of the snow and his little hooves tap-tap as he thinks of dashing along in front of the red pung.”

“Tell him,” said Ulysse, as if issuing a grave pronunciamiento, “that tomorrow he shall gallop to his heart’s content, that Mademoiselle Léocadie will share with me the so great honor and rapture of being borne as on the wings of the wind.”

But, on the morrow, such a wind was blowing across the marshes as would have picked up Pégase and his little red pung, Ulysse and Léocadie and carried them all into the Bay of Fundy, had they been foolish enough to venture forth. They stayed at home; the wind contented itself with whisking away a few barns and outhouses, knocking down a goodly number of fences and tearing some slates off the church roof.

It kept Paul at home. He spent the day preparing for his move to Moncton, and had it been a migration to Wrangel Island he could not have gone about it with less enthusiasm. Moncton was only a short distance away: it didn’t matter. There was nothing to come back for anyway. He hardly gave Emilie a thought and felt rather thankful to the raging wind for affording him an excuse to stay away from Dorchester. He talked to her over the telephone, very briefly, explaining that he did not wish to weary her. Was she feeling better? Well, no—not a great deal. Had another doctor come? No, Dr. Frinette was doing all that could be done for the present. “And tomorrow when you come, Paul, my cure will progress.”

He tried to be cheerful with her. It was hard. If he loved her, as in that moment of self-reproach and concern for her safety, he had told her, then it was not love as he had understood it. Love was a gay, colored thing, a flame in the forest, a banner in the sun, a rainbow in the April sky. What he felt for Emilie was none of these things. Still, he told himself, it may be all the better on that account. What I felt for *her*—He could not speak her name or even think of it without feeling lost and miserable—what I felt for her was like the moonlight and the stars and all the lovely colors of the sky. And it wasn’t real. It was only a mirage, a dream.

He had seen her yesterday with Monsieur Plamondon, had watched them turn up the road so that their path would not cross his. Life hadn't seemed worth living in that dark moment. She was through with him. She didn't care even to meet him in the street. A prize fool he had made of himself, or she had made of him. Yet their kisses had been real; the memory of her, warm and lithe and lovely, made his blood flow faster, made him hope, for no reason, that his happiness might come back to him.

The judge was still on his dignity, speaking seldom to his only begotten, inviting Monsieur Alberic Daigle, the schoolmaster, in for the evening game of chess or piquet. The judge had a memory like an elephant and would never forget Paul's saying that his imbecility might, in some degree, be inherited. "Why," thought the judge, "his mother, while no genius, was quite an intelligent woman. I do not know what the boy was thinking of when he passed that remark." The judge was at peace, now that Paul had left the siren and was again back with Emilie, where he belonged. Doubtless in the spring he and Emilie would be married. As for that girl, that niece of Plamondon—the judge thought she could come to no good end. He thought of several stiff sentences to hand out to her and Ulysse Plamondon, should they, as was highly probable, ever appear before his tribunal.

The wind blew itself out, leaving a plain of drifted snow on the marsh, as undulating and monotonous as the Sahara, and forthwith the farmers were out sticking little fir and spruce trees in it at intervals to mark out the roads and prevent people from driving into the river or becoming lost on the marsh at night and freezing to death.

Along this road where the sturdy little trees stood like forest-sentinels, on the gay sunny day that followed the big wind, Pégase flew like a winged steed. So Monsieur Plamondon said, so said Uldège and Rosalie, who watched from the Bower window as the gallant equipage crossed the marsh to Pont Lefebvre. Pégase drew a little red sleigh like a Russian troika, Pégase's harness was adorned with more bells than could be found in all the churches from Memramcook to St. Anne de Kent, and Pégase had two gallant red pom-poms up around his ears, so that he looked somewhat like the sacred animals the old Greeks and Egyptians were wont to offer sacrifice to and lead in procession.

How those countless little bells tinkled and jangled! How the powdery snow flew up over the dashboard and showered upon Ulysse and Léocadie until they looked, to the distant Uldège and Rosalie, like candy figures well sprinkled with icing-sugar! How Pégase, with tossings of his head and rollings of his eyes, gave the impression that he was flying, that beside him

Man o' War or any other celebrated horse, would be merely a study in slow motion! How Monsieur Plamondon helped him out in this game by cracking the whip, gritting his teeth, bracing his feet, tugging on the reins and bidding Léocadie hold on for dear life lest she be thrown from the pung and fatally injured by having her brains dashed out, though usually she might have stepped from the vehicle without much danger of anything other than a mild tumble.

"Have ever your eyes been gladdened by the spectacle of such a steed as Pégase? Have ever you heard tell of one that could approach this incomparable animal, save him after whom our good horse is named? Have you ever seen the like, Léocadie?"

"Never, monsieur. In all truth, he is a noble beast." She sparkled up at Ulysse from under the bear-skin robes in which he had all but suffocated her, with cheeks as red as the little troika, with eyes brighter than the most gleaming bell on Pégase's lovely harness, with snow upon her gay crimson cap and in the blowing tendrils of her hair.

Carters with their great Clydes, countrymen with sturdy cobs or raw-boned nags, saluted Monsieur Plamondon with a cheery shout, a wave of the whip, and Monsieur Plamondon waved back and beamed upon them and then upon Pégase. How jealous those poor horses must be, gazing upon such splendor! How they must envy Pégase as he skimmed over the white and frozen plain! Once, Anthony Belliveau from Pont Lefebvre whipped by them with his sorrel trotter, making Pégase look as if he were standing still, but Monsieur Plamondon, all that time, was gazing at the sky above the Beaumont and calling upon Léocadie to witness the peculiar cloud formation, so that he did not see Anthony at all, until the sorrel horse was far ahead of him. His brows went up then. He pursed his lips and whistled. "Hi! What then! Here I have been cloud-gazing with you when Pégase was eating his heart out to show that wooden horse a race. Forgive me, Pégase. Be charitable! Would it be kind to defeat that horse, to humble him and cause his master perhaps to beat him and give him no supper? You know it would not be a fair race, you little ruffian."

Pégase probably understood. He did not seem to mind very much, even when on the way back, the sorrel nag tore past him again. "One day," explained Monsieur Plamondon, "I shall let him have his head. I shall let him out, Léocadie, and on that day, my child, you will see the fastest horse in the world."

Now as Pégase bravely trotted up the little hill to St. Gudule, they met Judge Allain's big car coming down. It passed them with a jangle of chains that was like an echo of the merry bells. She saw Paul sitting at the wheel. He touched his cap to them, but did not smile. He looked, she thought, as if he had not smiled for days, as if it would be a great effort to smile. And suddenly, with his passing, all the joy went out of the day and it was cold even under the heavy bear-skins. Ulysse seemed to find things different too. He did not again speak until they had turned in at the Bower and Pégase was safely handed over to the proud ministration of Uldège. He looked then almost timidly at Léocadie and slipped his arm through hers as they went into the house.

"You are sad, little one," he said. "And he is not happy. And that is not right. No, it is not right."

"But it is best." There was no great conviction in her way of saying it. "In time—"

"You are an apt pupil, Léocadie; but I wonder just how good a teacher I am."

"I trust in you."

Ulysse shook his head. "I do not know if it is well. Better perhaps to trust your heart."

"But if I did—"

He shrugged. He looked into the room where his piano stood, its rosewood softly gleaming. He knew he could not play it today. She was not happy, this lovely child. It was not right that two should suffer. And for what? Well, there were many things that she did not know and perhaps need never know. All the fears that had haunted him seemed of no importance here in this backwater far off from the great river of life, the rush and flow of which came here only as a remote sound like wind over the distant hills. Things buried these twenty years, dark events that he had thought would never be recalled to him. Then she had come. And with her coming, a host of vanished forms arose and walked again in the world. "Her I shall never see again, poor little Mimi. And Hilaire—it may well be that he will never return from that living-tomb—"

"What are you thinking about?" She held her hat in her hand. She pushed back the hair that encroached upon her brow. Ulysse shook his head, "Of nothing, *chérie*. Nothing that can ever matter. Well, we had a pleasant drive, eh? And we shall meet at dinner. And we shall try to be happy."

“I could not be otherwise—with you.”

He pulled her ear gently. “You are a little flirt. A little minx. A rogue. A deceiver. You say you love me; you pine for another. You smile on me; another passes; you cease to smile.”

“I—I did not mean—” Her cheeks felt hot. She looked down at the pretty red cap.

“It is only as it should be, Léocadie,” he said gently. “Love comes but once, and of its coming we can know little. Nor the reason for it, nor why it should be one person and not the other.”

“You speak from experience, monsieur?”

“From sad experience, little one. We will say no more.” And he left her and went into his room and stood looking fixedly at Cerbère, not seeing him.

Paul drove to Dorchester. The snow made the going soft and pleasant, muffling the sound of the chains. Great clouds of snow like spindrift were kicked up by the flying wheels. He had put off his visit to Dame Laurin’s quite as long as he dared. It was like that now. Emilie—Emilie would be waiting for him. She would be impatient and she had, now, a claim upon him. He was a bit vague about that claim. Maybe it would be a limp, or a numbness in the leg or a recurrent pain in the ribs. He would probably be reproached with that limp, that pain or that numbness.

“Why did she have to get in the way of the car? Why did I have to go and say I loved her in front of the whole parish? And why do I abide by it anyway? Just to see Léocadie—just a glimpse of her, and I cease to hate her, if I ever did for a moment. I can’t forget her, can’t do without her. But she looked so happy, riding with Monsieur Plamondon.” Her bright looks had hurt him more than anything else. How could she laugh and be so gay when he was utterly miserable! She did not care. It must be that. She had forgotten all about him. Presently some other would come along and she would try her wiles on him.

He turned in at Dame Laurin’s house, ran up the steps and knocked briskly, making a face at the gargoyle that leered at him with brassy malevolence. Dame Laurin opened the door just as he had contorted his face into a hideous grin matching the gargoyle’s. The old lady stepped back so suddenly that her lace cap slid over on one ear. She stared at him, appalled.

“Name of a name, monsieur, what is wrong with you, anyway! Forceps, definition of, it was the last time you came. Now I open the door to you and find you looking like Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre Dame or maybe The Man Who Laughs. I am not sure that I wish to be related, even by marriage, to one who exhibits all the symptoms of an idiot.”

Paul’s cheeks were more crimson than the cold wind had made them. “If you will but let me explain—”

“Again! You are always explaining. Do come in, won’t you! If you stand there with the door open you will next be giving me the influenza. Hébert! Come take Monsieur Allain’s hat and coat. And, please, young Paul, do not go around looking like monsters and frightening people out of their wits.”

“A thousand apologies, Dame Laurin. How is Emilie today? Is—is it likely she will have a permanent limp?”

“A permanent—” The old lady sighed. “Go and see for yourself. Hébert will conduct you. I am hesitant about going upstairs with you; afraid you might start turning summersets or sliding on the balustrade.”

Paul grinned. The old lady laughed merrily and went back to her big chair by the living-room fire, to her book and her snuff-box. Hébert, who, without his fur, looked rather like a skinned bruin, led the way upstairs. Paul followed humbly.

Emilie was very frail and lovely in a pink negligée with white fur about the collar. She gave him a languid hand and made him sit by the bed. “Aren’t you going to kiss me?” she demanded when Hébert had gone.

“I—”

“Oh, don’t bother! You don’t care enough to think of it yourself. You all but killed me. You have me worrying whether or not I shall ever walk properly again; you say you love me and then you come here late in the afternoon and act like a mummy. What am I to think?”

“But you won’t be lame or anything like that!”

“You won’t care. You vowed everything a man can vow, right in front of everyone, but I’ll wager you could forget all you said, without a great deal of trouble.”

“I do not want to quarrel with you, Emilie. Please let us not wrangle like this. I am miserable enough already.”

“And why? She has something to do with it!” The black eyes flashed and the red mouth was angry. “That is it. It’s no real love that brings you to me. You have had a quarrel with her. Well, say! Have you had a quarrel with her?”

“If you want to know, yes.”

“I knew it. I felt it all along. You are thrown over by that little adventuress, then on the rebound you come to me. Oh, I hate you. I cannot bear you. I want nothing whatever to do with you. Why do you sit there looking at me. I will not have it!” To Paul’s consternation, she jumped out of bed, kicked her feet into her mules and almost ran out of the room.

He followed, with a look in his eyes as in the eyes of one who has witnessed a miracle. She had gone down stairs. He went down stairs after her. He heard Dame Laurin in the living-room, laughing hysterically. When he poked his head in at the door, the old lady laughed still louder and pointed her stick at him.

“*Hé!* A numbness in the limbs! Will she have a permanent limp! You maker-of-faces, it’s good you angered her enough to get her out of bed. If you ask me, she got nothing more than a bit of a shaking up.”

“Well then, why did she pretend she was half-killed and have me thinking that I had done her some terrible harm?”

“Oh, do not ask me that. You are always asking me impossible questions. When you are not doing that, you are going around making faces at me.”

“Madame! I was not making faces at you, I swear it. It was the door-knocker.”

“The—good heavens, you don’t tell me you go about making faces at door-knockers!”

“As a rule, no. But today I detected something particularly malevolent in that knocker of yours and I could not resist the impulse to give it back something in kind.”

“You looked far more hideous than the knocker.”

“Splendid! Do you think I had better see Emilie again before I go?”

“You are an exasperating fellow, Paul. I think you had better do nothing of the kind.”

Paul looked his relief. “Well then, perhaps I had better be going.”

"It didn't take you long to upset everything. How did you do it?"

"I do not know." He shrugged to show his helplessness at explaining anything at all. "I did nothing, said nothing. We were talking. Emilie asked me if I had quarrelled with Léocadie—that is, Mademoiselle Perron. And I said yes—"

"Oh, you said yes!"

"Yes. Then she jumped out of bed and I saw that she did not limp."

Dame Laurin shook her head, as if it were a very great problem, with a solution far beyond her. "And you really have quarrelled with the little Perron? What about?"

"*Mon Dieu!* What do women ever quarrel about, madame? Can you tell me that? I have had more misery in the last few days than in all the years before."

"That comes from soup-writing," said Dame Margot with cheerful malice. "I knew you were starting a lot of woe for yourself as soon as I guessed what you were doing."

"I suppose I was. I have most certainly had plenty of it. I am sorry about Emilie. Please tell her that; and I shall tell her myself if ever she feels like listening to me."

"I think she will."

"And I hope so. I am fond of Emilie, always have been."

"It isn't enough. What about the other one? Are you just fond of her?"

"Who shall say?" He looked so down that the old lady felt sorry for him. "I—"

"You may tell me, Paul."

"Well then, I thought I loved her," he blurted. "I should not tell you this. But it is so. And I think I still do."

"Then what is all the trouble?"

"She does not love me."

"You are sure?"

"But yes. She merely amuses herself with me. It seems I am a country boy and country-boys are so droll, so naïf—" His nostrils twitched and his dark eyes were stormy and he looked neither droll nor naïf right then.

“Well, they are,” said Dame Laurin slyly. “But they are lovable too. There now, run along. And here’s a bit of advice; women are no more to be believed when they say they don’t love you than when they say they do.”

“Is it so, madame?”

“It is so, Paul. Au revoir.”

“Au revoir, Dame Laurin.”

CHAPTER VIII

The valley of Memramcook was buried deeper and deeper with snow as each week brought its storm, and it seemed that the heavens had no intention of letting up until the highest drift touched the church-steeple and the job of interment was completed. Tractors rumbled up and down the post-roads, pushing mighty plows; on the railway line, rotary sweepers dashed along sending up huge clouds of feathery whiteness; the farmers grew weary shovelling their way to the woodpile and only the very little ones, who saw in all this piling up of snow the work of a kindly providence making good sleighing for Père Noël and his pretty reindeers, faced the white world with beaming eyes and rosy cheeks.

Paul Allain, directed by the judge, had betaken himself to Moncton, to a mouldy little office on Main Street and a funereal suite of rooms in the elegant suburb of Sunny Brae. Not that the dreariness of his surroundings could make Paul feel any drearier. He had tried, in the days before he left St. Gudule, to get up enough courage to go to Léocadie, there at her feet to humble himself, there to find out if Dame Laurin spoke wisely when she said girls were not to be believed when they said they did not love; any more than when they said they did.

But he had not gone to her. He had run the risk of snow-blindness, not to mention frozen feet and frost-nipped ears, by tramping over the marsh at all hours in the hope of seeing her. But all he found to gladden him were the sunsets, darkly crimson, flaunting themselves across the western sky; or the stars hard and cruel in the deep blue of the night or the long sweeping fingers of the aurora as they sought to pluck these stars from their fastenings on the night's azure robe and whisk them away to the pole.

No Léocadie. Once again he did see her, driving across the marsh with Monsieur Plamondon, behind the flying heels of Pégase. But they sped by him so fast, such was the rocket-like speed of that phenomenal horse, that all he got was a wave of the hand, a flourish of the superfluous whip. Bitterly he decided then to bury himself in the law, to give himself to it body-and-soul, to renounce her, to forget that she had ever been. But a whole week had dragged itself by like the weary Alexandrine or the wounded snake it was likened to, and the burying-process had not got started and the giving of himself to this immortal profession had been cramped somewhat by the fact

that the first gigantic problem he had to wrestle with was, no less, Pettipas vs Bilodeau—"all that part and parcel of land lying between the Memramcook River on the west," and so on *ad nauseam*. Grimly he tried to find in this dismal mass of charges and counter-charges, statements and denials, some of the fascinating aspects the judge had mentioned, doggedly he put himself in the place of Pettipas, in the gum-shoes of Bilodeau. No good. It was just a lot of mud and there was nothing in it for him. In the very midst of the epic battle for this priceless field, a pair of violet-blue eyes, with lovely lashes, would look up at him mockingly or tenderly and as he framed the very speech that would make the field Bilodeau's forever, a low, sweet voice would speak to him. And then he would thrust all the papers and books away from him, careless of whether they went into the waste-basket or into the fire.

