

**BONAVENTURE**  
**A PROSE PASTORAL OF ACADIAN LOUISIANA**  
**BY GEORGE W. CABLE**

**PART 2**

**CHAPTER V.**

**FATHER AND SON.**

Such strange things storms do,—here purifying the air, yonder treading down rich harvests, now replenishing the streams, and now strewing shores with wrecks; here a blessing, there a calamity. See what this one had done for Marguerite! Well, what? She could not lament; she dared not rejoice. Oh! if she were Claude and Claude were she, how quickly—

She wondered how many miles a day she could learn to walk if she should start out into the world on foot to find somebody, as she had heard that Bonaventure had once done to find her mother's lover. There are no Bonaventures now, she thinks, in these decayed times.

[Pg 180]“Mamma,”—her speech was French,—“why do we never see Bonaventure? How far is it to Grande Pointe?”

“Ah! my child, a hundred miles; even more.”

“And to my uncle Rosamond's,—Rosamond Robichaux, on Bayou Terrebonne?”

“Fully as far, and almost the same journey.”

There was but one thing to be done,—crush Claude out of her heart.

The storm had left no wounds on Grande Pointe. Every roof was safe, even the old tobacco-shed where Bonaventure had kept school before the schoolhouse was built. The sheltering curtains of deep forest had broken the onset of the wind, and the little cotton, corn, and tobacco fields, already harvested, were merely made a

little more tattered and brown. The November air was pure, sunny, and mild, and thrilled every now and then with the note of some lingering bird. A green and bosky confusion still hid house from house and masked from itself the all but motionless human life of the sleepy woods village. Only an adventitious China-tree here and there had been stripped of its golden foliage, and kept but its ripened berries with the red birds darting and fluttering around them like so many hiccoughing Comanches about a dramseller's tent. And here, if one must tell a thing so painful, our old friend the mocking-bird, neglecting his faithful wife and letting his home go to decay, kept dropping in, all hours of the day, tasting the berries' rank pulp, stimulating, stimulating, drowning care, you know,—“Lost so many children, and the rest gone [Pg 181]off in ungrateful forgetfulness of their old hard-working father; yes;” and ready to sing or fight, just as any other creature happened not to wish; and going home in the evening scolding and swaggering, and getting to bed barely able to hang on to the roost. It would have been bad enough, even for a man; but for a bird—and a mocking-bird!

But the storm wrought a great change in one small house not in Grande Pointe, yet of it. Until the storm, ever since the day St. Pierre had returned from the little railway-station where Claude had taken the cars, he had seemed as patiently resigned to the new loneliness of Bayou des Acadiens as his thatched hut, which day by day sat so silent between the edges of the dark forest and the darker stream, looking out beyond the farther bank, and far over the green waste of rushes with its swarms of blackbirds sweeping capriciously now this way and now that, and the phantom cloud-shadows passing slowly across from one far line of cypress wood to another. But since that night when the hut's solitary occupant could not sleep for the winds and for thought of Claude, there was a great difference inside. And this did not diminish; it grew. It is hard for a man to be both father and mother, and at the same time be childless. The bonds of this condition began slowly to tighten around St. Pierre's heart and then to cut into it. And so, the same day on which Claude in Vermilionville left the Beausoleils' tavern, the cabin on Bayou des Acadiens, ever in his mind's eye, was empty, and in Grande Pointe his father stood on the one low step at the closed door of Bonaventure's little frame schoolhouse.

[Pg 182]He had been there a full minute and had not knocked. Every movement, to-day, came only after an inward struggle. Many associations crowded his mind on this doorstep. Six years before, almost on this spot, a mere brier-patch then, he and Maximian Roussel had risen from the grassy earth and given the first two welcoming hand-grasps to the schoolmaster. And now, as one result, Claude, who did not know his letters then, was rising—nay, had risen—to greatness! Claude, whom once he would have been glad to make a good fisherman and swamper, or at the utmost a sugar-boiler, was now a greater, in rank at least, than

the very schoolmaster. Truly “knowledge is power”—alas! yes; for it had stolen away that same Claude. The College Point priest’s warning had come true: it was “good-by to Grande Pointe!”—Nay, nay, it must not be! Is that the kind of power education is? Power to tear children from their parents? Power to expose their young heads to midnight storms? Power to make them eager to go, and willing to stay away, from their paternal homes? Then indeed the priest had said only too truly, that these public schools teach every thing except morals and religion! From the depth of St. Pierre’s heart there quickly came a denial of the charge; and on the moment, like a chanted response, there fell upon his listening ear a monotonous intonation from within the door. A reading-class had begun its exercise. He knew the words by heart, so often had Claude and he read them together. He followed the last stanza silently with his own lips.

[Pg 183]“Remember, child, remember  
That you love, with all your might,  
The God who watches o’er us  
And gives us each delight,  
Who guards us ever in the  
day,  
And saves us in the night.”

Tears filled the swamper’s eyes. He moved as if to leave the place. But again he paused, with one foot half lowered to the ground. His jaws set, a frown came between his eyes; he drew back the foot, turned again to the door, and gave a loud, peremptory knock.

Bonaventure came to the door. Anxiety quickly overspread his face as he saw the gloom on St. Pierre’s. He stood on the outer edge of the sill, and drew the door after him.

“I got good news,” said St. Pierre, with no softening of countenance.

“Good news?”

“Yass.—I goin’ make Claude come home.”

Bonaventure could only look at him in amazement. St. Pierre looked away and continued:

“S no use. Can’t stand it no longer.” He turned suddenly upon the schoolmaster. “Why you di’n’ tell me ed’cation goin’ teck my boy ’way from me?” In Bonaventure a look of distressful self-justification quickly changed to one of anxious compassion.

“Wait!” he said. He went back into the schoolroom, leaving St. Pierre in the open door, and said:

“Dear chil’run, I perceive generally the aspects of fatigue. You have been good scholars. I pronounce a half-hollyday till to-morrow morning. Come, each and every one, with lessons complete.”

[Pg 184]The children dispersed peaceably, jostling one another to shake the schoolmaster's hand as they passed him. When they were gone he put on his coarse straw hat, and the two men walked slowly, conversing as they went, down the green road that years before had first brought the educator to Grande Pointe.

"Dear friend," said the schoolmaster, "shall education be to blame for this separation? Is not also non-education responsible? Is it not by the non-education of Grande Pointe that there is nothing fit here for Claude's staying?"

"You stay!"

"I? I stay? Ah! sir, I stay, yes! Because like Claude, leaving my home and seeking by wandering to find the true place of my utility, a voice spake that I come at Grande Pointe. Behold me! as far from my childhood home as Claude from his. Friend,—ah! friend, what shall I,—shall Claude,—shall any man do with education! Keep it? Like a miser his gold? What shall the ship do when she is load'? Dear friend,"—they halted where another road started away through the underbrush at an abrupt angle on their right,—“where leads this narrow road? To Belle Alliance plantation only, or not also to the whole world? So is education! That road here once fetch me at Grande Pointe; the same road fetch Claude away. Education came whispering, ‘Claude St. Pierre, come! I have constitute’ you citizen of the world’. Come, come, forgetting self!’ Oh, dear friend, education is not for self alone! Nay, even self is not for self!”

[Pg 185]“Well, den,”—the deep-voiced woodman stood with one boot on a low stump, fiercely trimming a branch that he had struck from the parent stem with one blow of his big, keen clasp-knife,—“self not for self,—for what he gone off and lef’ me in de swamp?”