But the eyes and the voice faded and he was alone; the eyes gazed into Monsieur Plamondon's and the voice spoke to Ulysse. "What a world of whiteness this is, uncle! Do you not fear that soon we will all be buried in it so deep that we never again can be dug out?"

"But yes." Ulysse swung around on the piano-bench and clasped his knee with his hands. "I have thought very much of it. I think, my small child, that the danger is becoming acute. I am out of sorts with Cerbère again: he scorns his biscuit. I am displeased with Pégase: he has been insolent about my not permitting him to race that wretched sorrel of Anthony Belliveau's. So I have decided to leave them to be buried in the snow, while you and I shall tomorrow set forth—"

He stopped, cocked an eye at her, seeing in her face excitement and fear. She wanted to be away; she dreaded going far from this young Paul who even now was no doubt eating his life away in Moncton.

"To where, monsieur? Ah, you are cruel to me—even as to Cerbère and Pégase."

"Yes, cruel to you. I torment you; I hold forth the cup, then dash it from your hand as it approaches your thirsting lips; I tender you the bunch of grapes, then with a sneer knock them to the floor and crush them beneath my heel; I say we will set forth, and when eagerly you seek to know where, I—I say 'To Montreal!'"

"To Montreal!"

"Ah, yes—Mo'real! It is now Wednesday. On Saturday night I give a recital in Verdun. And you will sing."

“I will—!”

“Most certainly. I have arranged that. I have communicated with my good friend, that robber and brigand, Rosario Leboëuf, who acts as my impresario; I have told him that I bring with me this time none other than my niece Léocadie, and that on this programme that will be given for such of the good people of Verdun as appreciate the true beauty of poetry and song, my little Léocadie shall have a place. Ah!” He blew a kiss from his fingers. “Admiration! Joy! Rapture! They will sit spellbound, those people. They will cry when they can find breath, ‘Ah, name of God, but this girl is the most beautiful singer that has ever been heard! This is a voice from heaven! She sings with the harmony of an angel, this niece of Monsieur Plamondon’s, who comes from the distant hills of Acadie!’”

Léocadie looked at him timidly. “But suppose they say instead, ‘She sings like a crow, this one. She is too, too hideous! What can poor Monsieur Plamondon be thinking about, surely he has taken leave of his senses, to clutter up his programme with such a sad little cabbage as this Léocadie!’”

“Impossible! That could not be said by anyone. You will see. You will be acclaimed. You will sing that sad lovely little song you brought with you and that, it seems to me, you have learned to sing better with more feeling, with more truth, since you came here. Is it not so?”

She nodded. “It is so.”

“Ah, one must suffer in order to be an artist. One must know the pain of loss to give to others the pathos, the sad beauty of such loss. I hear you sing it—

“‘Only goodby, so softly murmured,
And you touch my hand, farewell;
And my broken heart follows your steps
Far off upon your road—’”

“Yes, that is it, monsieur—

“‘For you have never known the love I had for you,
You have never returned to me,
You I so adored.’”

“It is a sadness, an ineffable beauty,” said Ulysse. “And it will cause the entire city of Mo’réal to shed tears.”

So, on the morrow, Cerbère, forgiven, was bidden farewell, Rosalie cautioned to take supreme care of the Bower, to keep a watchful eye on all

fires lest the perfidious sparks fly out and set to blazing the lovely Turkish rug and imperil that poor Cerbère. Uldège drove Monsieur Plamondon and Léocadie across the marsh to Pont Lefebvre to board the express that would whisk them away to the outside world. Pégase's bells jangled not one whit less merrily for that his beloved master was going to absent himself for days on end.

"One might almost think," observed Ulysse sternly, peering over the bear-rug at Léocadie, "that the little wretch is glad to be rid of us. It is quite possible, though he may not know it, that I will change my mind at Pont Lefebvre, change it on the very steps of the train, or, better still, get off at Memramcook Ouest, circle back and find that he is doing some evil in my absence."

But there was no change of mind, either on the steps or at Memramcook Ouest. The long train, with a gay shriek from its whistle, slid along the edge of the great white plain of marshland, serpentine daskly by the muddy river in which great cakes of ice like chocolate-cream candy floated and jostled. Monsieur Plamondon seated her comfortably in the section reserved for them and settled down opposite her with a copy of *La revue des deux mondes*, which he ignored entirely save when he used it to gesture with to help out an absorbing recital of the history of the country through which they passed.

At Moncton there was a short wait during which they stepped down from the train to walk along the platform, to buy fruit and candy and magazines. They came, laden with these and laughing, from the dingy little station and all but collided with Paul Allain—Paul all bundled up in a great raccoon coat and white muffler. There was no avoiding him now. And she did not want to avoid him. She never had wanted to. Ulysse was master of the occasion. He seized her magazines, her parcels, a goodly armful, and by some advanced gymnastic feat succeeded in slapping Paul on the back and making a speech all at the same time.

"We go now to Mo'real, Léocadie and I. All these little things, my child, I shall place in our seat while you say goodbye to Monsieur Paul."

She looked at him helplessly, pleadingly, as if asking him not to abandon her in this moment, and he gave her a cheery smile that said, "See what a monster I am! I leave you to your fate. Look not to me to save you." And he darted along the platform, dropping oranges and magazines, having them picked up for him, thanking the pickers up with elaborate bows that usually sent flying the very articles that had just been restored to him.

“You—you are not going away for good?” All else seemed to yield in importance to that question, the way he asked it. “You are coming back?”

“But yes.” She glanced up at him, looked away. “Monsieur Plamondon gives a recital at Verdun and I—I am to sing—”

“Ah! How I wish I might be there!” He looked at the train as if to see whether or not there might be room for him. He looked back to her. “I—I should like to be at that concert. I should like to sit there and watch you and hear you sing. What will you sing?”

She gazed down at the toe of one gray galosh that was making a little snow mountain between her and him—not at all a high mountain, she saw, but one easily scaled by either of them. “I shall sing—oh, it goes like this—a lovely song that begins ‘Rien qu’au revoir’—”

“Only goodbye,” he echoed.

“Only goodbye.”

“And how does it go then?”

She hesitated. She could feel the eager intentness of his eyes. She loved his great shoulders towering above her, loved his dark youth and strength.

“Please say how it goes, Léocadie!”

“Ah, you know that song! ‘Only goodbye so softly murmured—’”

“‘And my broken heart follows your steps far off upon your road.’”

“You do know it then.”

“Yes. It has been with me many days now, and many nights when I’ve lain awake in the darkness thinking of—of a night when the moon shone and made silver on the river.”

“Had we better not forget that night?”

“Can you forget it?”

“I—I am afraid I must go. The train—” Obliging the train whistle invited her with a deafening clamor. He caught her hand. “Can you forget it, Léocadie?”

She struggled to withdraw her hand. “All aboard!” Bells clanging. Porters running. Trainmen shouting. Little trucks tooling up and down the platform, puffing noisily. He hurried with her to the steps of her car. “Can you?”

She was on the step. She looked over her shoulder, into his eyes. "I cannot forget, Paul." And it wasn't lost in the grinding of the wheels, for she saw him smile as if he'd seen a vision and he threw his gray hat up in the air and caught it and waved it at her and at Monsieur Plamondon who awaited her in the vestibule. And who murmured in her ear, "*Rien qu'au revoir?*" Then laughed with gusto and took her arm and shook her. "More than goodbye, *n'est-ce pas?* Come, we shall go back to our places and settle down for the long journey. It will be more pleasant for you now."

"But you know it could be no more pleasant than it was. I—I should not have talked to him."

"Of course not," agreed Ulysse, helping her off with the lovely coat of gray squirrel, arranging her little pillow, setting a box of bon-bons on her knee and thinking that in this car, in this train, in all the great Dominion and the great United States with Cuba and Mexico thrown in for good measure, there was no girl half so lovely as she. "He is not happy in Moncton, I will wager. What a dust-dry, poker-backed business is the law, to be sure! One could see he was not happy, until he saw you."

"I—I forgot everything you told me, everything I vowed to do. Why, I did not once ask for Mademoiselle Plaunte, if she is completely recovered from her accident."

"One says, in Memramcook, that she was the subject of a miracle, which will in time, no doubt, be investigated by the council of miracle-investigators and pronounced upon. I heard from Rosalie who heard from Uldège who heard from Simon Perrier, the sexton, whose niece Jeanne Leger keeps company with Georges Hébert who is Dame Laurin's butler—I heard that Mademoiselle Plaunte was an invalid one minute and out of bed and all cured and stamping her foot the next."

"But why?"

Ulysse shrugged, spread his eloquent hands. "That is for the miracle-investigators. I am not even a fair amateur when it comes to such things. There must, however, have been some strong stimulus to get her out of bed. It may even be that she quarreled with Paul."

"Ah, it is too bad. I have caused that trouble between them. But I did not know he was supposed to be her fiancé or I assure you I—I should never have walked with him. And yet—somehow I cannot help myself. When I see him, all my strength, all my firm resolutions are forgotten."

"I know. They are poor things to withstand a great flame. And young love is a flame that consumes all before it. It is a beautiful thing, love, but sometimes I hate it." He was gazing out the window at the darkening landscape, the lights glimmering from cottage-windows, the dogs that ran from farm-yards to bark defiantly at the train, the little children with sleds or skates, who waved their mittened hands. He looked tired, thought Léocadie, tired and lonely and not old, not gray or faded. Something in her warm heart reached out to him then. It was as if in that moment were vouchsafed to her some glimpse of what his own love had been, some dim knowledge of the sorrow he had known.

She leaned forward and touched his hand. He awoke from his absent contemplation of the flying scene. He looked at her bewildered for a moment as if he had been back twenty years and as if she belonged to that long ago and he could not identify her with the present. Then he smiled and shook his head. "No, I was wrong, Léocadie: I do not think at any time I hate love. It was just the demon in me for a moment in the ascendant. Do not heed me. Come, I shall tell you about Mo'real, about the great shops, the hotels where all is life and gaiety, the churches where all is candles and piety, the bits of Old France that after centuries still survive, the great high Mount from which one may see the whole world and the Adirondacks. You will be enraptured with Mo'real. After the recital, my good friend, the scoundrelly Rosario Lebœuf, who would cut one's throat for a penny, gives a levée at his place in Beaver Hall Square. There you will meet the elite of Mo'real—the writers who never write, the painters who never paint, the deep-breathers who merely breathe. Actors you may meet and some hard-working journalists. And you will surely have some tea and cakes and many compliments."

It was a pleasant journey, this that Monsieur Plamondon and Léocadie made across the white and frozen land, through the ancient province of Quebec. Monsieur Plamondon was such a one as scattered brightness and good feeling wherever he went. Their fellow-passengers looked upon them with friendly eyes; upon Léocadie with admiration. Once an elderly lady bent over them and said, "Monsieur Ulysse Plamondon, is it not?"

"It is, madame. And his niece Mademoiselle Léocadie Perron."

The old lady was charmed. "I have attended your recitals in Quebec. I have heard your elegant compositions over the radio and on the phonograph and, seeing you here in the very car with me, I could not resist speaking to you. I am Madame Fabre-Lusignan."

“We are most honored, Madame Fabre-Lusignan.” Ulysse bent low over her hand. He loved such moments as this. The huge man in the next seat, who looked like a senator, was not reading his paper at all but was listening with ears erect, so too was the stranger across the way who had just boarded the train at Three Rivers, a man who had at once awakened in Ulysse a feeling of curiosity and compelling interest, whose black eyes, that seemed at times to glow with hidden fire, had held Léocadie’s for a moment with avid, even fascinated regard.

Madame Fabre-Lusignan having bestowed a large laurel-wreath on Ulysse and having given Léocadie a few minor decorations for her youth and beauty and her good fortune in being associated with so great an artist, passed on to her seat down the aisle. The stranger half-rose from his, then sat back and stared fixedly out the window, giving Ulysse and Léocadie a chance to see him better.

His hair was luxuriant, thick and wavy, but almost snow white, his face was youthful but its expression was that of an old, old man’s, belied entirely by those burning coals of eyes. His nose was high-bridged, aquiline, his mouth thin, cruelly hard, until he smiled, as he did when he turned and caught them looking at him—then it was gentle, almost whimsical. He reminded them of steel and fire, so tall and wiry he was, so vitally alive. “He might be forty or four hundred,” mused Ulysse. “One could never tell. He might have sojourned for a while in hell, from the look of him, but assuredly too he has at one time seen heaven.”

The stranger’s gaze was fixed on Léocadie as if he could not withdraw it; but there was nothing offensive in it, nothing that disturbed her or caused Ulysse to think of his fencing-foils and a field at dawn and coffee for one. The stranger got up at last and stood in the aisle, looking down at them from his great height. He wore black broadcloth and his linen was the envy even of Monsieur Plamondon, whose own came direct from Paris. He spoke, this man, and both of them started at the depth, the power of his speech. It was the speech of a man who has been silent for long years but whose vocal powers have not for that deteriorated but rather gained strength and excellence.

“This is unwarrantable, I know,” he said in such French as made Ulysse shed tears of joy in his heart. “But I feel that you will forgive me, both of you. I chanced to hear what madame said to you, and I, too, though I have never been fortunate enough to hear you, Monsieur Plamondon, am an admirer of yours. Is it that you give some recitals in Montreal?”

“But yes, monsieur.” Ulysse bowed. “At Verdun tomorrow night. My niece here, Mademoiselle Léocadie Perron, will sing too.”

“And I shall be there to listen,” smiled the stranger. “My name is Pierre Gervais.”

“We are honored, Monsieur Gervais. We shall look for you at our recital and welcome you there.” Léocadie’s smile echoed Monsieur Plamondon’s speech. Gervais gazed down at her with his soul in his eyes until, embarrassed, she colored and drew her gaze with a great effort from his. He took leave of them, walked on to the smoker. They saw him again as they were getting out at Montreal.

“That man, I swear, has undergone a transformation this morning,” said Ulysse in the taxicab that took them the short journey to the Windsor. “You have made another conquest, Léocadie.”

“Truly a strange one.” She too had been thinking of Pierre Gervais, unable to get him out of her mind; those eyes of his that haunted one, that seemed to burn into one’s very soul, that seemed to ask, to demand. “He reminded me of Edmond Dantes, in Monte Cristo. He—*Nom de dieu*, what is the matter, monsieur! Are you ill—this long journey—the fatigue—!”

“It is nothing.” Ulysse’s face had turned suddenly white, a ghastly white and there had come a choking sound in his throat. He recovered quickly, outwardly at least. “Yes, yes! That is it! The train, the endless miles, the stifling heat, the abominable food, the hard bed, the—”

“But you did not appear to mind!” Her eyes were round with wonderment. “Why, you seemed to enjoy every minute of it. You told me you loved to ride on trains, that some day when you were rich you would purchase a private car and move your piano and Cerbère and Pégase, and Uldège and Rosalie and all your possessions into it and spend the time riding around on the end of the Transcontinental express.”

“So I did.” Ulysse scowled. “Again then I have been deluded. I have made a grave mistake. From now on these evil trains are anathema to Ulysse Plamondon. Were it summer now I should at once purchase a swift automobile and one of those little houses to hitch onto it and another for my family and never again set foot upon a wretched, snorting, jostling train.”

Léocadie shook her head. It was not like Monsieur Plamondon thus suddenly to shift his allegiances. On the way up he had advocated the abolition of motorcars so that the railways would have more business. Something momentous, she was sure, had caused this sudden about-face.

Something had greatly upset him, but when after an hour or so he knocked at her door, he was again himself, again smiling and merry. With him was an olive-skinned, dark-eyed young man, exquisitely clad, whom he presented as Monsieur Rosario Lebœuf and called in one breath his most ancient and beloved friend and in the next the worst robber and brigand in this city of rogues.

Monsieur Lebœuf greeted Léocadie with sudden worship. "Ah, this so great surprise that Monsieur Plamondon has given us! A niece, and what a niece! I could picture no one so lovely, so completely charming—"

"And why not, little wretch!" demanded Ulysse. "Is it that I am too repulsive, too evil to have one such belonging to me!"

"Why, no! It is just that one did not somehow associate you with—*eh bien!* But why have you kept this little one so long hidden down in those grim Acadian forests, buried in your red marsh mud?"

"My old one, she comes from Paris."

"Ah, Paris!" Rosario was enraptured. "She will then be an artist. We shall await with eager expectancy, mademoiselle, your debut here in Mo'real. I am sure you will be as admired for your voice as you will be loved for your beauty. After the recital there will be, of course, a little *levée* at my place in Beaver Hall Square, the Sign of the White Pigeon, at which you and your good uncle will be the guests of honor. Now, knowing Monsieur Plamondon of old, and being aware that he has a deeper knowledge of Mo'real than we who live all our lives in it, I shall leave you until tomorrow evening. *Au revoir.*"

He departed. Ulysse, always happy in this old, bustling city, conducted his lovely companion to the coffee-shop, where with dry sac and veal-kidneys sauté and indigestible pink-colored pastries he regaled her to repletion. After which they sallied forth to view the city, to make rapturous pilgrimages through the shops, to buy perfumes and shoes and scarves and a dozen and one things that delighted Ulysse quite as much as they did her; to admire the gay garlands and gorgeous lights and lovely little trees all ready for Christmas only a few weeks away; to ride, after that, in a little sleigh away up to the top of Mount Royal; to see from there the world and the Adirondacks stretched out before them; to watch the mad toboggans laden with brightly clad girls and boys go roaring down the long slide at a speed that made Léocadie close her eyes and elicited from Ulysse comparisons between it and the rate at which Pégase would travel if ever he were permitted; to return at evening, tired and happy, to the warmth and light and

life of the great hotel, to drink the liquid rubies of Chambertin and eat the truly marvellous dinner Monsieur Plamondon ordered, while the *chef d'orchestre*, who knew of his presence there, played a medley of Ulysse's very own compositions and brought tears of ecstasy to the good man's eyes.

"I am so proud, monsieur—" She gazed at him across the table. "So happy to think that I have a father like you. Wherever you go, one knows you, one greets you with honest pleasure. 'Monsieur Plamondon, who arrives! Make all things ready for Monsieur Plamondon! Is everything to Monsieur's liking? If not—'"

Ulysse bowed his head for a moment and seemed to make a brief address to his *consommé julien*. "I am glad for you, Léocadie." He looked up at her. His smile seemed to cost him an effort. "I am proud only that I have made you happy. Would that I could make you a thousand times more proud and happy."

The music was soft, rich, throbbing with the voices of 'cello and viola, clarinet and horn. The lights were low, rose-colored, glamorous. Waiters moved lightly as shadows over the deep carpet. The wine slumbered in its little wicker-cradle. Voices were muted, blending with the lights and the music.

"Would you love this world, little one?" he asked suddenly. "Would you prefer to belong to it rather than to—?"

"I love it, yes." Her eyes shone like the Chambertin in Monsieur Plamondon's glass. "Who could help loving it! But even as I love it my thoughts go back to your room in the Bower, to the great fire, to the books that speak to one, to your big pipe in which you smoke dreams, to Cerbère who watches there alone—"

"Ah, so!" He nodded. "You have found its beauty then."

"I will never leave that beauty."

She saw Monsieur Plamondon gazing fixedly across the room. Her own eyes followed his regard. That strangely white, youthful head, that tall form, those eyes in the gaunt, priest-like face—eyes that even at this distance, showed strange light in their depths. "Why, it is Monsieur Pierre Gervais!" she said. "Our friend of the trip up."

"Yes," said Monsieur Plamondon. "It is indeed he."

She looked earnestly at Ulysse. "I have thought that you do not like this man very much."

“Ah! Ah! You have!” He looked darkly at her. “Then you must at once stop thinking. This man—he means nothing to me. I know nothing of him. Have never seen or heard tell of him before. To be sure he is a very strange man.”

“Yes. He piques one. I have thought that I have seen him before, but when I try to think where—”

“That is just a fancy, my child. Do not—do not think of him at all.”

“It is a lovely lady he is with.”

“I fancy,” said Ulysse, “that he is a man to whom lovely ladies are as common and meaningful as—as shaving-soap. Let us talk of something else—something droll—let us talk of Lebœuf.”

So they talked of the olive-skinned impresario, who, it appeared, collected glass and pottery and had devoted a good part of his life to gathering information about that noble dog known as *le chien d’or*—The Golden Dog—who lives on a plaque on the Post Office wall in Quebec, where he has been gnawing on the same bone since the long ago time of the evil Intendant, François Bigot, and who announces to the world in quaint old French that he is the dog who gnaws the bone, takes his repose while gnawing it and waits for a day not yet come when he will sink his teeth in the trousers of those who wanted to bite him.

“It is most unlikely,” said Monsieur Plamondon, “that this opportunity will ever be given to that unhappy dog, as already almost two centuries have gone by and he hasn’t bitten anyone yet. He and Cerbère may, however, some day join forces, then let their enemies look out!”

The concert-hall was filled to overflowing, for not only was Monsieur Ulysse Plamondon a beloved and popular artist but he had in Rosario Lebœuf a man who knew his business, who had seen to it that the good burghers of Montreal and its environs were well advised of the appearance in their midst of the talented musician and composer from the fair land of Acadia. About Léocadie, Rosario had been just a little bit doubtful, had thought until he saw her that the good Plamondon’s head was becoming soft, and so had not made a great deal of her coming; until the day after she came, when he made up for it all by announcing in the public press in French and English, with a small ad in the Jewish paper, that Monsieur Plamondon had brought with him an artiste the like of whom had not been seen or heard in America since the days of Mademoiselle Jenny Lind.

Ulysse thought it excellent and in no degree exaggerated. "My dear old spittoon, Lebœuf, you have done well without even hearing her sing. Had you heard her, you would most assuredly have been at a loss for comparisons."

"I pray God it is so," murmured Rosario. "I have succeeded in drawing here this night the greatest throng of doubting-Thomas music-critics and musicians as has been assembled since—since many long ages."

"Ah! They come to criticize, to condemn;" said Ulysse, "they stay to marvel, to applaud. When they see that little one their first doubts will melt, when she advances upon the stage they will move forward in their chairs, when I strike the opening bars of her song upon the piano their ears will erect themselves, when she opens her mouth they will hold their breath, when she sings they will close their eyes and think they are in Paradise."

"Monsieur!" Rosario bowed low. "With all my heart I believe you."

Léocadie seemed to be the only one who had any doubts about her ability to captivate not only Montreal, but the world at large. She stayed close to Monsieur Plamondon, drawing courage and strength from his own easy confidence, his obvious delight in the evening's work before him. She closed her eyes as he stepped upon the stage, and the thunder of clapping and cries of acclamation rose up around her like a great sea. Here, as in St. Gudule, she saw the witchery of his art cast its warm, colored spell over the vaster crowd, felt a thousand voices singing with his, felt in her own heart the very same rapture as they did in theirs when he sang of his beloved land, of the little things of earth, the violet in the forest dark, the wild geese on their southward way, the sleighbells in the snow, the Child in the Manger and the Shepherds who watched their flocks by night.

"*Seigneur mon Dieu!*" murmured Rosario at her elbow. "Never in the life have I heard Monsieur Plamondon rise to such excellence. It is a true artist, this—a veritable man of spirit."

Léocadie prayed. When it came her turn, when Ulysse took her by the hand and led her upon the stage, she felt sure she would faint and never again awaken. She dared not look at those people; she could not. They would never listen to her; they would laugh at her. Her hand shook in Ulysse's gentle clasp. Surely this applause was not for her. "Be not afraid, small one," murmured Ulysse. "Sing as you always sing. If you don't I'll beat you and give you no food and take from you the perfume and the little watch!"

She felt better then. She all but laughed. She did smile, and all was well. She forgot this blurry sea of upturned faces, forgot this great barnlike hall, this city that thundered on outside it. She was back in Monsieur Plamondon's little room in the firelight. How it gleamed on the piano, on the bookshelves, on the mahogany! How interestedly Cerbère waited for her to sing! How confidently Monsieur Plamondon smiled up at her from the piano-bench and nodded! Outside a great moon rolled over the Acadian hills and the stars jewelled brightly; and Paul was out there, listening, waiting. And she sang the songs these people loved. And they loved her singing.

"A triumph! A victory unparalleled in the art history of this metropolis!" said Monsieur Lebœuf, and even put it in the papers. "In one blow, Mademoiselle Perron has carved for herself a niche in the hall of great artistes. France may lay claim to her, but to Canada she belongs."

"It was indeed excellent, my Léocadie," said Ulysse afterwards—a quiet, pensive, different Ulysse. "It was most lovely. I am proud of you—proud and very happy. It is as I said to you that night at home—with work and study you can become famous, you can have the world at your feet."

"She can indeed!" The deep, startling voice came from behind them where they stood in the wings of the auditorium. Pierre Gervais was the first of the hundreds who came back-stage to congratulate the artists, to share this moment of triumph. The tall, white-headed man in his tail-coat and dazzling linen looked like some character from a mighty drama. One expected a red riband across his breast; it seemed as if he were made for one. Diminutive was Ulysse Plamondon beside him, but Ulysse's eyes were as brave, as direct in the way they returned his look, as ever man's eyes were.

"You have then enjoyed it, Monsieur Gervais?"

"Monsieur, I have not words to say how much. I came prepared to enjoy it: I have loved it."

Léocadie's hand rested in his for a moment. He lifted it ever so little, bent low and kissed her fingers. Monsieur Plamondon's eyes were inscrutable. Other people came now. Pierre Gervais gave place to them. "But I shall see you tomorrow afternoon at Monsieur Lebœuf's levée, I trust," he said smiling. "I must see you."

"It is somehow flat when all is over, is it not?" Ulysse watched the light and shadow on her face as their taxi sped towards the hotel when the last words of praise were spoken, the last acknowledgements made. "The anticipation is good, the execution is something that lifts you up on high; the aftermath—"

But her eyes were shining. "For you, yes. You have had so many such triumphs, so many hours like this. For me it is the first."

"Oh, forgive me, Léocadie!" He laid his hand on her arm. "I am the selfish, cruel, foolish Plamondon now, denying you even this little happiness that comes upon your success. Be happy, Léocadie! Laugh! Rejoice!"

"Do not you, monsieur?"

"Of course. I am so happy this night that I have no way of showing it. In my heart is a great joy." And, he added to himself, a great fear, a great misery. They had a little dinner now that it all was over—a dinner *à deux*. Even the incoherent Lebœuf had been sternly excluded by Ulysse. It was a gay little dinner, during which, carried away by her own happiness, she did not pay so much attention as ordinarily she would have paid, to Monsieur Plamondon's moments of abstraction.

"It is that I am a little tired," he explained, when once she did ask him if he was displeased with her. "Tomorrow all will be well. Tomorrow we go to Rosario's levée, from there to the train—and home."

The levée was remarkable chiefly for the display of morning-coats, dove-gray ascots, white spats and gardenias; the weakness of the tea, the dullness of the talk and the excellence of the material Rosario had collected, dealing with the origin and history of the Golden Dog, and which he displayed to advantage.

"He is, to be sure," admitted Ulysse, "a remarkable old dog, this one who never wearies of chewing bones up on the wall of the Post Office in Quebec. But I have at home a dog which so far surpasses him in wisdom, breeding and intelligence that it is treason, *mes amis*, to mention Cerbère and this poor beast in one breath."

"Ah, how I love dogs!" sighed an old lady in maribou feathers and pearls. "I adore them! Where do you keep your dog, Monsieur Plamondon?"

"On the mantel-piece," said Ulysse gravely.

He was so busy watching the door that he quite missed the amazed looks exchanged by his hearers. Surely Monsieur Plamondon was a trifle mad! And he was; mad to be away from here before that man came. The hour struck. Pierre Gervais had not appeared. "Come, Léocadie. Farewell, all, we must go now, back to our Acadian hills and marshlands. Think well of us; we shall remember you."

Then they were in a cab, speeding away from Beaver Hall Square, and for the first time in several days Ulysse was really gay.

CHAPTER IX

Uldège waited on the station-platform at Pont Lefebvre as the express from Quebec, with much steaming and puffing, ground to a grudging stop. Pégase, harnessed to his pretty little sled, set up a cheery jangle-jangle and tossed his head and kicked at the snow as if to show these persons peering from the train-windows that there were just as splendid horses and equipages in the Memramcook Valley as in the grand places they came from. Down stepped Léocadie and Monsieur Plamondon, following bags and brief-case and countless bundles.

“Ah, Uldège!” Monsieur Plamondon beamed on the faithful one. “It is good to be home, no! And all is well at the Bower? Cerbère and Pégase—?”

“All correct, Monsieur Plamondon. And your tour—a success as always?”

“As always, Uldège.”

“And Mademoiselle Léocadie?”

“Mademoiselle Léocadie was acclaimed by the great city of Mo’réal. Never had those good people heard such singing.”

“Ah, magnificent!” Uldège made a mountain of himself by adding bag on bag, parcel on parcel. He led the way to the sleigh. Pégase rolled an eye at his master and received the apple bought especially for him from the train-boy, with great condescension. “Now, brigand,” said Ulysse, “see how fast you can take us home; we perish of hunger while you gorge yourself on delicious fruit.”

The marshland was buried even deeper in snow and at both ends of the bridge were pitches, which all but sent them flying into the drifts—drifts so high that Ulysse swore one lost in them would not be located until Spring.

Uldège was very quiet. All that they could see of him was his great nose that protruded from above the collar of his dogskin coat and under the peak of his big fur hat. Monsieur Plamondon glanced at him from time-to-time, his lips pursed. Half way across the marsh, when Pégase was going at his liveliest Monsieur Plamondon gave himself a slap on the knee. “Uldège!” he said sternly. “You have not lied to me?”

“But no, m’sieur.” Uldège poked his nose at his master. “What should I lie about?”

“Cerbère! He has been up to mischief. I can tell, my friend, that you are holding something back, that there is something amiss. What then is it? For the love of the good God say to us what then it is?”

“But there is nothing, monsieur—nothing whatever! All is well. All is as you left it. We have watched well, Rosalie and I.”

“I know that, faithful one. Were it otherwise I should cease to believe even in the sunset. Just the same, I, with my hidden powers, felt and do still feel, for that matter, that all is not—not quite as it should be. But fear not, I shall learn. If you are shielding Cerbère or this little wretch who took the apple from me without a word of thanks and who now gallops like one the fiends pursue, then your kindness is misplaced and you, even as I, will experience their ingratitude.”

“They have carried themselves like gentlemen, monsieur, both of them.”

“*Bien!* We will talk no more about it now. We will concentrate only on our good luncheon now, eh, Léocadie? We will abandon ourselves to the joys of home. Tonight, the big fire will burn harder, brighter, and give off more warmth than ever it did before; tonight we will play and sing and snap our fingers at the wind and the snow and all the world outside. Why, name of a name, do you shake your head, Uldège! You are not going mad, my poor old friend?”

“No, monsieur.”

Ulysse lapsed into frowning silence for the rest of the journey. The Bower, warm and cheery, hung with gay green garlands, with red berries and pretty little wreaths, welcomed them, drew them in, folded them in its kindly arms. Home—her home as well as his; and in her eyes he saw reflected his own contentment, his own joy of heart at being back again among these loved things.

“Ah, Rosalie!” That good woman was fluttering buxomly about. “All has gone well with you, says Uldège.”

“All has marched as it is necessary, M’sieur Plamondon. You will find the house in order.” She was looking this way and that. Monsieur Plamondon, in the act of hanging up his coat, stopped, turned and stared at her. “You too! You are disturbed. I can see it in your nervous gestures, in your eye that rolls, in your voice that quavers. Now, by a sacred name, there is something going on here that is being kept from the one who first should

know about it. Can you dare to keep from me, Ulysse Isaure Jacques-Marie Plamondon, this so dark and evil secret that, I feel, is casting a spell upon us all!" He glowered at them. "You will not then speak, *hein!* One resource only is left to me then." He darted to the studio door. "Cerbère, what is amiss in this place?" He turned away, shrugged, spread his hands raised his brows quizzically at Léocadie. "I can do nothing. Come, we shall make ready and have our luncheon. Once again"—He looked from Uldège to Rosalie, who were shifting from one foot to the other. "What is it that this is?"

"It is nothing, M'sieur Plamondon," insisted Uldège.

"Nothing, *cher m'sieur*," echoed Rosalie and hurried off to the kitchen.

"Ah, well then," sighed Ulysse. "It is indeed nothing. We will cause it to be forgotten. It can be nothing serious. Maybe Cerbère has been in the larder or Pégase has kicked a hole in the barn-door. Let it go to the devil."

And promptly, it seemed, he forgot all his premonitions of evil. At luncheon, he was at his best, rallying Léocadie on her lack of appetite, though in truth she had a splendid one; praising Rosalie for being even a better cook than he had made her out to be to those grand masters of the kitchen in Montreal, who were awarded crosses of war and legions of honor for their genius with the skillet. "No one of them, my good Rosalie, can compare with you, in all the world the supreme, the most talented one who ever touched a saucepan or basted a roast."

After that excellent repast, Monsieur Plamondon retired to his room to attend to the many letters that had piled up during his absence. Léocadie gazed out the window upon the dazzling world of whiteness, got her hat and coat and went for a walk. Her joy was still with her, the excitement of Montreal still flowed in her, the happy experience lingered on—the concert, the crowds, the lights, the music. And the dark, burning eyes of Pierre Gervais still looked into hers and his strange deep voice echoed still in her ears. He had not come to M. Lebœuf's levée. Why, she wondered. He had seemed so earnest in his intention of being there. He had spoken as if it were of the utmost importance that he should see them again.

"But then," she mused, "he is no doubt a man of great importance. There would be many things demanding his attention. And Monsieur my father did not seem to mind in the least that we did not again set eyes on that man. I think monsieur did not like him and I wonder why. I liked him. I felt something for him—a kind of fascination that frightened me but made me glad."