“Ah, sir!” replied Bonaventure, “what do I unceasingly tell those dear school-chil’run? ‘May we not make the most of self, yet not for self?’” He laid his hand upon St. Pierre’s shoulder. “And who sent Claude hence if not his unselfish father?”

“I was big fool,” said St. Pierre, whittling on.

“Nay, wise! Discovering the great rule of civilize-ation. Every man not for self, but for every other!”

The swamper disclaimed the generous imputation with a shake of the head.

“Naw, I dunno nut’n’ ’bout dat. I look out for me and my boy, me.—And beside,”—he abruptly threw away the staff he had trimmed, shut his knife with a snap, and thrust it into his pocket,—“I dawn’t see ed’cation make no diff’ence. You say ed’cation—priest say religion—me, I dawn’t see neider one make no

diff'ence. I see every man look out for hisself and his li'l' crowd. Not you, but"—He waved his hand bitterly toward the world at large.

"Ah, sir!" cried Bonaventure, "'tis not something what you can see all the time, like the horns on a cow! And yet, sir,—and yet!"—he lifted himself upon tiptoe and ran his fingers through his thin hair—"the education that make' no difference is but a dead body! and the religion that make' no difference is a ghost! [Pg 186]Behole! behole two thing' in the worl', where all is giving and getting, two thing', *contrary*, yet resem'ling! 'Tis the left han'—alas, alas!—giving only to get; and the right, blessed of God, getting only to give! How much resem'ling, yet how *contrary*! The one—han' of all strife; the other—of all peace. And oh! dear friend, there are those who call the one civilize-ation, and the other religion. Civilize-ation? Religion? They are one! They are body and soul! I care not what religion the priest teach you; in God's religion is comprise' the total *mécanique* of civilize-ation. We are all in it; you, me, Claude, Sidonie; all in it! Each and every at his task, however high, however low, working not to get, but to give, and not to give only to his own li'l' crowd, but to all, to all!" The speaker ceased, for his hearer was nodding his head with sceptical impatience.

"Yass," said the woodman, "yass; but look, Bonaventure. Di'n' you said one time, 'Knowledge is power'?"

"Yes, truly; and it is."

"But what use knowledge be power if goin' give ev't'in' away?"

Bonaventure drew back a step or two, suddenly jerked his hat from his head, and came forward again with arms stretched wide and the hat dangling from his hand. "Because—because God will not let it sta-a-ay given away! 'Give—it shall be give' to you.' Every thing given out into God's worl' come back to us roun' God's worl'! Resem'ling the stirring of water in a bucket."

[Pg 187]But St. Pierre frowned. "Yass,—wat' in bucket,—yass. Den no man dawn't keep nut'n'. Dawn't own nut'n' he got."

"Ah! sir, there is a better owning than to *own*. 'Tis giving, dear friend; 'tis giving. To get? To have? That is not to own. The giver, not the getter; the giver! he is the true owner. Live thou not to get, but to give." Bonaventure's voice trembled; his eyes were full of tears.

The swamper stood up with his own eyes full, but his voice was firm. "Bonaventure, I don't got much. I got dat li'l' shanty on Bayou des Acadiens, and li'l' plunder inside—few kittle', and pan',—cast-net, fish-line', two, t'ree gun', and—my wife' grave, yond' in graveyard. But I got Claude,—my boy, my son. You t'ink God want me give my son to whole worl'?"

The schoolmaster took the woodsman's brown wrist tenderly into both his hands, and said, scarce above a whisper, "He gave His, first. He started it. Who can refuse, He starting it? And thou wilt not refuse." The voice rose—"I see, I see the victory! Well art thou nominated 'St. Pierre!' for on that rock of giving"—

"Naw, sir! Stop!" The swamper dashed the moisture from his eyes and summoned a look of stubborn resolve. "Mo' better you call me St. Pierre because I'm a fisherman what cuss when I git mad. Look! You dawn't want me git Claude back in Gran' Point'. You want me to give, give. Well, all right! I goin' *quit* Gran' Point' and give myself, me, to [Pg 188]Claude. I kin read, I kin write, I t'ink kin do better 'long wid Claude dan livin' all 'lone wid snake' and alligator. I t'ink dass mo' better for everybody; and anyhow, I dawn't care; I dawn't give my son to nobody; I give myself to Claude."

Bonaventure and his friend gazed into each other's wet eyes for a moment. Then the schoolmaster turned, lifted his eyes and one arm toward the west, and exclaimed:

"Ah, Claude! thou receivest the noblest gift in Gran' Point'!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

### CONVERGING LINES.

On the prairies of Vermilion and Lafayette, winter is virtually over by the first week in February. From sky to sky, each tree and field, each plain and plantation grove, are putting on the greenery of a Northern May. Even on Côte Gelée the housewife has persuaded *le vieux* to lay aside his gun, and the early potatoes are already planted. If the moon be at the full, much ground is ready for the sower; and those ploughmen and pony teams and men working along behind them with big, clumsy hoes, over in yonder field, are planting corn. Those silent, tremulous strands of black that in the morning sky come gliding, high overhead, from the direction of the great [Pg 189]sea-marshes and fade into the northern blue, are flocks that have escaped the murderous gun of the pot-hunter. Spring and Summer are driving these before them as the younger and older sister, almost abreast, come laughing, and striving to outrun each other across the Mexican Gulf.

Those two travellers on horseback, so dwarfed by distance, whom you see approaching out of the north-west, you shall presently find have made, in their

dress, no provision against cold. At Carancro, some miles away to the north-east, there is a thermometer; and somewhere in Vermilionville, a like distance to the south-east, there might possibly be found a barometer; but there is no need of either to tell that the air to-day is threescore and ten and will be more before it is less. Before the riders draw near you have noticed that only one is a man and the other a woman. And now you may see that he is sleek and alert, blonde and bland, and the savage within us wants to knock off his silk hat. All the more so for that she is singularly pretty to be met in his sole care. The years count on her brows, it is true, but the way in which they tell of matronhood—and somehow of widowhood too—is a very fair and gentle way. Her dress is plain, but its lines have a grace that is also dignity; and the lines of her face—lines is too hard a word for them—are not those of time, but of will and of care, that have chastened and refined one another. She speaks only now and then. Her companion's speech fills the wide intervals.

"Yesterday morning," he says, "as I came along [Pg 190]here a little after sunrise, there was a thin fog lying only two or three feet deep, close to the level ground as far as you could see, hiding the whole prairie, and making it look for all the world like a beautiful lake, with every here and there a green grove standing out of it like a real little island."

She replies that she used to see it so in her younger days. The Acadian accent is in her words. She lifts her black eyes, looks toward Carancro, and is silent.

"You're thinking of the changes," says her escort.

"Yass; 'tis so. Dey got twenty time' many field' like had befo'. Peop' don't raise cattl' no more; raise crop'. Dey say even dat land changin'."

"How changing?"

"I dunno. I dunno if 'tis so. Dey say prairie risin' mo' higher every year. I dunno if 'tis so. I t'ink dat land don't change much; but de peop', yass."

"Still, the changes are mostly good changes," responds the male rider. "'Tisn't the prairie, but the people that are rising. They've got the schoolhouse, and the English language, and a free paid labor system, and the railroads, and painted wagons, and Cincinnati furniture, and sewing-machines, and melodeons, and Horsford's Acid Phosphate; and they've caught the spirit of progress!"