The afternoon sun was gloriously golden and bright, but there was no warmth in it. The snow was hard underfoot and crunch-crunched beneath her heels as she breasted the mighty wind that whistled across the marshland; the wind that rushed at her, strove to pick her up and whirl her off to its caverns across the icy world, that plucked at her skirts, her hair, and stung her cheeks and nipped at her little nose. What a wild and boisterous fellow was that wind!

She passed some few of the *villageois*, and gave them good-day. Was it fancy, was it the biting cold, keeping them buried deep in their coat collars, that made their muttered greetings seem strange, lacking in the cheerful warmth they had always shown to her, the niece of Monsieur Plamondon. “Bah, it is only fancy! They are too cold to speak up, to look out and smile, those poor peasants. One cannot blame them for that. It is Monsieur Plamondon with his questioning of Uldège and Rosalie, his hinting at some dark secret, who has communicated this disease to me and has got me, too, imagining things that are not.”

Judge Allain’s car came toward her across the marsh from Pont Lefebvre. Her heart gave a little excited jump when she saw it. Absurd, of course, to think—It would be that fearsome man, his father; or the little chauffeur. She would not look. He did not like her, that big bear of a father.

The car stopped. Paul slid from under the wheel and ploughed through the snow-filled ditch, to reach her. She saw delight in his dark eyes, in his smile. He took both her gloved hands in his and held them. He stared at her, searching her eyes, every contour of her face as if he had been starved for a look at her. And suddenly, there in the centre of the white desert of marshland, he caught her in his arms and kissed her hungrily. Breathless, they gazed at each other, and in that moment they knew beyond all doubt, what was between them, that she was all to him, as he in her life meant the greatest bliss she could ever know.

“I could not help that, *chérie*. To save my soul, I could not have kept myself from that kiss.”

“I—I would not have you lose your soul, my Paul, but I—I—”

“You do care for me. You lied to me that other day here on the marsh, when I met you in the mist, when you said you had just been flirting with me —”

“How do you know that I do not flirt with you still?”

“I know. Why did you lie to me that day? You caused me untold misery.”

“Do you think I felt none myself?”

“You did!”

“You seem glad to know it.”

“Glad only to know that you cared enough to feel sorry for what you did. *Voyons!* I keep you standing here in this terrible cold. Come, ride with me. I have just come from Moncton. My good father has gone to Ottawa where he sits on some committee—and he is just the man can sit on them. He kindly left the car for me in Moncton—with enough advice to fill it.”

“You have not been back here since I saw you in Moncton?”

“Why should I come here, when you were in Montreal! No, I stayed in my office, in my room, and wrestled with Pettipas vs Bilodeau. There is enough in that case to keep me busy for years. But come, Léocadie!”

Well, why not! She let him pick her up in his arms and carry her through the deep snow of the ditch. She laughed up at him when he stumbled and all but let her fall. Then she was in the seat beside him and they were rolling away across the marsh, the tires noiseless on the snow.

“Tell me about Montreal. You had a good time? Your singing—they liked your singing?”

“They liked it. And I had a grand time. The stores, the great hotels, the crowds, and everyone so kind.”

“There were men to flatter you and make love to you?”

“Scores of them,” she said mischievously.

“But you left them all to come back to me.”

“It may be that some will follow me here. Ah, I do not mean to tease you.” She laid her hand on his arm as she saw his smile fade. “I did lie to you, Paul—I am no flirt. Before you, there was no other; after you—if there should be an after—there will be no other.”

“There will be no after,” he said stubbornly. “I was a fool to act the way I did after you—after you told me. I was only a droll, naïf country boy. I don’t think I ever believed you in my heart when you said you merely played with me. I don’t think it would in the end have made much difference. But I was furious that day, I was so angry I did not care what became of me.”

“And what did? You went to see Emilie, did you not?”

"I went to see her. I said a lot of foolish things. I—oh, *mon dieu*! I told her I would marry her if she wanted me,"—Léocadie was silent, not smiling now. Paul looked at her wildly, beseechingly. "But she does not want me!"

"She told you that!"

"But yes—then she jumped out of bed and was all cured of the agony she suffered from her accident."

"Paul! You were cruel to her."

"But I did not mean to be. I swear I did not. And she was all the time deceiving me, saying she had pains that came and went, a numbness in the limbs. And I believed her and felt like a monster that I had brought all this suffering upon her, and thought that I should give up my life to atonement. And it would have been atonement. I do not love Emilie. I never could love her."

The car climbed Belliveau Hill, passed the judge's house, square, white and formidable behind its tall firs and cedars, and carried them to the highlands that look down on the Petitcodiac River, Chignecto Bay and the little villages and hamlets scattered along the shores of Albert. Here he stopped and for a while they sat in silence, gazing upon the broken and tumbled ice in the tidal river, on the white hills far away, on the dark mystery of the forests of evergreen, black and somber against the snow.

"I am happy now," he said. "I am content. I have thought long and hard, Léocadie, since that first night I met you, and my thinking has always ended in this, that my life would be nothing at all without you."

"But with me—what can it be? Your father does not like me. He will never forgive you if you leave Emilie Plaunte and—and—"

"I shall have to do without his forgiveness then. I have a little money from my mother, enough to see us through the first year or so until I fight my way out of Pettipas vs Bilodeau and into something where there is some money. You are not afraid? You will marry me, Léocadie? I love you so. Don't you care, too?"

She came into his arms, her cheek against the fur of his coat, his lips warm on hers, his hands caressing her hair. "I care, too," she whispered. "I think I care too much." He held her hard against him, drawing her closer and closer, as if he would never let her go. And she did not want to be let go ever. Here in his arms, here with his kisses sweet upon her mouth, her eyes, she could stay forever. Till the sky grew red as a roaring furnace and the forests dark as pitch and the gray frost-mists rose over the distant waters,

they lingered there; then drove back to St. Gudule, too happy to talk, to think of anything save this wonder that they knew. Of the when or how or wherefore of their being married they did not speak. Hows and whens were for such dull folk as the judge; they lived on a rainbow, these two, on the very key of the varicolored arch and neither one of them thought of the long slope on either side of them.

He left her at the Bower, watched her go up the path to the door and enter the ruddy warmth that waited there. Then he drove home, put the car away and went whistling into his father's house. Jean Morand, the chauffeur, was visiting his sister in Moncton; Lucille reigned supreme. Lucille's eyes had this night an expression such as in a crow's when it knows of some splendid carrion hidden away in a wood, and is not telling anyone about it. Paul noticed that she looked rather like a little crow, but was far too concerned with his own happiness to pay her much attention until, when she brought in the dessert and the coffee she fetched a little bombshell along with them, pulled the pin and let it go.

"It is a terrible scandal, this that has come to St. Gudule, Monsieur Paul."

Even then, Paul was not greatly concerned. Terrible scandals did come to St. Gudule now and then, as they did to St. Jovite, St. Urbain, Ste. Thérèse, Ste. Anne de Kent and all the other, not quite accurately named, little communities in the land. "What is it now?" he asked, aware that it was his move.

"It is what the peddler brought here who came from Quebec, from the village of St. Clothilde de Rimouski—"

"*Bon dieu!* Not the black small-pox!" Paul stared at her, recalling that it was a Quebec peddler who had brought that awful disease to the village years ago when his little sister died of it.

"But no!" Lucille shook her head and did parts of tricks with her apron, folding it up all ready for the appearance of the rabbit, then conjuring forth no rabbit at all. "Not the black small-pox, but evil none the less. This peddler names himself Tilmon Grou and a few days ago in a squall he comes into the store of Florian Gaudet where are seated many around the fire and where are many others doing their purchasing."

"Yes?"

"Well then, he is warming himself by the stove, this poor *colporteur*, and not saying anything at all, for he is half-frozen and does not feel like talking.

But some of those there are making mention of Monsieur Plamondon—”

“Eh! Monsieur Plamondon!” Paul looked up at her, very much concerned. “What about him?”

“The peddler listens to what they say for a while. ‘Is this then the great Monsieur Ulysse Plamondon, composer of songs?’ he demands, and when told that it is none other, he says, ‘Why, I was born in the same village as this great man, knew well his father, went to school with Ulysse.’ Everyone is interested in that. ‘Ah, then,’ remarks no less a personage than Père Dollard, the curé, ‘you must have known also Monsieur Plamondon’s sister Athalie, mother of his niece Léocadie, who now lives with him?’ And the peddler looks at everyone as if they are mad and says, ‘But no! Ulysse was an only child, had no sister Athalie, and certainly no niece Léocadie. I knew the family all my life. The mother died when Ulysse was born. There was no other.’”

“The devil!” Paul jumped up, kicking his chair aside. “What old maid’s gossip is this! Why, it is preposterous! Not for a moment to be credited! Would you take the word of some drunken peddler before that of a splendid and cultured gentleman like Monsieur Plamondon? It is terrible! I never have heard such nonsense!”

“It is not nonsense, monsieur.” Lucille fluffed her dingy feathers and made horns out of the corners of her apron. “He is a worthy man, this peddler, and is agent for Gauvin’s *Sirop pour la rhume et d’autres maladies* which even your sage father says is an excellent remedy.”

“I do not care if he is agent for the lie-detector machine, I never heard such rubbish in my life. Surely no one believes this yarn!”

Lucille looked at him pityingly but superciliously. “Monsieur Plamondon, you know, is an artist. Some say, an unbeliever. Artists are strange people. In Paris—”

“Oh, Paris!” Paul strode past her out of the room. “Paris be hanged!”

Of course, it was ridiculous, just a lot of silly tittle-tattle, such as was forever being stirred up in this place where so many people had so little to do. Monsieur Plamondon, now that he had returned, would put an end to it summarily and decisively. Monsieur Plamondon would be furious, would take down his rapier from above the hearth, call out this evil peddler and run him through the heart. Paul poked at the fire viciously as if the peddler’s heart were right in there. What a story to spread abroad among people who would take only one inference from it, and that the worst possible!

“Artists are strange people—bah!” Paul kicked a hassock as cheerfully as if it were the peddler’s head. “Anyone who ever tries to get his nose out of the mud is queer—there must be something wrong with him. Lucille!” He went to the door and called to her as she was clearing away in the dining-room. “Better not spread that silly story. It won’t be well for you when the truth comes out.”

“Hmph! I, monsieur, am not the one who needs to worry when the truth comes out.” And she made a noise like a happy little crow on his way to a feast.

Monsieur Plamondon, save for those occult and only faintly heard premonitory whisperings that had made him question his old servants, was quite unaware of the storm brewing around him. True, Cerbère had an ominous look and scorned his biscuit; true there was a promise of misery in the air and he felt quite sure that, in his absence, all the windows in Melpomyne’s Bower had been opened, allowing the spirits of evil to flutter in on their bat wings and secrete themselves in various places, whence now they peered out at him.

Once, going to the kitchen for a glass of milk, he came upon Uldège and Rosalie engaged in a mysterious whispering, of which he caught only the words, spoken by Uldège—“*ce maudit colporteur*”—“this accursed peddler”—

“O heaven!” Ulysse tugged at his tuft of beard. “What new horror is this! Is it that you have murdered a poor peddler and interred him in the cellar whence his ghost may rise up at any time to confront us!”

“No! Oh, no!” They spoke in chorus, abashed, utterly unnerved. “It is—it is—” This from Uldège—“it is of a peddler who sold Rosalie some wretched stuff in place of silk that one speaks now, M’sieur Plamondon.”

“It is a lie, Uldège,” said Ulysse sternly, “but I let it pass. I dwell in a den of liars, I am sure that on every front I am being met with subterfuge and deceit. I see it in the way Cerbère avoids my eyes, in the way Pégase turned from me when, a little while ago, I went to see if he had damaged his little stall, in the way you two now give me a rigmarole about peddlers and silk and all manner of nonsense. I burn within. I consume myself. Give me a glass of milk, if it is not too great a favor to ask.”

Majestically he drank the milk and stalked back to his studio. He was not, as a matter of truth, so deeply concerned about what bothered his good

servants as he pretended. The knowledge of it would have stunned him and might indeed have brought about in him that Jekyll-to-Hyde transformation with which he had so often threatened those about him. Pensively, from his big round window he watched the crimson west, the sooty black of the hills below that huge inferno of a backdrop, the spires and peaks and humped-up, crouching shapes of hills, limned against the fiery field. He saw Judge Allain's impressive chariot draw up before his gate and watched how solicitously, how gently, Paul handed her down from her seat.

"Maybe it is this that agitates," he thought. "Perhaps there has been a quarrel between this impetuous young man and the Rock of Gibraltar who fathered him. He has broken with the dark Emilie no doubt and there is from that the very devil to pay. Well, I know not what I can do about it all. I have, at this moment, enough to think about regarding that little girl from Mont Parnasse. I have not seen the end of the Count of Monte Cristo. Strange that she should say that about Gervais! It was only when she said it, that time on the way from the station to the hotel, that it struck me what was afoot, that it occurred to me the tomb had opened and given up its dead." He shuddered. "But I may be wrong. It may be nothing like that. Yet I fear it. His interest in her. His eyes when he looked at her. Well, he shall not have her—he shall never take her from me. I have given too much."

The telephone rang. Ulysse thought of those great dramas of Shakespeare where there comes at some grave, portentous point in the action, a knocking at the door. As in Macbeth. Now, he thought, it is the ringing of the telephone: door-knocking has gone out of fashion. Léocadie, entering at the moment, answered for him. She looked over her shoulder at him with eyes that told a thousand stories all in one. "For you, monsieur—a telegram."

Monsieur Plamondon squared his shoulders, glanced at his gleaming blades crossed above the mantel, scowled at Cerbère, strode over to the telephone and took it from her with steady hand. "It is Ulysse Plamondon who speaks," he announced. Then he said, "Yes" and "Yes" and "Thank you a hundred times," and hung up. He turned to her with a quiet smile. "How happy you look!" He linked his arm with hers. "And how lovely you look! It did not take him long to find you."

"We met upon the marsh. He took me for a drive, away over the hill. And we sat and watched the sunset."

"No better occupation in all the world, little one, than watching the sunset. I never miss one if I can help it. This one that fades now, that leaves

only a lurid afterglow, it was an angry, ominous, crimson-faced fellow, a threatening fellow.”

“Ah, but I did not think of it as such. I—”

He looked at her musingly, rubbing his chin. “No. No, I dare say you did not. For you it was pink, roseate, warm. Ah, well! Things go from bad to worse here. I go to the kitchen to procure a glass of milk and what do I find? Rosalie and Uldège whispering away like those foul conspirators who tried to blow up the English parliament and unfortunately failed. Yes, like Monsieur Guy Fawkes and a sister-conspirator, if he had such. And they are talking about, of all things, some fifty times accursed peddler, who, they try to tell me, sold Rosalie some tissue paper or bunting instead of silk. Obviously, it is a lie.”

Obviously, too, Ulysse was not thinking of what he was saying. His thoughts were on another matter entirely. He shook his head in despair. He gave her a little push. “Come, off with your things, my child, and we shall have a little music before our dinner. Of course, I burn to know what is between you and Paul. And I could never guess. No one could ever guess.”

With flushed cheeks she left him, lingering over the removal of hat, coat and galoshes, going up to her room on some pretext or other. He was not impatient. His mind was busy with a thousand conflicting things, all starting from that brief telegram signed “Gervais,” that had just been telephoned to him: PASSING YOUR WAY. SHALL TAKE LIBERTY OF PAYING BRIEF CALL. GOOD WISHES TO YOU AND MADEMOISELLE.

Léocadie came now, lovely in a dress of blue wool that made her eyes seem bluer, her hair more goldenly bright. “Now, big tyrant, evil ogre, that you are,” she said, “I will do your bidding. Play for me and I shall sing. What shall I sing? ‘Only goodbye’?”

“No,” said Ulysse. “You will not sing ‘Only goodbye’.”

Pierre Gervais came the following evening while Léocadie was at the church to hear a rehearsal of the Christmas music. He came by car from Moncton and the car waited for him. Ulysse welcomed him with all the warmth and bonhomie that one uses to greet a panther. Gervais, quite at his ease, smiled at the little musician’s wariness, his obvious intention to fence as never in his life before had he fenced.

“You are surprised at my visit, Monsieur Plamondon?” Gervais sat in the big chair beside the hearth, where Ulysse so often sat and watched the

leaping flames. Now Ulysse was perched on the piano-bench, legs crossed, hands clasping one knee.

“Perhaps yes, Monsieur Gervais. And again perhaps I have—I shall not say ‘expected it’, but rather felt that it was to be.”

“Yes.” Gervais’s eyes that seemed all black pupil, strayed to the fencing-foils. “You are devoted to *l’escrime*?”

“I am a master,” admitted Monsieur Plamondon.

“So!” Gervais smiled. “Well then, I will not fence with you, my good friend, for you are no doubt in practice. I have long been out of it. I am rusty; my wrists are not so supple as of old because—”

With a sudden, terrible gesture he held out his hands, making the wrists protrude beyond the long white cuffs and black sleeves—

“*Jésu!*” Monsieur Plamondon stared at those scars that could never be erased. “You are then—the one?”

“I am the one.”