"Yass, 'tis so. Dawn't see nobody seem satisfied—since de army—since de railroad."

"Well, that's right enough; they oughtn't to be satisfied. You're not satisfied, are you? And yet you've never done so well before as you have this season. I wish I

could say the same for the ‘Album [Pg 191]of Universal Information;’ but I can’t. I tell you that, Madame Beausoleil; I wouldn’t tell anybody else.”

Zoséphine responds with a dignified bow. She has years ago noticed in herself, that, though she has strength of will, she lacks clearness and promptness of decision. She is at a loss, now, to know what to do with Mr. Tarbox. Here he is for the seventh time. But there is always a plausible explanation of his presence, and a person of more tactful propriety, it seems to her, never put his name upon her tavern register or himself into her company. She sees nothing shallow or specious in his dazzling attainments; they rekindle the old ambitions in her that Bonaventure lighted; and although Mr. Tarbox’s modest loveliness is not visible, yet a certain fundamental rectitude, discernible behind all his nebulous gaudiness, confirms her liking. Then, too, he has earned her gratitude. She has inherited not only her father’s small fortune, but his thrift as well. She can see the sagacity of Mr. Tarbox’s advice in pecuniary matters, and once and once again, when he has told her quietly of some little operation into which he and the ex-governor—who “thinks the world of me,” he says—were going to dip, and she has accepted his invitation to venture in also, to the extent of a single thousand dollars, the money has come back handsomely increased. Even now, the sale of all her prairie lands to her former kinsmen-in-law, which brought her out here yesterday and lets her return this morning, is made upon his suggestion, and is so advantageous that somehow, she doesn’t know [Pg 192]why, she almost fears it isn’t fair to the other side. The fact is, the country is passing from the pastoral to the agricultural life, the prairies are being turned into countless farms, and the people are getting wealth. So explains Mr. Tarbox, whose happening to come along this morning bound in her direction is pure accident—pure accident.

“No, the ‘A. of U. I.’ hasn’t done its best,” he says again. “For one thing, I’ve had other fish to fry. You know that.” He ventures a glance at her eyes, but they ignore it, and he adds, “I mean other financial matters.”

“’Tis so,” says Zoséphine; and Mr. Tarbox hopes the reason for this faint repulse is only the nearness of this farmhouse peeping at them through its pink veil of blossoming peach-trees, as they leisurely trot by.

“Yes,” he says; “and, besides, ‘Universal Information’ isn’t what this people want. The book’s too catholic for them.”

“Too Cat’oleek!” Zoséphine raises her pretty eyebrows in grave astonishment—  
“‘Cadian’ is all Cat’oleek.”

“Yes, yes, ecclesiastically speaking, I know. That wasn’t my meaning. Your smaller meaning puts my larger one out of sight; yes, just as this Cherokee hedge puts out of sight the miles of prairie fields, and even that house we just passed.

No, the 'A. of U. I.,'—I love to call it that; can you guess why?" There is a venturesome twinkle in his smile, and even a playful permission in her own as she shakes her head.

[Pg 193]"Well, I'll tell you; it's because it brings U and I so near together."

"Hah!" exclaims Madame Beausoleil, warningly, yet with sunshine and cloud on her brow at once. She likes her companion's wit, always so deep, and yet always so delicately pointed! His hearty laugh just now disturbs her somewhat, but they are out on the wide plain again, without a spot in all the sweep of her glance where an eye or an ear may ambush them or their walking horses.

"No," insists her fellow-traveller; "I say again, as I said before, the 'A. of U. I.'"—he pauses at the initials, and Zoséphine's faint smile gives him ecstasy—"hasn't done its best. And yet it has done beautifully! Why, when did you ever see such a list as this?" He dexterously draws from an extensive inner breast-pocket, such as no coat but a book-agent's or a shoplifter's would be guilty of, a wide, limp, morocco-bound subscription-book. "Here!" He throws it open upon the broad Texas pommel. "Now, just for curiosity, look at it—oh! you can't see it from away off there, looking at it sideways!" He gives her a half-reproachful, half-beseeching smile and glance, and gathers up his dropped bridle. They come closer. Their two near shoulders approach each other, the two elbows touch, and two dissimilar hands hold down the leaves. The two horses playfully bite at each other; it is their way of winking one eye.

"Now, first, here's the governor's name; and then his son's, and his nephew's, and his other son's, and his cousin's. And here's Pierre Cormeaux, and [Pg 194]Baptiste Clément, you know, at Carancro; and here's Basilide Sexnailder, and Joseph Cantrelle, and Jacques Hébert; see? And Gaudin, and Laprade, Blouin, and Roussel,—old Christofle Roussel of Beau Bassin,—Duhon, Roman and Simonette Le Blanc, and Judge Landry, and Thériot,—Colonel Thériot,—Martin, Hébert again, Robichaux, Mouton, Mouton again, Robichaux again, Mouton—oh, I've got 'em all!—Castille, Beausoleil—cousin of yours? Yes, he said so; good fellow, thinks you're the greatest woman alive." The two dissimilar hands, in turning a leaf, touch, and the smaller one leaves the book. "And here's Guilbeau, and Latiolais, and Thibodeaux, and Soudrie, and Arcenau—flowers of the community—"I gather them in,"—and here's a page of Côte Gelée people, and—Joe Jefferson hadn't got back to the Island yet, but I've got his son; see? And here's—can you make out this signature? It's written so small"—

Both heads,—with only the heavens and the dear old earth-mother to see them,—both heads bend over the book; the hand that had retreated returns, but bethinks itself and withdraws again; the eyes of Mr. Tarbox look across their corners at

the sedate brow so much nearer his than ever it has been before, until that brow feels the look, and slowly draws away. Look to your mother, Marguerite; look to her! But Marguerite is not there, not even in Vermilionville; nor yet in Lafayette parish; nor anywhere throughout the wide prairies of Opelousas or Attakapas. Triumph fills Mr. Tarbox's breast.

[Pg 195]"Well," he says, restoring the book to its hiding-place, "seems like I ought to be satisfied with that; doesn't it to you?"

It does; Zoséphine says so. She sees the double meaning, and Mr. Tarbox sees that she sees it, but must still move cautiously. So he says:

"Well, I'm not satisfied. It's perfect as far as it goes, but don't expect me to be satisfied with it. If I've seemed satisfied, shall I tell you why it was, my dear—friend?"

Zoséphine makes no reply; but her dark eyes meeting his for a moment, and then falling to her horse's feet, seem to beg for mercy.

"It's because," says Mr. Tarbox, while her heart stands still, "it's because I've made"—there is an awful pause—"more money without the 'A. of U. I.' this season than I've made with it."

Madame Beausoleil catches her breath, shows relief in every feature, lifts her eyes with sudden brightness, and exclaims:

"Dass good! Dass mighty good, yass! 'Tis so."

"Yes, it is; and I tell you, and you only, because I'm proud to believe you're my sincere friend. Am I right?"

Zoséphine busies herself with her riding-skirt, shifts her seat a little, and with studied carelessness assents.

"Yes," her companion repeats; "and so I tell you. The true business man is candid to all, communicative to none. And yet I open my heart to you. I can't help it; it won't stay shut. And you must see, I'm [Pg 196]sure you must, that there's something more in there besides money; don't you?" His tone grows tender.