CHAPTER X

Firelight and lamplight, softly blended into one warm radiance, there in Monsieur Plamondon's studio, played upon the stranger's gaunt face, his white head, and seemed to lose itself in the depths of his eyes. Monsieur Plamondon sat in the shadow where purposely, not for a moment admitting that it was a sort of confession of weakness, he had placed himself. It was, he said, that he might better observe his guest. Cerbère looked wisely down upon both of them. Outside in the frosty, agate-hard cold of the night, trees cracked with the sounds of pistols going-off; within, the apple-wood burned with a running murmurous sound like the flow of waters in a forest. And in that room, too, her presence was all about. A wisp of lace-handkerchief lay upon the piano; there were flowers of her tending; there was a romance she had been reading bright in its yellow cover.

"Understand," said Monsieur Plamondon after the long silence that succeeded the stranger's admission, "I admit nothing."

"What is there to admit?" Gervais looked at him searchingly. "This girl is Mimi Perron's daughter. That requires no admission on your part. That proclaims itself to me, as it did the moment I boarded your train at Three Rivers, in her every look, her every movement, her every word and smile."

"*Eh bien!* She is Mimi Perron's daughter and, since, monsieur, I happen to be Mimi Perron's husband—"

"You, her husband!" Gervais leapt to his feet, glared at Ulysse with sudden ferocity. "Is this then a joke!"

Monsieur Plamondon took from his pocket a leather wallet, took from the wallet the picture, the faded marriage certificate that Léocadie had brought with her from France, and tendered them to the man who called himself Pierre Gervais.

He took them slowly, held them under the light of the lamp that stood by his chair and studied them. Ulysse, with pity, with compassion, with hidden fear in his eyes, watched that inscrutable visage. Gervais folded the paper, handed it and the picture back to their owner.

"I am a man who fed himself for fifteen years and more on a grand illusion—on the grandest and most foolish and most damnable illusion that

men are given to—I believed in a woman.”

“Most of us, monsieur, have suffered from that same illusion, some for a shorter time, some, alas, for one much longer. You, if I mistake not are Hilaire d’Este, Duc de St. Guilbert—”

“Your error. I am Pierre Gervais. For fifteen years I lived—or died, one might better put it—in the French penal colony in Cayenne, whither I was sent for the betrayal of army-secrets and the murder of a fellow-officer; whence, five years ago, I escaped.”

“You are Hilaire d’Este. Once you were my—my wife’s lover.”

“It is all dead now.” The stranger did not resume his seat. He stared into the fire and in Monsieur Plamondon’s heart was for him a great compassion. But he was a murderer, a convict, a man who—

“All dead and gone,” repeated Gervais. “But it all came alive again”—He turned to Ulysse and there was a glory in his eyes. “It all came alive again, *mon ami*, the morning I boarded that train at Three Rivers and walked into the coach where she was sitting. I stopped, I stared, I must have looked like one who sees a vision. I all but rubbed my eyes. You must have noticed me. I whispered, ‘Mimi!’ You must have heard me. For she was Mimi—as last I had seen Mimi—the same wondrous hair, the same deep blue eyes, the same vivacity; half-child, half-woman. Briefly it came alive—now it must die again.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur Plamondon and there was nothing feigned, nothing theatrical, in his stern regard, in the firmness of his voice. “It must die again.”

“Once, it was after you were married to her, shortly before they were to send me to Cayenne, I escaped from the prison in Marseilles. I sent word to her, to Mimi, through one I knew in Paris. I asked her to come to me. I thought we could flee to Naples. She never received that message?”

Monsieur Plamondon’s face was like that of the sphinx that has weathered centuries of storm. “Monsieur,” he said, “you ask what I cannot tell you. Is it likely that, even had she received it, she would tell me, her husband?”

Gervais appeared not to hear him. “I was retaken the very next day. I was exiled from France at once. But all these years I believed, even as I believed in my God, that she got that message and she came to me.”

Monsieur Plamondon shrugged. "A good thing to believe, was it not? But she is gone now. It would be as well to forget."

"I can never forget."

"Why does this girl bear the name Perron?"

"Mimi did not come to Canada with me. She stayed in Paris. She sang, as before, in the cabarets under her own name, Mimi Perron. No doubt you met her in a cabaret, even as I did. Well, the little one stayed with her. She was always Perron. Because the people here did not even know I was married—and do not yet know—she passes as my niece Léocadie."

"I see. Well, you have been patient with me, Monsieur Plamondon. You have been kind."

"I have tried," said Ulysse, and he thought, "If ever hatred for any human being dwelt in my heart, it was for this man. If ever man deserved to be hated by his fellow-man, this one deserves it of me. Were I to act as often and often in the years gone by I swore I would act when confronted with him, I would take down my blade from the wall there and put it into his heart. He robbed me of everything I held dear in that long ago time; today he would come back casually and take from me all that I have newly learned to cherish. I should loathe, despise, revile this man. I should kill him!" He said, "You will take a little cognac, Monsieur Gervais? Léocadie will be home soon from the church where she has gone to hear rehearsed the music for Christmas. She will wish to see you."

"She will?" His pleasure was as a knife-thrust to Ulysse. "You will not mind my—my seeing her? After all, to you, by my own admission, I am an escaped felon."

"All that is dead."

"Not quite. There was a man named Dreyfus—you may recall?"

"I recall very well."

"After torments worse than mine, after a long passage through hell, it was shown he got the wrong ticket."

Ulysse stared at him. "Name of God, *mon vieux*, you do not stand there and tell me that for fifteen years you stayed in that place, knowing all the time that you were innocent of the charges against you!"

Pierre Gervais bowed with matchless elegance. Monsieur Plamondon thought of Charlemagne, of the Chevalier Bayard, of knights in white armor.

The strange eyes held his, the strange voice said, “Before God, my friend, it is so!”

In the silence that thundered with the beat and jar of tremendous forces, of violence, hate, injustice, love, cruelty, suffering, they did not hear the front door open, did not hear her soft footfall till she was in the room, gazing with round eyes from one to the other. When they did see her, they saw her, both, with rapture. For Ulysse, it was becoming unbearable and Hyde was swiftly turning into Jekyll.

“Monsieur Gervais!” She included Ulysse in the smile she gave him. He held both her hands in his and gazed down upon her with quiet worship.

“I was passing this way,” he explained easily. “Some business in Halifax. I was so put out at having to miss the levée in Montreal, that I swore I would not go through Memramcook without coming to pay a brief visit. Monsieur Plamondon has been very good to me, a presumptuous stranger.”

“You do not seem a stranger—to me. Nor to Monsieur Plamondon either, I am sure. We welcome you most cordially. I may speak for you, *mon oncle*?”

Ulysse smiled his agreement. “You have spoken for me. Monsieur Gervais is most welcome here.”

“I can stay only a little while, but in that little while, Mademoiselle Léocadie”—He lingered over her name, as Ulysse so often did—“I hope you will sing for me.”

“Did you come so far just to hear me sing?”

“Perhaps yes. It is worth, I am sure, a more arduous pilgrimage than this.”

“After that, I shall sing for you as much as you like.” She was light and gay; in her pleasure at seeing Pierre Gervais—a pleasure astonishing to herself—she had quite forgotten the hour and more she had spent in the church, hearing the children’s choir sing the lovely hymns and carols of Christmas—the Adeste, Noël, the glorious, triumphant beauty of the Gregorian, wherein words and music blended inseparably, inevitably, and flowed on like a river in spate of wondrous sound. But in that hour, before it and after it, she had learned that the changed manner of the villagers, that she had called fancy the day of her return, was not fancy at all. It was real; it was frightening and cruel. The whispered words, the dark, questioning looks, the drawing away from her when she passed.

Bewildered, sick at heart, all but terrified, she had run most of the way home. Not to tell Monsieur Plamondon. She would never have him know of it. But to hide from the eyes that watched, the tongues that wagged; to let heal the little biting wounds that eyes and tongues had made upon her heart.

It all came back to her now, but she put it away. She went to the piano and played for them and sang. Peace came into her heart. It seemed right, eminently right, that she should sing for these two, that Pierre Gervais should be included in the warmth, the affection that filled her heart. From nowhere, he had come into her life, and suddenly belonged to it.

She sang a ballad of Ronsard that Ulysse had set to music—an old lovely ballad that the poet wrote to his mistress—

“Some winter night shut snugly in beside the fagot in the hall,
I think I see you sit and spin surrounded by your maidens all;
Old tales are told, old songs are sung, old days come back to memory;
You say, ‘When I was fair and young, a poet sang to me.’”

“This is most beautiful.” Gervais spoke from the silence that followed her singing. “Poets, I think, will always want to sing to you, little one.”

She shook her head. “Sometimes I wonder; sometimes I wish I had been a girl twenty years ago in Paris, where there were poets then, where romantic knights like Monsieur Plamondon went about twanging guitars and composing triolets to their loved ones.”

Gervais smiled. “I was in Paris twenty years ago, but there was not a great deal of that, I fear. Not in my life anyway. But then, I am no artist like our esteemed maestro here. I—I was a soldier.” Quickly he switched the subject. “Tell me, when do you come to Montreal again? This time you must both visit with me. I shall look forward to it. I live in Westmount. While I think of it I will leave the address.” He laid a card in the little dish. “Now, much as I hate the thought, I must go.” He stood up. “May I say that I have spent no more enjoyable evening than this in all my life. Thanks to you, mademoiselle; and to you, monsieur.” He gave them each a courtly bow, then shook them by the hand.

In the hall, Ulysse helped him on with his rich fur-lined coat. Léocadie held his hat of black velours unconsciously stroking its softness. He was a handsome figure, a heroic figure. Subdued and very gentle he was tonight and they sensed a wistfulness, a loneliness about him when the door was opened and the blue-white of the night stared implacably at the cosy warmth of the Bower.

“It is hard,” he said with a little smile, “to leave this—for that.” He pointed his stick at the frozen marshland, the deep blue sky hung with those cold silver stars. “It would be harder, did I not carry with me some of the warmth and color you have here in your home. May it be always warm and bright. Monsieur Plamondon, you are my friend. Mademoiselle Perron, I carry your image in my heart. *Au revoir.*”

He was gone. The car’s red tail-lamps blinked at them, glowing redly against the snow. Then they vanished into the night and the song of the exhaust died on the icy air. Ulysse drew her in, closed the door. He was silent, his eyes had a far-off look, as if they gazed back over the years. He looked at her and she thought his face for a moment showed pain and anguish. They went again into the studio, feeling an emptiness there as if some splendid thing had gone out of it. Even Cerbère looked downcast.

They sat by the fire, on which Ulysse piled new logs and for a while, busy with their thoughts, they said nothing. Still the tortured trees cracked and snapped in the iron clutch of the frost; the window panes were white, patterned with a myriad gorgeous flowers, designs of intricate and breathless beauty. The great bell of St. Gudule church boomed out into the night, marking the close of a mission that was being held. Ulysse listened to its slow resonant chiming.

“That,” he said, “is called the Sinner’s Bell.”

“Yes. It is to call those who stray away; to remind those whose hearts are black with wickedness and stony with hatred, that God still thinks of them and will not give them up.”

“It rings for me tonight,” said Monsieur Plamondon.

“For you.” She got up and crossed over to sit on the side of his chair, sliding her arm about his neck. “Never for you, my dear one. In you there is no sin, no wickedness.”

“Perhaps great wickedness, Léocadie.”

She laughed. She knew his eternal jesting. “But yes, you have been ill-treating Cerbère again no doubt or throwing pepper in Pégase’s mash or blowing smoke in his eye.”

“Worse than that. But I will not burden your poor heart with my infamy. Tell me of the Christmas music. It was good, eh? Did they sing that mass of Palestrina that I told Père Grignon they must never do?”

“Of course they did. And it was not bad at all.”

"It must have been horrible. But the carols—they were lovely?"

"So lovely. So grand as to bring the tears to your eyes as you thought of that poor girl with no place to go to have her little baby. No door would open to her, no one would take her in—and she afraid, haunted—"

"Do not!"

"*Mon Dieu*, you weep, *monsieur mon père*."

"No, no, no. It is nothing. That poor little Mary with no place to go. Ah, misery! Then in the little stable with only the ox and the ass and the poor wondering shepherds to see, that small Jesus is born and is laid in a manger. Is it not hard to think that any man could refuse a woman shelter, a place of repose, when in such a plight she came to him. No matter who or what she was or in what circumstances she came to him! Think you that I could refuse to do anything, anything such a woman asked of me?"

"I know you could not."

"I could not."

"You are a good, kind and noble man, monsieur."

"And you are a little goose to think so. There were many at the church?"

"A good many."

He looked at her sharply, so sensitive to the least inflection of her voice, the smallest suggestion of joy or sorrow. "Is there something?"

"Oh, no—there is nothing."

"You too—you have not joined Uldège, Rosalie, Pégase and Cerbère in this conspiracy of deceit. *Mon Dieu!* If I do not go this night down to the cellar to see if there is not a box of dynamite on top of the furnace. Is it a plan to blow me to atoms!"

She thought, "It is something worse in its way, I fear, than dynamite. But what it is I cannot guess." She said, "There is nothing. You imagine things."

"Who would not? What with peddlers and silks and nudgings and whisperings and the like! Tomorrow at the latest I shall run this thing to earth. And when I learn this dark secret, let those who kept it from me so long beware. Even you, Léocadie."

"I would most certainly, even at the risk of your fury, monsieur, keep any and all dark secrets from you with my very last breath. But I know of none right now."

“But there is one.”

She too knew there was one; that perhaps only to her and him, the two concerned, was it any longer a secret; that in tavern, store and cottage, at the market, at the station, at the cross-roads, at the church, people talked and whispered this black, evil secret. She could feel eyes staring at her, countless pairs of eyes; hear tongues wagging, chattering, millions of tongues, till the room was filled with staring eyes and wagging tongues.

Monsieur Plamondon, too, seemed to feel these things. He got his copy of Villon in its binding of mellow red leather. He loved his Villon. Ballad after ballad he read her, but tonight their haunting mournfulness, their undertone of decay and disintegration, of a world that rots underneath its brightest places, seemed more predominant than ever. “I must give it up,” he said at last. “If I read much more, I too shall be going about asking unsuspecting persons if they are privy to the whereabouts of yesteryear’s snow. And I can think of nothing more useless, when found, than old snow. Off to bed with you, small imp. You must be weary. Golden dreams.”

The days that followed, right up until the Eve of Christmas, were of a cold so intense, so clear and brittle that Ulysse declared one could cut it with a knife or take it in one’s hands even, and snap it off. Pégase’s breath, he swore, had frozen into a solid cloud several times and had to be thawed out by Uldège, otherwise the poor little beast had suffocated.

It kept people indoors, that cold, huddled close to the roaring fires. Woodpiles diminished like snow on an April day. The mail-carrier’s horse froze in his tracks and died on the marsh and only by a great miracle might one poke one’s nose outside without having it nipped right off. The sunsets were more crimson still, more like fire, and the more like fire they became, the colder were the nights that followed.

It served one good purpose, that cruel cold, it kept from Monsieur Plamondon and Léocadie the wretched stories that were being exchanged across Quebec heaters and kitchen ranges in every farmhouse from Pré d’en haut to Dorchester. Even Uldège and Rosalie, sheltered too from the scandalous blast, lost their furtive air and timid manner. Monsieur Plamondon forgot the matter entirely, was on good terms with everyone and composed a hymn of Christmas that was a delight to hear. Even Léocadie, who had seen some ugly manifestations of this nameless menace, began to think that it had passed, that when the siege was lifted and the frost legions

withdrew snarling into their fastnesses in the Labrador, all would be as it was before.

Paul, she heard from Rosalie, had gone back to Moncton to take part in some great lawsuit. The judge returned, on Christmas Eve, from sitting on committees, and with his son, home for the holiday, went with the rest of the world to *la messe de minuit*—the Midnight Mass. Monsieur Plamondon, no great churchman, always made it a point to attend this lovely service. Léocadie went with him.

The cold had abated somewhat, and out of the distant hills, from the most remote hamlets and villages, came the Acadian farmers and their wives and their children beyond all counting. Merry little sleighs, their passengers completely hidden under great robes and blankets and piles of straw, jangled with silvery bells across the marsh to St. Gudule. A great throng stood around the church-door crowding to enter. Inside, the altar blazed with a thousand candles and there before the shrine of the Virgin stood the quaint representation of the Stable of Bethlehem, in the manger of which the infant Christ was born. There were the shepherds leaning on their crooks, there the patient ox and the solemn-eyed ass, looking ever so much like Judge Allain; there the star that guided the wise-men on their way, there the little child given to the world to bring it such light and happiness as it had never known.

Music floated from the choir-loft, ecstatic, jubilant, lovely beyond all telling, voices blending in the joyous harmony of the age-old songs that belong to all the world, that tell of the quiet stars above the Judean hills, of the shepherds who saw a great light burning and heard music from the sky and the beat, beat of the angels' wings as they hovered above this cradle of mankind.

"*Ah, que c'est divin!*" muttered Ulysse, his simple heart enraptured, seized by the spell of piety, of worship, of utter belief in this story that demands believing. "Ah, but it is divine!"

Ahead of them a few seats Judge Allain was looking at the shepherds with great approval and making a mathematical estimate of the number of candles on the altar, as well as a gloomy calculation of the possibility of the whole thing going up in flames. Paul, beside him, turned once and found her where she knelt beside Ulysse, and his worship was all for her.

It was ended. To the joyous strains of an angelic chorus, they went from the church, Monsieur Plamondon too happy, too absorbed by his own reflections, too taken up with the beauty of this feast, to notice the many

who looked askance at him and the lovely girl who held his arm, who barely returned his greetings, who did not stop to talk. Afterwards it would come back to him. Afterwards he would wonder. Now he hurried home with her to the little tree they had decorated with lovely ornaments of red, blue, orange, pink and a dozen other colors, with long strings of popcorn, with imitation snow and icicles that looked so real as to make one shudder, with a great star on its very tip and little dogs and cats and Santa Clauses peering out at them from the green boughs.

The fire blazed rapturously. Cerbère's tail seemed to wag. Pégase was conducted from his stable to the kitchen door, given a glimpse of things inside, regaled with apples, candy and anything else he might fancy. For Léocadie there was a lovely ski-suit and, strangely enough, skis to go with it; and books of music and little jugs of perfume and a bracelet and an elegant pair of skates; for Monsieur Plamondon, there was a huge pipe and a great jar of tobacco, a bottle of very old cognac, a gorgeous scarf, a book of church-music that she knew he had coveted; for Rosalie—what devilish irony on Ulysse's part!—there was a dress of real silk with "Beware of Peddlers" printed under the Christmas greetings; for Uldège a pair of immense fur gloves that came up to his elbows and a good pipe and much tobacco; for Cerbère two special biscuits, a chocolate bar and a promise of the turkey-frame after tomorrow's dinner.

Far into that silent holy night they sat by the fire and watched their lovely tree and admired their pretty gifts. "Surely," said Léocadie, "this is the happiest night of all the nights of the world."

"This is one stolen from heaven," agreed Ulysse. "No better have I known, nor ever hope to know."

"You have given me all this, monsieur. I will not say monsieur. Tonight I call you father. You have been so good to me, my father, but I should love you even were you the monster you sometimes pretend to be."

She came to him and kissed him. Gently he stroked her hair, held her briefly and put her from him. "It would be a great pity on this night of all nights, foolish one, if I were to become my real self. If once again you say to me that I have been kind to you, back goes the ski-suit, the bracelet, the perfume, the skates—everything."

"Ah, you are inhuman, a cruel, wicked—"

"*Bon!* Splendid! That is better. That is the truth. Now I can sleep well."

They left the fire and the tree and the lovely gifts scattered about, and the little stuffed dog in his place on the mantel where for so many years he had stood and watched. And those who thought it absurd, funny, amazing, eccentric that Ulysse should keep him there and speak to him as if he lived, should have known that his little paws were planted as firmly in the good man's heart as on that marble slab, that for Ulysse he still lived, would always live, for love does not die.

The day after Christmas was quite as cold as the days had been before. In fact, Ulysse said, it had knocked the bottom out of the thermometer. It was, however, the day on which Père Grignon, *petit vicaire* to Père Dollard, came to practice with Ulysse the noble and intricate art of trying to impale people on the point of a sword.

The room was cleared. Ulysse was arrayed in silk knee-breeches and vest; the foils, the masques, the gloves lay on the table by the window. Ulysse picked one up and went through lightning manœuvres—*en prime, en seconde, en tierce*—up to *en octave*. He made weird leaps and evolutions, *coup tourné, garde de gaucher, attaque, esquive, fente en arrière, coup d'arrêt*. Ah, he was nimble, this little Monsieur Plamondon, at the game of fencing. Alas, for his skill this day, it was not with the swords alone that he and Père Grignon would engage.

He was a bald headed little man, this Grignon, with eyes as cold and clear as the sky this day above St. Gudule. He was a practical-minded Frenchman, than which in all the world there is nothing more practical. Ulysse liked him for his knowledge of literature and art, academic though it was. He had studied at Louvain, this Grignon, and with the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice, in Montreal. He was an able hand with the fencing-foil and went about his work in a cold-blooded, business like manner, this day as always, donning his plastron, his masque, his gloves, with great finesse; facing Monsieur Plamondon with a grave salute.

He talked easily as he fenced.

"Monsieur Plamondon, what was the name of your sister, the mother of your niece?" Thrust.

"That sister"—Parry—"her name was Athalie."

There followed this bit of play a thrust from Ulysse that would surely have spitted a less nimble opponent, button or no button. Ulysse was nervously on guard.

“Monsieur Plamondon, is it that you knew in your youth one Tilmon Grou, now a peddler?” Thrust. A devious thrust. Peddler! Ah, name of a name—*ce maudit colporteur*—the peddler Ulysse and Rosalie had talked about. What then is this!

“I knew such a one”—Parry—“in the village of St. Clothilde de Rimouski where I spent my boyhood!”

“He says, *mon ami*, that there were no others in your family than yourself.”

Touche!

Monsieur Plamondon dropped his point, all but dropped his piece. He stared through his black masque at the black masque before him, striving to find the icy eyes behind it. Ah, what a duel this was—a duel he could not win.

“It then is true?” The little vicar lowered his own blade. There was regret in his voice. “I had hoped—”

Ulysse tore off his masque. Père Grignon removed his. They faced each other.

“It is quite true, *monsieur le vicaire*,” said Ulysse softly. “What of it!”

“You ask! This young girl is not your niece, not any relative of yours!”

My daughter—why could he not say, “My daughter” and end this. He opened his lips to speak. No words came. He knew he could not say those words, let happen what would.

“All Memramcook then is aware that I have lied about Léocadie? It is common gossip that the girl is nothing at all to me, except perhaps my mistress? That is it?”

“You know how people talk. You are different from the rest, an artist. She is so lovely—”

“It is a most hideous lying business—an outrage!” He flung away his fencing-foil. “We make an end of this, *mon père*—here and now. I will say no more than I have said.”

“This is a terrible scandal, Monsieur Plamondon. Think what it means to have this—”

“I bid you good-day, my pious friend. Did I not know that, after your fashion, you act from the heart, I would suggest we remove the buttons from

the foils—”

Père Grignon shrugged. “I see you are adamant.”

“Adamant! I am all in flames, monsieur! I could consume this village, this valley, with what burns in me. This innocent child—”

“People are prone to judge—”

“I am not up for judgment—nor is she.” Ulysse bowed, left the room with no further words. Père Grignon divested himself of his armor, donned his cassock, his coat, his sugar-loaf hat and went his way. Monsieur Plamondon was, of course, a man of the world and in the world his business was his own business, but this place wasn’t the world. “That girl runs around with the son of Judge Allain,” mused Père Grignon. “It is of a great sadness, this.”

And it was, in truth, of a great sadness, for Paul had telephoned to her at noon and she had gone out to meet him and, even as the duel of words and swords went on, she and Paul were braving the icy wind, happy to be again with each other.

“I saw you briefly at the mass,” he said. “I see you every moment in my dreams. We must hasten, you and I, *ma mie*. We love each other. We will not delay. I quarrel with him, with my father. He persists in bringing up this ridiculous story—” He stopped, looked at her, to find her staring at him with a wild question in her eyes.

“What story? I know there is something. I have sensed it.”

“Well then, some drunken peddler came here and told them he was born in the same village as Monsieur Plamondon and that Monsieur Plamondon had no brothers or sisters.”

The effect of this upon Léocadie was quite what he had looked for. She laughed, laughed—until he was laughing too.

“How absurd it is! I knew you would take it so. I have told them all it was a lie.”

“But—but it is not!”

“Eh!” Comically, all his laughter went away and he stopped to gaze at her in complete bewilderment. “You say it is true! Then you—”

“I am Monsieur Plamondon’s daughter, my poor Paul. He was my mother’s husband, not brother. Ah, you are all mixed up. I will explain. He did not live with her, my mother, all the time since I was born. I did not

know about him or what he was like or whether he would even have me in his home then she died and sent me to him. So, that night on the train when I met you—and you were the first one I met—I told you I was his niece. I had always been Léocadie Perron, my mother was always Mimi Perron. Monsieur Plamondon, to avoid a lot of useless and maybe distasteful explanations, let me go as his niece. Now it has caused all this whispering, staring and lifting of eyebrows. Ah, *mon dieu*! It is too droll.”

“You make me very happy. He is a good man, your father. It can all be cleared up now. One can tell these people how foolish, how wicked they have been.”

“Do not say anything until we have told him, my father, about this. How he will laugh! They think him my lover perhaps! And—what a wonderful lover he would be, were he not a still more wonderful father.”

“You do not then like your present lover, little one.”

“Ah, mon Paul! I love you.”

She was eager to get home, to tell Monsieur Plamondon the dark secret that had caused trouble even in his own kitchen, that had disturbed the simple hearts of Uldège and Rosalie, who, knowing their master’s goodness, could not bear to hear him talked about. How Monsieur Plamondon would laugh! It was such *contretemps* as this, he had often said, that delighted him most; just as he had been delighted to have wished upon him, who had neither sister nor brother, a lovely little niece.

She left Paul with a promise to see him tomorrow. She hurried up to the door of the Bower. The knocker was framed in a great green holly wreath with pretty red berries. She could see the tree in the bow-window, its bright ornaments shining in the sunlight. She hurried indoors, calling to him. Rosalie, weeping, her face white as the flour on her arms, came from the kitchen.

“What—what is it, Rosalie?”

“Ah, name of the good God, he has gone mad, poor M’sieur Plamondon! He has taken the leave of his senses. He—he shook me.” She sobbed. “He pulled poor Uldège’s nose. He twisted Cerbère’s little tail and threatens to burn down the barn tonight when Pégase is asleep. He became like this after Père Grignon left, after the play of swords. We know not what to do. You must go to him. You must calm him. You must tell him that none of us could for one moment believe—”

“I know.” She patted the poor woman’s back. “I will go to him.”

Ulysse was in his bedroom, gazing out the window. He turned to her. His eyes were very dark, very bleak. She stopped at the door, seeing him look as he had never looked before. Haggard, weary, disillusioned.

“You—you have heard then, monsieur?”

“I have heard. And you?”

“From Paul. Is it not droll, all this! Why do you look so sorrowful? It is very simple. All you have to do is tell them the truth—”

“That,” said Ulysse, “is just the trouble, little lovely one. The truth would never do.”

CHAPTER XI

She stared at him, wondering, incredulous. "What is it you say, monsieur! Do I hear you aright! The truth, it would never do. But—"

He waved his hands nervously. "Forgive me. I do not think what I say. I cannot think. All will be well. All will be as it should be, presently, presently. Just now I cannot make up my mind. I am unnerved, upset. This to come so suddenly upon me. So wickedly. Hear me, little child: I am at the fencing with Père Grignon—Grignon whom I have known these many years. Like a thrust it comes at me, 'What is the name of that sister of yours, mother of your niece?' I parry the thrust. I say, 'Athalie'. He thrusts again. I am beginning to be unnerved. 'Do you know one Tilmon Grou, a peddler, from Rimouski?' I reply with word and sword, 'I know that one'. The final thrust that touches me—'He has been here, he says you were in your family the only child.' It was like that, Léocadie."

"But—but why should it upset you so! It is after all a harmless business. You told Père Grignon the facts; that I—that I was your child."

Ulysse did not look at her. "I told him nothing."

She could not speak. "You—you let him go away thinking that you—that I—How could you! How could you be so cruel, so wicked, so unkind to me!"

"Ha! Have I not told you a thousand times that I am all those things you say of me. Yes, I am those things over and over again. But you—you laughed at me. I was jesting. I was playing the fool. I was perhaps a little bit mad. Now you know that it was no play; it was the real thing. You hear me, Léocadie, the real thing!"

For a moment her eyes showed belief. But she could not believe. She ran to him, put her arms about his neck, clung to him, sobbing. "I do not understand. Oh, forgive me, monsieur, that I am so stupid, so dull, that I cannot comprehend this: Explain to me, gentle one, what it all means. It is not—it is not that you are ashamed of me, that there is anything—"

He hid his face in her hair. She felt his shoulders tremble for a moment violently. He put her from him with infinite tenderness. He was calmer now.

Even, he smiled at her. "I will not talk of it now, my child. I cannot. Later—tonight perhaps—tomorrow, after I have had time to think—"

"But what is there to think about!" Her mouth was trembling; in her eyes was a mist through which she could see him but dimly. "You fill my heart with fear, with terrible uncertainty. Ah, what am I to do!"

"Be patient. I ask this of you, Léocadie—I who love you. Be patient just a little while. Trust me, all will be well."

She looked at him bravely, love struggling with doubt in her heart, in her face. "*Bien!* I will do as you ask, monsieur. You—you have always been good, always right. I cannot now bring myself to believe that now you will fail me. Surely not now when I—when I thought myself most happy."

"I will not fail you now. Go on now. Remove from your face the signs of weeping. I will stay here and summon from the cupboards and corners the demons who hide there. I will confer with them, wrestle with them, confound them. It may be a great, a stern and awful combat. While it wages, pray for me, my child."

"You are serious, monsieur?"

"I am quite serious. I—" He said no more. In wretched silence that wrung his heart she looked at him for a moment with failing hope, with growing misery, then she went away. "Poor, abused, beaten, tormented little one!" He flung himself down on the bed when she had gone. "It is I who have done this to you whom in all this world I love most!" He scowled. "Is that so—is it not perhaps that I love myself most, that my fear of losing her is only concern for my own happiness that is bound up in her! Ah, wretch that I am, I have embarked upon evil ways—ways of subterfuge, of lies and deceit. I cannot add one more lie, the worst lie, to the others; and I dare not tell the truth. Ah, what have I done to her!"

He had left her bewildered, terrified, frightened, like a little fawn driven into some awful defile where there were black sharp rocks and awful torrents and green eyes peering out of shadowy caverns and a thousand other horrors. Her heart fluttered and she could not still it. The tears that she earnestly dried came again and again. Miserably, she sat on the bed in the pretty room that was her pride. Her room—so different from the wretched, dingy kennels of Paris boarding-houses, the only dwellings she had known before this happy time. It had been so real to her, this room. She had loved to make her bed, to touch the lovely dresser, the chairs, the curtains, the little jars of cream, the bottles of perfume. Her things, held so warmly to her warm little heart.

What now! What was all this! Nothing that she had thought real seemed now to have any stability, any certainty. The rock on which she had stood was turning to sand; the good stone walls all about her were becoming like straw; the winds howled around her and the cold enveloped her. "Ah, heaven! My mother! My father! What is this that has come to me, a poor girl! It is punishment for my too great happiness, my selfishness. I am not perhaps a good girl and all these things will be taken away from me. I have brought trouble to him. If I go away now, the trouble will pass from him. I will go away, but where will I go!"

When the bell rang for dinner, both she and Ulysse were late, but when they came they brought with them, both, a gaiety, a lightness that was pitiful, so feigned it was, so much a mockery. How careful they were to talk only of things in which there was no danger of coming upon that which lay nearest their hearts—the awful cold, the new music that had come this morning, that not yet had they taken time to look over.

"Yes. We must play that music tomorrow," said Ulysse. "We must prepare for the New Year, which will be a year filled with busy practice, with cruelly hard work for someone I know, someone who now does not know how many times her knuckles are going to be rapped by her stern teacher!"

Her smile was bright with tears unshed. How she would love each rap of the knuckles, no matter how great the hurt; how she would rejoice in scoldings, beatings, anything, if only this uncertainty and dread might pass from her. But she would be patient. He knew best. Always he knew what was the right thing. It was not for her to be angry or reproachful or to resent this seemingly unreasonable refusal of his, to say what needed to be said. In his own good time he would speak, and all would be bright again and happy.

That time was not tonight. For a little while she stayed with him in his studio. She tried to play for him, to sing, but it was not a success. Her heart was not in it, and she let her hands fall from the keys and bowed her bright head and bit her lip to keep from weeping. He sat in his chair by the fire, silent, different, like a stranger. The little Christmas tree, so gay, so bright and cheerful, mocked at her, the lovely gifts piled on the floor at its base. Was it only a few nights ago they had sat here, that she had perched upon the arm of his chair and called him father and said of all the nights that had ever been, this was the happiest and best!

"I will go now, monsieur." She got up from the piano-bench, stood straight and firm, smiling at him, loving him. "Good night, monsieur."

“Léocadie!” He looked at her earnestly. “In the morning I will speak to you. I will—” He shook his head in token of despair. “Please, my own, be not miserable. You know, you must know, that I love you and that now I try to decide what it is best to do—best only for you, understand.”

“I try to understand.”

“You can at least believe, little one. Promise me you will believe that I—that I consider at this moment only your happiness. It is all too bad. It is the way life goes. You think something is over and done with, you think it is buried in the past. Lo, after long years in which you are lulled to security and have found happiness, it comes back large as life to confront you. I have never given much thought to God, small one, until this time of your coming, but of late I have seen His hand and now I pray in my own inarticulate fashion for guidance. He will answer me, for you must be among His favored.”

She did not understand, but she would not question him further. She saw that he was harassed, driven, tormented. Even she, this night, could not console him, could not bring the old carefree brightness back to him. She went to him and, bending, kissed him on the forehead. He closed his eyes. He seized her hand and fondled it and pressed it to his lips.

“Go now,” he whispered. “Goodnight.”

He sat there, after she had gone, his eyes still closed, and strange shadows chased each other across his sensitive, spiritual face, so that all in a trice he seemed to pass from youth to age and from age to youth, as if his thinking shaped these shadows; and sometimes his lips curved in a smile and sometimes thinned into an angry line. But there was only Cerbère to witness.

The fire burned low, became a bed of glowing coals; the wind played a dirge around the eaves, the little Christmas tree looked futile and forlorn standing there in its neglected brightness. He could not look at it without thinking of her.