Madame Beausoleil steals a glance toward him,—a grave, timid glance. She knows there is safety in the present moment. Three horsemen, strangers, far across the field in their front, are coming toward them, and she feels an almost proprietary complacency in a suitor whom she can safely trust to be saying just the right nothings when those shall meet them and ride by. She does not speak; but he says:

“You know there is, dear Jos——friend!” He smiles with modest sweetness. “G. W. Tarbox doesn’t run after money, and consequently he never runs past much without picking it up.” They both laugh in decorous moderation. The horsemen are drawing near; they are Acadians. “I admit I love to make money. But that’s not my chief pleasure. My chief pleasure is the study of human nature.

‘The proper study of mankind is man.\* \* \* \* \*Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,The glory, jest, and riddle of the world.’

“This season I’ve been studying these Acadian people. And I like them! They don’t like to be reminded that they’re Acadians. Well, that’s natural; the Creoles used to lord it over them so when the Creoles were slave-holding planters and they were small farmers. That’s about past now. The Acadians are descended from peasants, that’s true, while some Creoles are from the French nobility. But, hoo! wouldn’t any fair-minded person”—the horsemen [Pg 197]are within earshot; they are staring at the silk hat—“Adjieu.”

“Adjieu.” They pass.

“—Wouldn’t any fair-minded person that knows what France was two or three hundred years ago—show you some day in the ‘Album’—about as lief be descended from a good deal of that peasantry as from a good deal of that nobility? I should smile! Why, my dear—friend, the day’s coming when the Acadians will be counted as good French blood as there is in Louisiana! They’re the only white people that ever trod this continent—*island or mainland*—who never on their own account oppressed anybody. Some little depredation on their British neighbors, out of dogged faithfulness to their king and church,—that’s the worst charge you can make. Look at their history! all poetry and pathos! Look at their character! brave, peaceable, loyal, industrious, home-loving”—

But Zoséphine was looking at the speaker. Her face is kindled with the inspiration of his praise. His own eyes grow ardent.

“Look at their women! Ah, Josephine, I’m looking at one! Don’t turn away.

—‘One made upOf loveliness alone;A woman, of her gentle sexThe seeming paragon.’

‘The reason firm, the temperate will,Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;A perfect woman nobly planned,To warn, to comfort, and command.’

[Pg 198]“You can’t stop me, Josephine; it’s got to come, and come right now. I’m a homeless man, Josephine, tired of wandering, with a heart bigger and weaker than I ever thought I had. I want you! I love you! I’ve never loved anybody before in my life except myself, and I don’t find myself as lovely as I used. Oh,

take me, Josephine! I don't ask you to love as if you'd never loved another. I'll take what's left, and be perfectly satisfied! I know you're ambitious, and I love you for that! But I do think I can give you a larger life. With you for a wife, I believe I could be a man you needn't be ashamed of. I'm already at the head of my line. Best record in the United States, Josephine, whether by the day, week, month, year, or locality. But if you don't like the line, I'll throw up the 'A. of U. I.' and go into any thing you say; for I want to lift you higher, Josephine. You're above me already, by nature and by rights, but I can lift you, I know I can. You've got no business keeping tavern; you're one of Nature's aristocrats. Yes, you are! and you're too young and lovely to stay a widow—in a State where there's more men than there's women. There's a good deal of the hill yet to climb before you start down. Oh, let's climb it together, Josephine! I'll make you happier than you are, Josephine; I haven't got a bad habit left; such as I had, I've quit; it don't pay. I don't drink, chew, smoke, tell lies, swear, quarrel, play cards, make debts, nor belong to a club—be my wife! Your daughter 'll soon be leaving you. You can't be happy alone. Take me! take me!" He urges his horse close—her face is averted—and [Pg 199]lays his hand softly but firmly on her two, resting folded on the saddle-horn. They struggle faintly and are still; but she slowly shakes her hanging head.

"O Josephine! you don't mean no, do you? Look this way! you don't mean no?" He presses his hand passionately down upon hers. Her eyes do not turn to his; but they are lifted tearfully to the vast, unanswering sky, and as she mournfully shakes her head again, she cries,—

"I dunno! I dunno! I can't tell! I got to see Marguerite."

"Well, you'll see her in an hour, and if she"—

"Naw, naw! 'tis not so; Marguerite is in New Orleans since Christmas."

Very late in the evening of that day Mr. Tarbox entered the principal inn of St. Martinville, on the Teche. He wore an air of blitheness which, though silent, was overdone. As he pushed his silk hat back on his head, and registered his name with a more than usual largeness of hand, he remarked:

"Man wants but little here below, Nor wants that little long."

"Give me a short piece of candle and a stumpy candlestick—and

'Take me up, and bear me hence Into some other chamber'"—

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Tarbox," responded the host; and as his guest received the candle and heard the number of his room,—“books must 'a' went well this fine day."

[Pg 200]Mr. Tarbox fixed him with his eye, drew a soft step closer, said in a low tone:

“My only books  
Were woman’s looks,  
And folly’s all they’ve taught me.”

The landlord raised his eyebrows, rounded his mouth, and darted out his tongue. The guest shifted the candle to his left hand, laid his right softly upon the host’s arm, and murmured:

“List! Are we alone? If I tell thee something, wilt thou tell it never?”

The landlord smiled eagerly, shook his head, and bent toward his speaker.

“Friend Perkins,” said Mr. Tarbox, in muffled voice—

“So live, that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan which  
moves  
To that mysterious realm where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent  
halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave, at night,  
Scourged to his  
dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy  
grave  
Like one that wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to  
pleasant dreams.’

“Don’t let the newspapers get hold of it—good-night.”

But it was only at daybreak that Mr. Tarbox disordered the drapery of his couch to make believe he had slept there, and at sunrise he was gone to find Claude.

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[Pg 201]

## CHAPTER VII.

### ’THANASE’S VIOLIN.

Had Marguerite gone to New Orleans the better to crush Claude out of her heart? No, no! Her mother gave an explanation interesting and reasonable enough, and at the same time less uncomfortably romantic. Marguerite had gone to the city to pursue studies taught better there than in Opelousas; especially music.

Back of this was a reason which she had her mother’s promise not to mention,—the physician’s recommendation—a change of scene. He spoke of slight malarial influences, and how many odd forms they took; of dyspepsia and its queer freaks; of the confining nature of house cares, and of how often they “ran down the

whole system.” His phrases were French, but they had all the weary triteness of these; while Marguerite rejoiced that he did not suspect the real ailment, and Zoséphine saw that he divined it perfectly.

A change of scene. Marguerite had treated the suggestion lightly, as something amusingly out of proportion to her trivial disorder, but took pains not to reject it. Zoséphine had received it with troubled assent, and mentioned the small sugar-farm and orangery of the kinsman Robichaux, down on Bayou Terrebonne. But the physician said, “If that would not be too dull;” mentioned, casually, the city, and [Pg 202]saw Marguerite lighten up eagerly. The city was chosen; the physician’s sister, living there, would see Marguerite comfortably established. All was presently arranged.

“And you can take your violin with you, and study music,” he said. Marguerite had one, and played it with a taste and skill that knew no competitor in all the surrounding region.

It had belonged to her father. Before she was born, all Lafayette parish had known it tenderly. Before she could talk she had danced—courtesied and turned, tiptoed and fallen and risen again, latter end first, to the gay strains he had loved to wring from it. Before it seemed safe, for the instrument, to trust it in her hands, she had learned to draw its bow; and for years, now, there had been no resident within the parish who could not have been her scholar better than to be her teacher.

When Claude came, she had shut the violin in its case, and left the poor thing hidden away, despising its powers to charm, lost in self-contempt, and helpless under the spell of a chaste passion’s first enchantment. When he went, she still forgot the instrument for many days. She returned with more than dutiful energy to her full part in the household cares, and gave every waking hour not so filled to fierce study. If she could not follow him—if a true maiden must wait upon faith—at least she would be ready if fate should ever bring him back.

But one night, when she had conned her simple books until the words ran all together on the page, [Pg 203]some good angel whispered, “The violin!” She took it and played. The music was but a song, but from some master of song. She played it, it may be, not after the best rules, yet as one may play who, after life’s first great billow has gone over him, smites again his forgotten instrument. With tears, of all emotions mingled, starting from her eyes, and the bow trembling on the strings, she told the violin her love. And it answered her:

“Be strong! be strong! you shall not love for naught. He shall—he shall come back—he shall come back and lead us into joy.” From that time the violin had more employment than ever before in all its days.

So it and Marguerite were gone away to the great strange city together. The loneliness they left behind was a sad burden to Zoséphine. No other one thing had had so much influence to make so nearly vulnerable the defences of her heart when Mr. Tarbox essayed to storm them. On the night following that event, the same that he had spent so sleeplessly in St. Martinville, she wrote a letter to Marguerite, which, though intended to have just the opposite effect, made the daughter feel that this being in New Orleans, and all the matter connected with it, were one unmixed mass of utter selfishness. The very written words that charged her to stay on seemed to say, "Come home!" Her strong little mother! always quiet and grave, it is true, and sometimes sad; yet so well poised, so concentrated, so equal to every passing day and hour!—she to seem—in this [Pg 204]letter—far out of her course, adrift, and mutely and dimly signalling for aid! The daughter read the pages again and again. What could they mean? Here, for instance, this line about the mother's coming herself to the city, if, and if, and if!

The letter found Marguerite in the bosom of a family that dwelt in the old Rue Bourbon, only a short way below Canal Street, the city's centre. The house stands on the street, its drawing-room windows opening upon the sidewalk, and a narrow balcony on the story above shading them scantily at noon. A garden on the side is visible from the street through a lofty, black, wrought-iron fence. Of the details within the enclosure, I remember best the vines climbing the walls of the tall buildings that shut it in, and the urns and vases, and the evergreen foliage of the Japan plum-trees. A little way off, and across the street, was the pleasant restaurant and salesroom of the Christian Women's Exchange.

The family spoke English. Indeed, they spoke it a great deal; and French—also a great deal. The younger generation, two daughters and a son, went much into society. Their name was that of an ancient French noble house, with which, in fact, they had no connection. They took great pains to call themselves Creoles, though they knew well enough they were Acadians. The Acadian caterpillar often turns into a Creole butterfly. Their great-grandfather, one of the children of the Nova-Scotian deportation, had been a tobacco-farmer on the old Côte Acadien in St. John the Baptist parish. Lake des Allemands lay there, [Pg 205]just behind him. In 1815, his son, their grandfather, in an excursion through the lake and bayou beyond, discovered, far south-eastward in the midst of the Grande Prairie des Allemands, a "pointe" of several hundred acres extent. Here, with one or two others, he founded the Acadian settlement of "La Vacherie," and began to build a modest fortune. The blood was good, even though it was not the blood of ancient robbers; and the son in the next generation found his way, by natural and easy stages, through Baratavia and into the city, and became the "merchant" of his many sugar and rice planting kinsmen and neighbors.

It was a great favor to Marguerite to be taken into such a household as this. She felt it so. The household felt it so. Yet almost from the start they began to play her, in their social world, as their best card—when they could. She had her hours of school and of home study; also her music, both lessons and practice; was in earnest both as to books and violin, and had teachers who also were in earnest; and so she found little time for social revels. Almost all sociality is revel in New-Orleans society, and especially in the society she met.

But when she did appear, somehow she shone. A native instinct in dress,—even more of it than her mother had at the same age,—and in manners and speech, left only so little rusticity as became itself a charm rather than a blemish, suggested the sugar-cane fields; the orange-grove; the plantation-house, with pillared porch, half-hidden in tall magnolias and laurestines and bushes of red and white camellias higher [Pg 206]and wider than arms can reach, and covered with their regal flowers from the ground to their tops; and the bayou front lined with moss-draped live-oaks, their noonday shadows a hundred feet across. About her there was not the faintest hint of the country tavern. She was but in her seventeenth year; but on her native prairies, where girls are women at fourteen, seventeen was almost an advanced stage of decay. She seemed full nineteen, and a very well-equipped nineteen as social equipments went in the circle she had entered. Being a schoolgirl was no drawback; there are few New-Orleans circles where it is; and especially not in her case, for she needed neither to titter nor chatter,—she could talk. And then, her violin made victory always easy and certain.

Sometimes the company was largely of down-town Creoles; sometimes of up-town people,—“Americans;” and often equally of the two sorts, talking French and English in most amusing and pleasing confusion. For the father of the family had lately been made president of a small bank, and was fairly boxing the social compass in search of depositors. Marguerite had not yet discovered that—if we may drag the metaphor ashore—to enter society is not to emerge upon an unbroken table-land, or that she was not on its highest plateau. She noticed the frequency with which she encountered unaccomplished fathers, stupid mothers, rude sons and daughters, and ill-distributed personal regard; but she had the common-sense not to expect more of society than its nature warrants, guessed rightly that she would find the same [Pg 207]thing anywhere else, and could not know that these elements were less mixed with better here than in many other of the city’s circles, of whose existence she had not even heard. However:

Society, at its very best, always needs, and at its best or worst always contains, a few superior members, who make themselves a blessing by working a constant, tactful redistribution of individuals by their true values, across the unworthy lines upon which society ever tends to stratify. Such a person, a matron, sat with Marguerite one April evening under a Chinese lantern in the wide, curtained

veranda of an Esplanade-street house whose drawing-room and Spanish garden were filled with company.

Marguerite was secretly cast down. This lady had brought her here, having met her but a fortnight before and chosen her at once, in her own private counsels, for social promotion. And Marguerite had played the violin. In her four months' advanced training she had accomplished wonders. Her German professor made the statement, while he warned her against enthusiastic drawing-room flattery. This evening she had gotten much praise and thanks. Yet these had a certain discriminative moderation that was new to her ear, and confirmed to her, not in the pleasantest way, the realization that this company was of higher average intelligence and refinement than any she had met before. She little guessed that the best impression she had ever made she made here to-night.

Of course it was not merely on account of the violin. She had beauty, not only of face and head, but of [Pg 208]form and carriage. So that when she stood with her instrument, turning, as it were, every breath of air into music, and the growing volume of the strains called forth all her good Acadian strength of arms and hand, she charmed not merely the listening ear, but the eye, the reason, and the imagination in its freest range.

But, indeed, it was not the limitations of her social triumphs themselves that troubled her. Every experience of the evening had helped to show her how much wider the world was than she had dreamed, and had opened new distances on the right, on the left, and far ahead; and nowhere in them all could eye see, or ear hear, aught of that one without whom to go back to old things was misery, and to go on to new was mere weariness. And the dear little mother at home!—worth nine out of any ten of all this crowd—still at home in that old tavern-keeping life, now intolerable to think of, and still writing those yearning letters that bade the daughter not return! No wonder Marguerite's friend had divined her feelings, and drawn her out to the cool retreat under the shadow of the veranda lanterns.