“Bah!” he muttered, “I am a fool—a too scrupulous, Quixotic fool, such as I have ever been. It is time now, if ever it was, if ever it will be, that I showed myself a man and took what I wanted. Why should I even consider giving her up, let alone torture myself for one who tortured me! What do I owe to that man, except hatred! He took her mother from me; now I would give her up to him—I, the stern, the cruel, the demoniac Plamondon before whom all creation and Cerbère and Pégase tremble! I will not do it! I cannot do it!”

So one moment he was decided: the next brought uncertainty, misery, the prospect of living, all the rest of his life, a lie; for she was not his child; he had had no children ever. Perhaps, he thought feverishly, I will go to her tonight and have her choose—choose between me and Pierre Gervais. I shall say to her: ‘that man is your parent, Léocadie—that man who does not know he ever fathered a little one, that man to whom I lied when I said Mimi did not get his message that he had escaped from the prison in Marseilles. She got it, yes, and she went to him, leaving me who had taken her in out of love and pity and married her—leaving me; it was only the day after we were wed. Shame kept her from ever returning to me; and she never again met her lover. I thought she had gone from my life, that all this was forever done—until you came.’

“That I shall say to Léocadie. ‘Will you choose this father,’ I shall ask, ‘who has been accused of terrible crimes, convicted of them! About whom the prison-look still lingers like some evil effulgence about a fungus in a swamp! Will you not rather let me claim you as my child, I who have more claim upon you than he, I who have loved you with all the power of this poor and wretched heart, I, Ulysse Plamondon, who loved your mother, who wed her but never called her my own.’”

But it would not be easy to say those things to her; yet something must be said. She was troubled, harassed, bedevilled by all this misery, far more than he was. He got up to go to her. He sat down again, looking mournfully at Cerbère, who gave him this night no counsel, no sympathy even. He clutched his head with nervous hands and rocked to-and-fro. Even so, he recalled bitterly, had he reacted the day he returned from the University to the little *pension* in Mont Parnasse, and found there the note that Mimi had left for him. The words were etched upon his heart that day, never to be removed: “He has escaped from prison, Hilaire. I go to him. Forgive me, kind and gentle monsieur. Forget me who have ever been unworthy of such love as yours.”

It was easy to forgive: he had loved her so. It was impossible to forget: he had placed all his hope, his trust, in her. He had been prepared to be a good and kind father to her little one. His heart had suffered for her plight. It was why he wept when Léocadie spoke of that other girl who could find no place to lay her down, who wandered, bewildered and afraid, from house to house, and could find no resting, whereon to lay her head.

“So, until she came to me,” muttered Ulysse.

For a while after Mimi had gone, bitterness had possessed him against her, against the unfortunate man she loved. But he had not rejoiced when in the papers next day he learned that d'Este had been retaken—before ever she could join him. He had hoped, even prayed then, that Mimi would return to him. Her shame kept her from it, and such pride as remained to her.

“And this is the tale I must relate to that little one. I must tell her that her father’s name is known in France only for his infamy; that her mother abandoned me—not I her as this poor child always thought and once or twice reproached me with. Poor, foolish, frivolous Mimi—you with your golden wings all tarnished, you fallen from your bright estate! How brave you must have been all the years to keep this lovely child, to form her in beauty as you did. For that, if for nothing else, you my love, I reverence you and honor you.”

It was long past twelve, he saw, when he got up to peer at the little clock in the shadows of the mantel beside Cerbère. But she, perhaps, would be awake, lying there in the darkness, hoping, praying, that he would come to her and bring some peace to her troubled spirit. He touched the little dog’s ear fondly. He left the room and went quietly upstairs. He tapped at her door, listened, tapped again. No answer.

He frowned. He had nerved himself to the telling. He wished to have it over with. In the morning it would not be so easy. Why was she not awake, that suffering heart. “Léocadie!” he called softly, and again waited; but no answer came. He went to his room and to bed and fell into restless slumber. Léocadie still crouched in the darkness, kneeling by her bed, where she had knelt all the time he knocked, the time he called to her.

She could not answer. She dared not. This night she could not face him. Perhaps never again could she look into those kindly eyes, into that gentle face, without feeling in her breast a pain too great to bear. Perhaps never could she make known to him what in her heart she felt of gratitude for all his tenderness, his love, his mercy.

“Like God,” she whispered. “He has acted like God. He is the noblest, the best of men, this little Plamondon. I am not fit to touch the tip of his shoe nor to breathe the air he breathes. I am as dust beneath his feet—” On the floor beside her lay yellowed papers, faded newspaper clippings from *le journal de Paris*, letters in her mother’s handwriting—letters that had never been received by the unhappy d'Este to whom they were written, but had been returned to her who wrote them.

While Monsieur Plamondon, alone in his studio, had gone through his agony of uncertainty and doubt, she had gone to the attic where her trunks and boxes were. In the bottom of a little iron-bound chest that had belonged to Mimi, she had come upon these withered leaves from a tree that rot had entered. Swiftly her nimble mind had pieced it all together; as in a terrible flash of light she had seen the part Ulysse Plamondon—poor, pathetic, generous, noble Ulysse—had played in this strange story.

“He took her in when all others closed their doors upon her. He gave her his name, that I too might have it, that I might never be known as the child of a traitor and homicide. And she—for that same traitor and homicide, she left him. Ah, she knew his infinite mercy, his goodness of heart, would still be there after twenty years; for she sent me to him. She sent me to him, and he took me in. And even as she, I served him ill in some fashion. I reproached him with having abandoned her and me, I accused him of having left her to starve. I crucified him! I crucify him still. It is because of me that he suffers now. Because it is a lie to claim me as his daughter, because for me it is disaster to say whose I really am. From this misery, at least, I can save him!”

While Monsieur Plamondon slept his troubled slumber, while the Bower lay wrapped in the stillness of the night and little Pégase dozed in his warm stall and maybe even Cerbère closed a glassy eye, she made herself ready. The moonlight, reflected from the snowy world, intensified by the vast fields of whiteness, made her room bright where its long shafts entered. She needed no more light than this light she loved. She had few things to do; some clothes, some stockings to pack in her travelling-bag, a brief little note—so hard to write—for Monsieur Plamondon, and one for Paul. Nothing else.

She had some money, a pitifully small sum of money, left from the poor legacy that had come to her when Mimi died. It had not been touched since the night she came here. Ulysse had been stern about that. He had plenty of money; she was his little girl; she should have all she wished. And how generous he had been to her; how prodigal even, how unstinting!

“These letters, these clippings from the journals, will show you, my dear one whom always I shall call father, why I must leave you now, why I must go far off to hide my shame and misery. Only God, I think, could be so good to an unfortunate girl, as you have been to me. You received me, who had no claim upon you, with tenderness and mercy. You took me in whom any others, treated as you were treated, betrayed as you were betrayed, would have closed their doors upon. You gave me your love, your protection, your

help, your dear companionship. You torment yourself now because of me. I have brought trouble and unhappiness into your life that should be all beauty. At least I can spare you this pain any longer. So farewell, soft tyrant, kindly monster, gentle fiend.”

It was sealed with tears, that little note, as was the briefer one she wrote to Paul Allain. She carried them both downstairs with her and left them beside Cerbère’s biscuit, under the little dog’s nose, where Monsieur Plamondon, who always came to wish his old friend good-morning, would be most certain to find them.

“What a scolding you will get, Cerbère,” she whispered, her mouth twisted, her eyes brimmed with tears. “What an ear-pulling and tail-twisting you will receive from him! Tell him, little friend, that it is in no way your fault, that you tried in every way to dissuade me, but that I said—I said it was better I should go—”

She gazed about her, at the piano. She went to it and touched it; at the books, she caressed them with her eyes; at his pipes, his tobacco-jar, his velvet-coat hanging on the back of the chair by his table. She picked it up, that lovely coat, and rubbed her cheek against it. How often had she felt its softness against her cheek! “Goodby,” she whispered to all the sad little ghosts that watched her there—“only goodby.”

She went quickly out into the world of white and silver, of blue sky and black shadow. The myriad lanterns of the stars, the great disc of the moon, were there to light her. Aloof and cold they looked, unfriendly, as if they thought it was their world now, that she had no business in it, this little shadowy figure who flitted up the village street, past the church and over the long stretch of the marsh-road to Pont Lefebvre. Of other times she thought, of other nights when she had travelled this selfsame road, with Ulysse, with Paul Allain, with a song in her heart, a fire in her blood. Now all was bitter, biting cold and her heart was cold and in her blood no warmth.

No light in all the sleeping valley; no dog’s bark, no sound in the world of silence. Far, far off, borne on the stillness of the clear air, the faint whistle of a train, the night-express from Halifax. Ulysse had told her about catching that train that passed in the silent hours. In the little station at Pont Lefebvre was left a lantern, and if one wanted to board that train one took the lantern, carried it to the end of the platform and swung it back and forth. The train always slowed between Dorchester and Pont Lefebvre. It would stop for the lantern.

It stopped tonight.

CHAPTER XII

Ulysse awakened at the first glimmer of dawn that touched the frosty window panes and came, gray and cheerless, into his room. He awoke unrefreshed, burdened still with the load of grief he had carried to bed with him. Ah, if only she had been awake last night, if only he had related to her all those things, the recital of which this morning seemed far beyond his powers. How could he bear to see the sorrow, the bewilderment, the hurt in that sweet face! But the truth—it must be the truth now. No more lies, no more deceit. The truth, even if it lost her to him forever.

“But it will not. She will not leave me now. I, after all, am her foster father. I must mean more to her than a father she has never known. We shall be happy again. We shall be happier than ever, once these clouds are cleared away. We shall devote ourselves once more to music; plan concerts, go on tour to all the great cities. I will make her famous, make her forget that ever there was this little trouble in her life.” He scowled. “It never should have been—never! If that accursed peddler, that Tilmon Grou—*seigneur mon dieu!* I recall that one who squinted so abominably, whose nose was never clean, who was the stupidest oaf in St. Clothilde de Rimouski—if he had never come here to open his big mouth—! But then it is not right that always I should keep the truth from her. It will out, one says; and I suppose now as well as any other time.”

He lay there on his back, hands clasped at the nape of his neck, warm in his good flannel nightgown. He listened, as the time slipped by, to hear her stirring in the next room. Always she arose early. She hated to be abed once the sun was shining. Not that it shone today: the clear and lovely night had given place to a day of gray skies and dark scurrying clouds; smoke blew down from the chimneys and the frost stood out white upon the roofs. There would come a thaw now and Memramcook would take on the aspect of Venice as the river topped its banks and surged against the dikes.

“What then keeps that little sleepy-head!” It was after eight o’clock. Monsieur Plamondon arose, donned his slippers, his red, brocaded dressing-gown. He made some little noise with his shaving; he dropped his shoes once or twice; he whistled “Vive la Canadienne”; still there came no sound from her room.

"She is then very weary. Worn-out from all this annoyance, this plague of unpleasantness. I shall let her sleep on. It is indeed not often that I go to breakfast alone." It was—he did not care to admit it—the first time since her coming that he had breakfasted alone. He did not like the prospect. He loitered, putting the finishing touches to his tie, to his handkerchief, to his cuffs; brushing his hair till it gleamed. Outside her door, he coughed deeply. No use.

Reluctantly, he marched down stairs. She might yet come. He would spend a little time longer with Cerbère this morning. Rosalie appeared in the doorway at the end of the hall and bowed to him with fearful humility. He beamed upon her.

"Breakfast is now ready, M'sieur Plamondon. You carry yourself well this morning, m'sieur?"

"Quite well, my good one. I shall wait a little for breakfast—until Mademoiselle Léocadie comes. She is the lazy one this morning. She is the little sister of the Seven Sleepers. You have taken, I trust, a resolution against all peddlers, Rosalie—who sell you calico for silk?"

"A thousand pardons for that clumsy falsehood, m'sieur. It was, you recall, not I but stupid Uldège who said that lying thing."

"You were an accessory, my friend. But we shall forget about it now. We have had enough of it. Only a few minutes I trust will you be inconvenienced by this little girl's laziness. If she is not up in"—He frowned at his watch—"in five minutes, I shall send Cerbère up to her with orders to bite her toe." He nodded at Rosalie, strolled into the studio, greeted Cerbère with a cheery, "*Bon jour, m'sieur!* How then do you comport yourself this —" He got no further. He stopped, stared at the little white oblongs that reposed by the biscuit Cerbère had left. He made no move to go to the mantel, to pick them up.

He swallowed once or twice. He licked his lips. He shrugged. He muttered, "But no! Nonsense!" He thought; only once before in my life did I come into a room to find anything like this waiting for me. That time it was misery, the cruellest thing that ever came to me—that I thought could ever come to me. Now—Cerbère, who is it who comes to you in the night and mistakes you for the post-office? If you are going into the letter-business, my old one, why not go to the ancient city of Quebec and join partnership with the dog who gnaws the bone and takes his repose while gnawing. "Ah, God be my aid!"

He strode over to the mantel, gazed at the letters, took with trembling fingers the one directed to him; directed simply, "Monsieur Ulysse". He looked at it as if with the intensity of his regard he would cause it to dissolve into nothingness. His gaze strayed to the glassy eyes of his ancient comrade and seemed to find sympathy in them. He opened the letter, read it, re-read it. He sat down in his chair with the sad little missive still in his hand.

"Once," he muttered. "And once again, there is a note for 'Monsieur Ulysse'. How strange! How fitting that it should be. The clippings, the letters—she must have left them in her room. She must have been distraught, half-mad, to find out that terrible story. Then to steal away in the cold and lonely night. Little lovely one! Small gentle Léocadie!" He dashed a hand across his eyes. "What did she do here, Cerbère? What did she say to you? How did she act? Think well, my sage friend, did she drop any hint where she was going? It is essential that I know. At once, I must go after her, and bring her back. Ah, why did you not stop her or, failing to stop her, why did you not accompany her upon that dark journey?"

He went upstairs, opened the door of her room. There by the bed were the yellow clippings, the letters, just as she had left them. Ulysse read them, not paying much attention to their contents. He knew all they said. "And Mimi saved those things all her life, saved them to leave as a poor legacy to this innocent child—a story of bitterness and shame. But I must not blame her; I do not. She loved d'Este. That I must admit, and, that admitted, all the rest follows as is due. One really loves; then one always loves."

He noted the few things that were missing—the poorest, the simplest things. He pictured her as she was gathering up those little possessions, preparing to depart. He felt in his heart the same pain, the same sickness that she had felt. He went out of the room, closed the door softly, softly, as if she were sleeping there still in that bed that had not been disturbed—as if she slumbered there and he would not awaken her.

"I take only a cup of coffee, Rosalie," he announced to that startled woman. "I go from here at once, this minute, this second. I may never return. Never will I return without that little one who has run away, driven from here by the tongues of evil ones who place their trust in peddlers."

He took his coffee. He hurried into his overcoat, his galoshes, his fur cap and gloves. "You will pack my bags, Rosalie. I go for a brief instant to a house I have never before visited—to the home of the great jurist, the Acadian Draco, the Seaside Solon, Judge Geoffroi Allain. If he says one

word I do not like, the province of New Brunswick will require a new chief justice and there will be a great funeral in St. Gudule. *Au revoir.*”

He marched out of the Bower, down the street of St. Gudule to Belliveau Hill road and climbed it with rapid strides for such a little man. In front of the house stood the ancient barouche of Dame Laurin. Hébert in his dismal furs, his busby sitting on his nose, paraded up and down with his whip on his shoulder for all the world as if he were doing sentry-go in front of Buckingham Palace.

He growled something at Ulysse in answer to the distracted good-morning that Ulysse called to him as he mounted the steps to make an assault on the door-knocker. Lucille opened the door and looked at Monsieur Plamondon with those bird-like eyes of hers as if she were about to take flight and land up in a high bough of the big fir tree out front.

“I come to see Monsieur Allain,” said Ulysse. “It is most urgent.”

“Enter then, monsieur, if you please.”

She led the way, Ulysse followed, into the big living-room off the hall, where was the fireplace that the judge loved to doctor with the tongs, where the inlaid chess-board over which he had waged so many tedious battles, where now in solemn conclave were seated Dame Margot Laurin, Emilie, the judge himself and Paul.

“Monsieur!” The judge got to his feet, reminiscent of a telephone-post being raised by a windlass. “You come here to my house!”

“That would seem to be evident,” said Ulysse. “But I am sorry to disappoint you: I come not to see you. I bring this for my good friend, your amiable son.” He handed Paul the pitiful little note. He gave him with it a look that spoke courage and sympathy. Paul took it, bowed to the wide-eyed company, opened it and read.

“She is gone!” he said. “She has run away. This is the work of unkind people, of those who talk without knowing what they talk about. You have done this to her—”

“We have done nothing—not I, certainly,” said Dame Laurin peering into her snuff-box, wishing she had thought to stop at the store of Wilty, chemist, in Dorchester, for a fresh supply of snuff. “I have paid no attention to this silly chit-chat that has been flying around. I have too much sense. Monsieur Plamondon I know to be a gentleman.”

“Thank you, madame.” Ulysse bowed. But this morning he was not in the mood for compliments.

“I go at once in quest of Léocadie,” he said to Paul. “There has been a great wrong done by this unfortunate occurrence and I, my friends—”

“One moment, monsieur!” Judge Allain held up a mighty hand. “We were discussing this matter as you came in. We were deliberating upon it. So grave has the situation become, so fraught with menace and pregnant with unpleasant possibilities, that it has been deemed worthy by me of a family-conference, no less. Ah!”