A gentleman joined them, who had "just come," he said. Marguerite's companion and he were old friends. Neither he nor Marguerite heard each other's name, nor could see each other's face more than dimly. He was old enough to be twitted for bachelorhood, and to lay the blame upon an outdoor and out-of-town profession. Such words drew Marguerite's silent but close attention.

[Pg 209]The talk turned easily from this to the ease with which the fair sex, as compared with the other, takes on the graces of the drawing-room. "Especially," the two older ones agreed, "if the previous lack is due merely to outward circumstances." But Marguerite was still. Here was a new thought. One who attained all those graces and love's prize also might at last, for love's sake, have

to count them but dross, or carry them into retirement, the only trophies of abandoned triumphs. While she thought, the conversation went on.

“Yes,” said her friend, replying to the bachelor, “we acquire drawing-room graces more easily; but why? Because most of us think we must. A man may find success in one direction or another; but a woman has got to be a social success, or she’s a complete failure. She can’t snap her fingers at the drawing-room.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Marguerite, “she can if she want!” She felt the strength to rise that moment and go back to Opelousas, if only—and did not see, until her companions laughed straight at her, that the lady had spoken in jest.

“Still,” said the bachelor, “the drawing-room is woman’s element—realm—rather than man’s, whatever the reasons may be. I had a young man with me last winter”—

“I knew it!” thought Marguerite.

“—until lately, in fact; he’s here in town now,—whom I have tried once or twice to decoy into company in a small experimental way. It’s harder than [Pg 210]putting a horse into a ship. He seems not to know what social interchange is for.”

“Thinks it’s for intellectual profit and pleasure,” interrupted the ironical lady.

“No, he just doesn’t see the use or fun of it. And yet, really, that’s his only deficiency. True, he listens better than he talks—overdoes it; but when a chap has youth, intelligence, native refinement, integrity, and good looks, as far above the mean level as many of our society fellows are below it, it seems to me he ought to be”—

“Utilized,” suggested the lady, casting her eyes toward Marguerite and withdrawing them as quickly, amused at the earnestness of her attention.

“Yes,” said the bachelor, and mused a moment. “He’s a talented fellow. It’s only a few months ago that he really began life. Now he’s outgrown my service.”

“Left the nest,” said the lady.

“Yes, indeed. He has invented”—

“Oh, dear!”

The bachelor was teased. “Ah! come, now; show your usual kindness; he has, really, made a simple, modest agricultural machine that—meets a want long felt. Oh! you may laugh; but he laughs last. He has not only a patent for it, but a good sale also, and is looking around for other worlds to conquer.”

“And yet spurns society? Ours!”

“No, simply develops no affinity for it; would like to, if only to please me; but can't. Doesn't even make intimate companions among men; simply clings [Pg 211]to his fond, lone father, and the lone father to him, closer than any pair of twin orphan girls that ever you saw. I don't believe any thing in life could divide them.”

“Ah, don't you trust him! Man proposes, Cupid disposes. A girl will stick to her mother; but a man? Why, the least thing—a pair of blue eyes, a yellow curl”—

The bachelor gayly shook his head, and, leaning over with an air of secrecy, said: “A pair of blue eyes have shot him through and through, and a yellow curl is wound all round him from head to heel, and yet he sticks to his father.”

“He can't live,” said the lady. Marguerite's hand pressed her arm, and they rose. As the bachelor drew the light curtain of a long window aside, that they might pass in, the light fell upon Marguerite's face. It was entirely new to him. It seemed calm. Yet instantly the question smote him, “What have I done? what have I said?” She passed, and turned to give a parting bow. The light fell upon him. She was right; it was Claude's friend, the engineer.

When he came looking for them a few minutes later, he only caught, by chance, a glimpse of them, clouded in light wraps and passing to their carriage. It was not yet twelve.

Between Marguerite's chamber and that of one of the daughters of the family there was a door that neither one ever fastened. Somewhere down-stairs a clock was striking three in the morning, when this door softly opened and the daughter stole into [Pg 212]Marguerite's room in her night-robe. With her hair falling about her, her hands unconsciously clasped, her eyes starting, and an outcry of amazement checked just within her open, rounded mouth, she stopped and stood an instant in the brightly lighted chamber.

Marguerite sat on the bedside exactly as she had come from the carriage, save that a white gossamer web had dropped from her head and shoulders, and lay coiled about her waist. Her tearless eyes were wide and filled with painful meditation, even when she turned to the alarmed and astonished girl before her. With suppressed exclamations of wonder and pity the girl glided forward, cast her arms about the sitting figure, and pleaded for explanation.

“It is a headache,” said Marguerite, kindly but firmly lifting away the intertwining arms.—“No, no, you can do nothing.—It is a headache.—Yes, I will go to bed presently; you go to yours.—No, no”—

The night-robed girl looked for a moment more into Marguerite's eyes, then sank to her knees, buried her face in her hands, and wept. Marguerite laid her hands upon the bowed head and looked down with dry eyes. "No," she presently said again, "it is a headache. Go back to your bed.—No, there is nothing to tell; only I have been very, very foolish and very, very selfish, and I am going home to-morrow. Good-night."

The door closed softly between the two. Then Marguerite sank slowly back upon the bed, closed her eyes, and rocking her head from side to side, said again and again, in moans that scarcely left the lips:

[Pg 213]"My mother! my mother! Take me back! Oh! take me back, my mother! my mother!"

At length she arose, put off her attire, lay down to rest, and, even while she was charging sleep with being a thousand leagues away—slept.

When she awoke, the wide, bright morning filled all the room. Had some sound wakened her? Yes, a soft tapping came again upon her door. She lay still. It sounded once more. For all its softness, it seemed nervous and eager. A low voice came with it:

"Marguerite!"

She sprang from her pillow.—"Yes!"

While she answered, it came again,—

"Marguerite!"

With a low cry, she cast away the bed-coverings, threw back the white mosquito-curtain and the dark masses of her hair, and started up, lifted and opened her arms, cried again, but with joy, "My mother! my mother!" and clasped Zoséphine to her bosom.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SHAKING PRAIRIE.

Manifestly it was a generous overstatement for Claude's professional friend to say that Claude had outgrown his service. It was true only that by and by there had come a juncture in his affairs where he could not, without injustice to others,

make a place for [Pg 214]Claude which he could advise Claude to accept, and they had parted with the mutual hope that the separation would be transient. But the surveyor could not but say to himself that such incidents, happening while we are still young, are apt to be turning-points in our lives, if our lives are going to have direction and movement of their own at all.

St. Pierre had belted his earnings about him under the woollen sash that always bound his waist, shouldered his rifle, taken one last, silent look at the cabin on Bayou des Acadiens, stood for a few moments with his hand in Bonaventure's above one green mound in the churchyard at Grande Pointe, given it into the schoolmaster's care, and had gone to join his son. Of course, not as an idler; such a perfect woodsman easily made himself necessary to the engineer's party. The company were sorry enough to lose him when Claude went away; but no temptation that they could invent could stay him from following Claude. Father and son went in one direction, and the camp in another.

I must confess to being somewhat vague as to just where they were. I should have to speak from memory, and I must not make another slip in topography. The changes men have made in Southern Louisiana these last few years are great. I say nothing, again, of the vast widths of prairie stripped of the herds and turned into corn and cane fields: when I came, a few months ago, to that station on Morgan's Louisiana and Texas Railroad where Claude first went aboard a railway-train, somebody had actually moved the bayou, the swamp, and the prairie apart!

[Pg 215]However, the exact whereabouts of the St. Pierres is not important to us. Mr. Tarbox, when in search of the camp he crossed the Teche at St. Martinville, expected to find it somewhere north-eastward, between that stream and the Atchafalaya. But at the Atchafalaya he found that the work in that region had been finished three days before, and that the party had been that long gone to take part in a new work down in the *prairies tremblantes* of Terrebonne Parish. The Louisiana Land Reclamation Company,—I think that was the name of the concern projecting the scheme. This was back in early February, you note.

Thither Mr. Tarbox followed. The "Album of Universal Information" went along, and "did well." It made his progress rather slow, of course; but one of Mr. Tarbox's many maxims was, never to make one day pay for another when it could be made to pay for itself, and during this season—this Louisiana campaign, as he called it—he had developed a new art,—making each day pay for itself several times over.

"Many of these people," he said,—but said it solely and silently to himself,—  
"are ignorant, shiftless, and set in their ways; and even when they're not they're

out of the current, as it were; they haven't headway; and so they never—or seldom ever—see any way to make money except somehow in connection with the plantations. There's no end of chances here to a man that's got money-sense, and nerve to use it." He wrote that to Zoséphine, but she wrote no answer. A day rarely passed that he did not find [Pg 216]some man making needless loss through ignorance or inactivity; whereupon he would simply put in the sickle of his sharper wit, and garner the neglected harvest. Or, seeing some unesteemed commodity that had got out of, or had never been brought into, its best form, time, or place, he knew at sight just how, and at what expense, to bring it there, and brought it.

"Give me the gains other men pass by," he said, "and I'll be satisfied. The saying is, 'Buy wisdom;' but I sell mine. I like to sell. I enjoy making money. It suits my spirit of adventure. I like an adventure. And if there's any thing I love, it's an adventure with money in it! But even that isn't my chief pleasure: my chief pleasure's the study of human nature.

'The proper study of mankind is man.\* \* \* \* \*Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,The glory, jest, and riddle of the world.'"

This spoiling of Assyrian camps, so to speak, often detained Mr. Tarbox within limited precincts for days at a time; but "Isn't that what time is for?" he would say to those he had been dealing with, as he finally snapped the band around his pocket-book; and they would respond, "Yes, that's so."

And then he would wish them a hearty farewell, while they were thinking that at least he might know it was his treat.

Thus it was the middle of February when at Houma, the parish seat of Terrebonne, he passed the last rootlet of railway, and, standing finally under the blossoming [Pg 217]orange-trees of Terrebonne Bayou far down toward the Gulf, heard from the chief of the engineering party that Claude was not with him.

"He didn't leave us; we left him; and up to the time when we left he hadn't decided where he would go or what he would do. His father and he are together, you know, and of course that makes it harder for them to know just how to move."

The speaker was puzzled. What could this silk-hatted, cut-away-coated, empearled, free lance of a fellow want with Claude? He would like to find out. So he added, "I may get a letter from him to-morrow; suppose you stay with me until then." And, to his astonishment, Mr. Tarbox quickly jumped at the proposition.

No letter came. But when the twenty-four hours had passed, the surveyor had taken that same generous—not to say credulous—liking for Mr. Tarbox that we have seen him show for St. Pierre and for Claude. He was about to start on a tour of observation eastward through a series of short canals that span the shaking prairies from bayou to bayou, from Terrebonne to Lafourche, Lafourche to Des Allemands, so through Lake Ouacha into and up Baratavia, again across prairie, and at length, leaving Lake Cataouaché on the left, through cypress-swamp to the Mississippi River, opposite New Orleans. He would have pressed Mr. Tarbox to bear him company; but before he could ask twice, Mr. Tarbox had consented. They went in a cat-rigged skiff, with a stalwart negro rowing or towing whenever the sail was not the best.

[Pg 218]“It’s all of sixty miles,” said the engineer; “but if the wind doesn’t change or drop we can sleep to-night in Achille’s hut, send this man and skiff back, and make Achille, with his skiff, put us on board the Louisiana-avenue ferry-launch to-morrow afternoon.”

“Who is Achille?”

“Achille? Oh! he’s merely a ’Cajun pot-hunter living on a shell bank at the edge of Lake Cataouaché, with an Indian wife. Used to live somewhere on Bayou des Allemands, but last year something or other scared him away from there. He’s odd—seems to be a sort of self-made outcast. I don’t suppose he’s ever done anybody any harm; but he just seems to be one of that kind that can’t bear to even try to keep up with the rest of humanity; the sort of man swamps and shaking prairies were specially made for, you know. He’s living right on top of a bank of fossil shells now,—thousands of barrels of them,—that he knows would bring him a little fortune if only he could command the intelligence and the courage to market them in New Orleans. There’s a chance for some bright man who isn’t already too busy. Why didn’t I think to mention it to Claude? But then neither he nor his father have got the commercial knowledge they would need. Now”—The speaker suddenly paused, and, as the two men sat close beside each other under an umbrella in the stern of the skiff, looked into Mr. Tarbox’s pale-blue eyes, and smiled, and smiled.

“I’m here,” said Mr. Tarbox.

“Yes,” responded the other, “and I’ve just made out why! And you’re right, Tarbox; you and Claude, [Pg 219]with or without his father, will make a strong team. You’ve got no business to be canvassing books, you”—

“It’s my line,” said the canvasser, smiling fondly and pushing his hat back,—it was wonderful how he kept that hat smooth,—“and I’m the head of the line:

‘A voice replied far up the height,Excelsior!’

I was acquainted with Mr. Longfellow.”

“Tarbox,” persisted the engineer, driving away his own smile, “you know what you are; you are a born contractor! You’ve found it out, and”—smiling again—“that’s why you’re looking for Claude.”

“Where is he?” asked Mr. Tarbox.

“Well, I told you the truth when I said I didn’t know; but I haven’t a doubt he’s in Vermilionville.”

“Neither have I,” said the book-agent; “and if I had, I wouldn’t give it room. If I knew he was in New Jersey, still I’d think he was in Vermilionville, and go there looking for him. And wherefore? For occult reasons.” The two men looked at each other smilingly in the eye, and the boat glided on.

The wind favored them. With only now and then the cordelle, and still more rarely the oars, they moved all day across the lands and waters that were once the fastnesses of the Baratarian pirates. The engineer made his desired observations without appreciable delays, and at night they slept under Achille’s thatch of rushes.

[Pg 220]As the two travellers stood alone for a moment next morning, the engineer said:

“You seem to be making a study of my pot-hunter.”

“It’s my natural instinct,” replied Mr. Tarbox. “The study of human nature comes just as natural to me as it does to a new-born duck to scratch the back of its head with its hind foot; just as natural—and easier. The pot-hunter is a study; you’re right.”

“But he reciprocates,” said the engineer; “he studies you.”

The student of man held his smiling companion’s gaze with his own, thrust one hand into his bosom, and lifted the digit of the other: “The eyes are called the windows of the soul,—

‘And looks commercing with the skies,Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.’

“Have you tried to look into his eyes? You can’t do it. He won’t let you. He’s got something in there that he doesn’t want you to see.”