“Ah!” murmured Ulysse.

“Monsieur!” Paul turned impatiently to Monsieur Plamondon. “Tell these people—explain to them—let them know the truth—that Léocadie is your own daughter.”

“I am sorry, my good young Paul; I cannot do that. Léocadie is no blood-relation of mine. I am her foster-father, her guardian, simply that!”

They stared at him, even Dame Laurin stared, in utter consternation.

“Why then have you all along called her your niece?” demanded Emilie. “Was there need for such deception?”

“No need. It was a harmless thing. I will not go into it all now.”

“Who then is this girl?” demanded the judge. “That young fool, my son, has told me flatly that he intends to marry her.”

“It is so,” said Paul. “I will marry Léocadie if she will have me.”

“If she will have you—” The judge stared so hard he all but cracked his glasses. “This designing, perhaps nameless—”

“Sir!” Ulysse stopped the ponderous flow of speech. “You do not know what you are talking about.”

“I do not! I do—not know what I am talking about!”

“Correct. I have told you that Léocadie is not my child. She is the child of the woman I loved but who—who never loved me. For the sake of that love I received this little girl when she came to me. None of you, I presume, have heard tell of Hilaire d’Este, Duc de St. Guilbert?”

The judge looked over his glasses at this presumptuous little man. “My good sir,” he said, “do you address that question to a man who, not only in French Canada, but in France itself, is looked upon as, I may say without

any undue exaggeration, without laying myself open to the least suspicion of boasting, a great authority on French legal history. The nobleman you speak of is as well known in that history as was Louis Dreyfus—and, I have concluded from my own investigations, quite as guiltless of the charges brought against him. I, monsieur, have been always, and still am, a champion of the Duc de St. Guilbert.”

“Splendid!” said Ulysse, almost bowled over by this revelation. “He is Léocadie’s father.”

“Eh!” The judge jerked up his head so quickly his glasses flew off straight at Dame Laurin, only to be fetched up at the end of their black ribbon. “She is the daughter of that great man! She has been living here in our midst, and we have not known this—”

“I alone have known it.”

“Paul,” demanded Dame Laurin, “when you marry the daughter of a duke, what do you become?”

Paul shook his head. “It matters nothing to me, madame, whose daughter she is. Just now, no doubt, she is alone, discouraged, heart-sick, thinking the world is all against her. If you go in quest of her, Monsieur Plamondon, I am going too.”

“*Eh bien!* We shall take the train at noon. I do not know where she went. At Moncton we may hear something. Perhaps it is to Montreal. I do not know. Wherever it is, I will find her.”

“Bravely spoken!” Dame Laurin sneezed. “You are a gallant knight, Monsieur Plamondon. Often you have reminded me of that immortal character of Edmond Rostand’s—the beloved Cyrano de Bergerac.”

Ulysse again bowed. “And often, madame, I have reminded myself of that greater creation of Miguel de Cervantes—Don Quixote de la Mancha.”

“Monsieur”—Emilie came over to Ulysse, who had never stirred from his vantage point by the door—“when you see Léocadie, you will give her my love and my wishes for her happiness. I have ceased to envy her the man she will marry. I think I did not want him: it was just that I did not like the thought of anyone else’s having him.”

“Dog in the manger,” explained Dame Margot. “Good luck, Monsieur Plamondon.”

The judge, wearing his most majestic look, his white hair in great disarray, tramped over to Ulysse and held out his hand. “A more fascinating

business, this, than the Dreyfus Case. Do you think it possible that *monsieur le duc* will visit here—?”

“He has been here,” said Ulysse, “a few nights ago.”

“Ah! But if he comes again, I should like to have the opportunity of meeting him.”

“It is most likely, monsieur, that you will meet him. A remarkable man, monsieur—very remarkable. A very wealthy man too, as you know.”

“I am aware of that.”

“Yes,” said Ulysse. “We must go now, your son and I. I bid you all farewell. *Voyons*, my little Paul, hurry yourself now. One must lose no time.”

One lost no time. The Allains’ car was requisitioned, rather against Monsieur Plamondon’s better judgment. Pégase, in an urgent matter like this, he told Paul gravely, would have been far, far better. Also, Pégase would most certainly feel slighted that he was not permitted to take part in the work of bringing back his errant mistress. “Oh, well,” said Monsieur Plamondon, as Jean Morand made the old car go faster than it had gone in years, “Pégase can meet us on our triumphal return. He shall be at the station at Pont Lefebvre with his little red pung. He shall have two apples. And on that day Monsieur Paul, I shall take the reins from Uldège, I myself; I shall brace my feet, bid all to hold on hard, and I shall let him have his head!”

In Moncton, during the train’s brief stop, Paul and Monsieur Plamondon made perfect nuisances of themselves, questioning everyone they could get to listen to them, demanding of all and sundry if they had seen pass through there last night (Ulysse) “The most beautiful young woman in the world;” (Paul) “A blonde girl with great blue eyes. You would notice her at once.” Usually the people they got hold of had just arrived from Cape Breton or were just on their way to Boston, and were, in fact, riding on the same train with the questioners. Finally, however, Ulysse located a sleepy-eyed and surly baggage-man who had seen the young lady last night.

Ulysse embraced him. “Ah, my savior, my dear ancient friend, you saw her then! Where did she go?”

“Train for Quebec, monsieur. She and the great tall man with the white hair and funny eyes.”

“*Bon Dieu!*”

“What is this?” demanded Paul. “What man is this?”

"It is he. She met him on the train, of course. He had been to Halifax. He was returning. It is Pierre Gervais."

"Gervais!" Paul was baffled. "What is he?"

"He is her father. It will be well."

She saw Pierre Gervais striding along the station-platform at Moncton. She moved back quickly from the window of the day-coach, but those eyes of his—it seemed that he could see in the dark—met hers squarely. He stopped, gazed up at the window, his hat came off. He made quickly for the steps. She cowered back into her seat, glad, frightened, wondering what she could say to him, what he would think of her.

He came down the aisle to her seat. Her hands went out to meet his. She could not help it. He was so obviously glad, even elated, to see her.

"What are you doing here, little one?" He smiled down upon her. "Surely not running away from home! Not deserting good Monsieur Plamondon!"

She cried. She could not help it. At once his expression was one of compassion. He sat down beside her. All his raillery changed into tender, gentle concern for her. "Ah, my poor child! My lovely young one! In heaven's name what has come to you. I was jesting with you. It is not, it cannot be, that I struck upon the truth!"

She dried her eyes. She looked at him miserably, like a lost little girl ready to confide in the first one who is kind to her. He was good, this Monsieur Gervais. He was a fine gentleman, a friend. He would understand. He seemed to understand already. He took her hand in his, held it. She did not mind. She wanted to rest her head on his great shoulder. He had huge shoulders, bigger even than Paul's, and Monsieur Plamondon could perch easily on one of them.

"You are kind, Monsieur Gervais."

"Always kind to you, Léocadie. From the moment I saw you, I knew that I—"

"You liked me."

"I did like you!"

"Why? What—what was it that made you seem interested in me? I have often wondered."

He smiled ever so little. "Someday perhaps I shall tell you. Now it is with you we are concerned. Ah, it is dark, dim, dingy, depressing in this coach. Come! I shall arrange for a compartment for you, and while that is being made ready, we shall sit in the club-car and have a great talk, you and I. Now that my friend, Monsieur Plamondon, is not here to look after you, I shall take his place as best I can. You are not too tired to talk to me?"

"I could not sleep tonight if I tried. But you are too good. I cannot let you do all this for me."

He shrugged. "It is nothing. A small thing. I would do more, much more, for you, little Léocadie. We shall go where it is bright and cheerful."

He was a man, this Gervais, who, it seemed, commanded even more attention than Monsieur Plamondon. There was a compartment for her at once. Her little travelling-case was carried there. Pierre Gervais conducted her back to the club-car. They sat there alone. The train jerked, got under way, clicked through the sleeping town, wormed its northward way bearing its many passengers, each with his separate fears, his own secrets, his own sorrows.

"Tell me, child, what it is that has troubled you. Seriously, have you run away from that lovely, peaceful little village, from that warm, happy home I saw you in the other night? Ah, when I went from it, I felt more than ever in my life, what it is to be a man without a home, without a country. I envied you two, so happy there with your music, your quiet pleasures."

"It was heaven, that. It breaks my heart to think that I—that I cannot have it any more."

"But why? You will confide in me."

She looked into the depths of his eyes. Some there were who felt fear when they looked at him, who knew terror and shrank from the glow and fire of his glance. Not she: for her there was only kindness, sympathy, encouragement.

"There was trouble. Oh, not with Monsieur Plamondon. He was always good and kind. He is the noblest of men. This trouble I brought to him, though I did not mean to do so. It all started when there came to St. Gudule *un maudit colporteur*—a peddler—who knew Monsieur Plamondon from his boyhood, who proclaimed that Monsieur Plamondon had neither brother nor sister and so could have no niece. And I, you see, was his niece. They thought then—oh, some horrible things that were enough to break that good man's heart."

Gervais nodded. "But could he not tell them the truth, that he is—he is your father. You, of course, knew that?"

"I—I believed it. But that is not so. He was never my father. It is that which drove me away from him, from that place, from Paul—Tonight I found out, Monsieur Gervais, that my father was a murderer and a traitor to his country, that my mother, far from being ill-treated by Monsieur Plamondon, deserted him almost as soon as they were married, to go to this other man, when he escaped from prison. They took him again, but she never returned to poor Monsieur Plamondon. Only, she sent him me."

Gervais' hand covered his eyes. She could see his mouth—that lined, hard-lipped mouth that she had seen as both cruel and kind, but never as now. It seemed to tremble now and suddenly he covered his face with his hands.

The train swayed on through the frosty night; somewhere a ventilator rattled spasmodically. But it was still there. She could hear the ticking of the little watch Ulysse had bought for her; almost she could hear her own heartbeats.

He took his hands away. "Of your father, Léocadie, you know only that he was a—what you said. You learned that, how?"

"I looked tonight in my mother's boxes. I found some old letters she had written to him that had been returned to her; some pieces from the Paris journals that told the story."

"You believed it. But, of course, what could make you do otherwise."

"I—I took it for granted."

"Look at me, Léocadie." She gazed up at him, trustingly, almost fondly. "Would you say, would you think, that I—I was a thief, a traitor?"

"You! But how absurd!"

"It is not. I am the man you read about, I am Hilaire d'Este. I am your father."

Motionless they sat, eyes unwavering, seeming to look into each other's heart. Slowly, she reached out her hand and touched his cheek, his hair. He caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. She was in his arms then, her head upon his great hard shoulder where she had wanted it to be.

"Mon père!"

"Ma petite enfant!"

The ferrule of Monsieur Plamondon's malacca-stick tap-tapped briskly on the pavement of St. Catherine's Street. He took a good step and a half to Paul's one. The top of his jaunty black Persian-lamb cap came slightly above the young Allain's broad shoulder. But the two, so widely different in outward seeming, were very much one in purpose.

"You think she will be there, Monsieur Plamondon? It is not possible that she would run away even from this gentleman, her father? It is not possible that she does not even know him for what he is?"

All this he had gone over, with variations, a hundred times on the journey from Moncton to Quebec, from Quebec to Montreal. And always Monsieur Plamondon shrugged and said, "All things are possible, my impetuous old one. In such an affair as this we must be calm, we must be confident, we must do nothing rash. It is the situation, this, which one must handle with the gloves made of kid."

He was anything but calm or cool himself, though he thoroughly believed that all during their quest he had been marked by a great nonchalance and ease. Even now, on their way to Westmount, he wanted to run. With a lunge of his stick that looked like one of the advanced movements in his beloved fencing, he hailed a taxicab and dove into it so precipitately that Paul expected him to go right out the other window. He had Pierre Gervais' card. He gave the address to the driver with an admonition not to take them to Lachine or Longueuil, because they were not to be fooled and a further warning that this was a matter of life and death.

"So it is," he assured Paul. "She is my life, that little one, and yours; to lose her would be death for us both, eh, *mon ami*!"

"She will be such a grand person now that I—well—"

"You are a big donkey, Paul. She would be always the same, my Léocadie. And always she was a grand person. But Monsieur Gervais is not going to be happy with me. He is the only man I lied to, and I lied to him rather than have him take her from me. And, *sapristi!* she is gone." He looked glumly at the taxi-driver's bull-neck. "But she will come back. I have it planned. She will marry you, so then she will live in St. Gudule and I shall see her all the time. She must come back. What would Cerbère, what would Pégase do without her! The one would refuse to eat his biscuit, the other would demolish the stable. Ah, we arrive! Be calm now! Possess yourself! In such matters—"

He was out of the taxi and scampering up the steps before Paul had made a move. He was ringing the bell for the fifth time in some ten seconds when Paul entered the vestibule. A grave-looking man-servant opened the door and lost for an instant the expression that had not failed him in twenty years, as Ulysse poked the malacca-stick at his chest and shouted, "Ah, brigand! Where is she? Where is that little one! Yield her up to me, I say, without further words or this stick will turn into a steel-blade that—"

"Be calm!" Paul drew the stick away. The tall figure of Pierre Gervais loomed up behind the man-servant. "Ah! My dear friend, Monsieur Plamondon! My good friend! Enter! You are most welcome. I waited for you, and you lost no time."

"Monsieur!" Ulysse shook both his hands. "She is then here! She is safe! She has not been kidnapped or abused or—"

"None of those things. She is here." He smiled at Paul, shook hands with him. "You are Paul Allain, eh? You are welcome too. Monsieur Plamondon, you will find Léocadie in the music room at the head of the stairs. Go to her." He squeezed Paul's arm. "After a little, my friend. I think we both, however much we love her, might give him precedence. How fast he mounts those stairs!"

Ulysse mounted them fast. He flung open the door. He dashed in, stared about him. Ah, there—there she was by the window that looked out on the garden. A little pale, a little tired. He held out his arms and she came to him. They did not speak. Ulysse could not speak, so great was his rapture. She could not: she was laughing and crying both at once. He held her at arms' length and gazed upon her and embraced her again, and again held her away and studied her earnestly.

"You bad, evil little girl!" he said at last. "I shall beat you, I shall lock you up, I shall be stern and cruel to you for this"—He stopped, looked very doleful. "But how can I? You will—you will not be my little Léocadie now."

"Always, monsieur. You know that always. I am not your niece, I am not your daughter—well then, if you want me I—I will be your wife!"

Ulysse stared at her, at her crimsoning cheeks, her bright eyes, her utter confusion. Then he laughed—laughed until she could not help but join him.

"Ah, *mon dieu*! It is too droll! You poor little girl. You propose to me! You would give yourself away to a monster, a tyrant, an ogre, to the Fiend of St. Gudule himself."

"Gladly would I give myself, my life, to you. It would be all too little in return for what you have done. It would be nothing, monsieur. I do not jest."

"Léocadie!" He took her hand in both his. "Give me only your love, your trust, your smiles, as I have known them. Give me only the right to think, 'She is my little girl, my lovely gentle one, the one who came to me out of the grayness of the world and brought me light and beauty and made warm again this heart of mine where the chill of age had begun to enter.' Give me only sometimes the right to hear you sing, to watch the firelight in your hair, in your lovely eyes, and to see there the happiness that must come from another."

"All these I gladly give—since you will have no more."

"Be still, little imbecile." He frowned darkly at her. "Would you have my bones broken by that big lover of yours, that Paul, who even now listens and turns green outside the door! Would you have me made the victim of a jealous lover's frenzy!"

"Paul—! He—he is here with you!"

"Ah! See now, fickle one. I am forgotten. I am scorned. Yes, he is here, Léocadie. And I have kept him too long from you. Promise me, when you are wed, you will come back to St. Gudule; you will not leave me."

"I will not leave you, my more-than-father."

"It is well." He looked at her steadily for a long, long moment. He bowed low to her and left her. Paul Allain went up the stairs quite as fast as had Monsieur Plamondon.

"Well, my friend"—Pierre Gervais conducted Ulysse to the library. They smoked cigars. They drank cognac. They were, somehow for the first time, at peace. "You thought you had lost her, I thought I had found her. It seems that it is neither one; simply she belongs to that young fellow. Still we shall see her often, eh? After a fashion she will still belong to us."

"Memory, monsieur, is perhaps sweeter, better, than reality," said Ulysse. "I do not know. Sometimes I have thought—I who have had only memories."

"I, too, have had to feed on them for long, monsieur. Both of us—"

"Your life has been a terrible sacrifice, a cruel banishment. It has been a noble life."

"No less so than yours, I think, friend Plamondon."

They were silent. The blue smoke drifted in the dimness of the library. It was peaceful there. A fire leapt and danced, sending shadows racing across the walls. The slow footsteps on the stairs hardly aroused the two from their revery.

“You are very silent, Monsieur Plamondon,” smiled Gervais. “Very pensive.”

Ulysse smiled too. “I compose a hymn for the wedding—merely that.”

She came first into the room, Léocadie, and stood there between them, and one thought, “She is Mimi—she is the Mimi I loved.” And the other thought, “She is Mimi—the Mimi I lost.” And both found peace and quiet dreaming in her beauty.

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 *Moon Over Acadie* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]