In the middle of the afternoon, when Achille’s skiff was already re-entering the shades of the swamp on his way homeward, and his two landed passengers stood

on the levee at the head of Harvey's Canal with the Mississippi rolling by their feet and on its farther side the masts and spires of the city, lighted by the western sun, swinging round the long bend of her yellow harbor, Mr. Tarbox offered his hand to say good-by. The surveyor playfully held it.

"I mean no disparagement to your present calling," he said, "but the next time we meet I hope you'll be a contractor."

[Pg 221]"Ah!" responded Tarbox, "it's not my nature. I cannot contract; I must always expand. And yet—I thank you.

"Pure thoughts are angel visitors. Be such  
The frequent inmates of thy guileless  
breast."

"Good luck! Good-by!"

One took the ferry; the other, the west bound train at Gretna.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### NOT BLUE EYES, NOR YELLOW HAIR.

When the St. Pierres found themselves really left with only each other's faces to look into, and the unbounded world around them, it was the father who first spoke:

"Well, Claude, where you t'ink 'better go?"

There had been a long, silent struggle in both men's minds. And now Claude heard with joy this question asked in English. To ask it in their old Acadian tongue would have meant retreat; this meant advance. And yet he knew his father yearned for Bayou des Acadiens. Nay, not his father; only one large part of his father's nature; the old, French, home-loving part.

What should Claude answer? Grande Pointe? Even for St. Pierre alone that was impossible. "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb?" [Pg 222]No; the thatched cabin stood there,—stands there now; but, be he happy or unhappy, no power can ever make St. Pierre small enough again to go back into that shell. Let it stand, the lair of one of whom you may have heard, who has retreated straight backward from Grande Pointe and from advancing enlightenment and order,—the village drunkard, Chat-oué.

Claude's trouble, then, was not that his father's happiness beckoned in one direction and his in another; but that his father's was linked on behind his. Could the father endure the atmosphere demanded by the son's widening power? Could the second nature of lifetime habits bear the change? Of his higher spirit there was no doubt. Neither father nor son had any conception of happiness separate from noble aggrandizement. Nay, that is scant justice; far more than they knew, or than St. Pierre, at least, would have acknowledged, they had caught the spirit of Bonaventure, to call it by no higher name, and saw that the best life for self is to live the best possible for others. "For all others," Bonaventure would have insisted; but "for Claude," St. Pierre would have amended. They could not return to Grande Pointe.

Where, then, should they go? Claude stood with his arms akimbo, looked into his father's face, tried to hide his perplexity under a smile, and then glanced at their little pile of effects. There lay their fire-arms, the same as ever; but the bundles in Madras handkerchiefs had given place to travelling-bags, and instead of pots and pans here were books and instruments. What reply did these things make? New Orleans? [Pg 223]The great city? Even Claude shrank from that thought.

No, it was the name of quite a different place they spoke; a name that Claude's lips dared not speak, because, for lo! these months and months his heart had spoken it,—spoken it at first in so soft a whisper that for a long time he had not known it was his heart he heard. When something within uttered and re-uttered the place's name, he would silently explain to himself: "It is because I am from home. It is this unfixed camp-life, this life without my father, without Bonaventure, that does it. This is not love, of course; I know that: for, in the first place, I was in love once, when I was fourteen, and it was not at all like this; and in the second place, it would be hopeless presumption in me, muddied-booted vagabond that I am; and in the third place, a burnt child dreads fire. And so it cannot be love. When papa and I are once more together, this unaccountable longing will cease."

But, instead of ceasing, it had grown. The name of the place was still the only word the heart would venture; but it meant always one pair of eyes, one young face, one form, one voice. Still it was not love—oh, no! Now and then the hospitality of some plantation-house near the camp was offered to the engineers; and sometimes, just to prove that this thing was not love, he would accept such an invitation, and even meet a pretty maiden or two, and ask them for music and song—for which he had well-nigh a passion—and talk enough to answer their questions and conjectures about a surveyor's life, etc.; but when he got back to [Pg 224]camp, matters within his breast were rather worse than better.

He had then tried staying in camp, but without benefit,—nothing cured, every thing aggravated. And yet he knew so perfectly well that he was not in love, that just to realize the knowledge, one evening, when his father was a day's march ahead, and he was having a pleasant chat with the "chief," no one else nigh, and they were dawdling away its closing hour with pipes, metaphysics, psychology, and like trifles, which Claude, of course, knew all about,—Claude told him of this singular and amusing case of haunting fantasy in his own experience. His hearer had shown even more amusement than he, and had gone on smiling every now and then afterward, with a significance that at length drove Claude to bed disgusted with him and still more with himself. There had been one offsetting comfort; an unintentional implication had somehow slipped in between his words, that the haunting fantasy had blue eyes and yellow hair.

"All right," the angry youth had muttered, tossing on his iron couch, "let him think so!" And then he had tossed again, and said below his breath, "It is not love: it is not. But I must never answer its call; if I do, love is what it will be. My father, my father! would that I could give my whole heart to thee as thou givest all to me!"

God has written on every side of our nature,—on the mind, on the soul, yes, and in our very flesh,—the interdict forbidding love to have any one direction only, under penalty of being forever dwarfed. This [Pg 225]Claude vaguely felt; but lacking the clear thought, he could only cry, "Oh, is it, *is it*, selfishness for one's heart just to be hungry and thirsty?"

And now here sat his father, on all their worldly goods, his rifle between his knees, waiting for his son's choice, and ready to make it his own. And here stood the son, free of foot to follow that voice which was calling to-day louder than ever before, but feeling assured that to follow it meant love without hope for him, and for this dear father the pain of yielding up the larger share of his son's heart,—as if love were subject to arithmetic!—yielding it to one who, thought Claude, cared less for both of them than for one tress of her black hair, one lash of her dark eyes. While he still pondered, the father spoke.

"Claude, I tell you!" his face lighted up with courage and ambition. "We better go—Mervilionville!"

Claude's heart leaped, but he kept his countenance. "Vermilionville? No, papa; you will not like Vermilionville."

"Yaas! I will like him. 'Tis good place! Bonaventure come from yondah. When I was leav' Gran' Point', Bonaventure, he cry, you know, like I tole you. He tell Sidonie he bringin' ed'cation at Gran' Point' to make Gran' Point' more better, but now ed'cation drive bes' men 'way from Gran' Point'. And den he say, 'St.

Pierre, may bee you go Mervilionville; dat make me glad,' he say: 'dat way,' he say, 'what I rob Peter I pay John.' Where we go if dawn't go Mervilionville? St. Martinville, Opelousas, New [Pg 226]Iberia? Too many Creole yondah for me. Can't go to city; city too big to live in. Why you dawn't like Mervilionville? You write me letter, when you was yondah, you like him fus' class!"

Claude let silence speak consent. He stooped, and began to load himself with their joint property. He had had, in his life, several sorts of trouble of mind; but only just now at twenty was he making the acquaintance of his conscience. Vermilionville was the call that had been sounding within him all these months, and Marguerite was the haunting fantasy.

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## CHAPTER X.

### A STRONG TEAM.

I would not wish to offend the self-regard of Vermilionville. But—what a place in which to seek enlargement of life! I know worth and greatness have sometimes, not to say oftentimes, emerged from much worse spots; from little lazy villages, noisy only on Sunday, with grimier court-houses, deeper dust and mud, their trade more entirely in the hands of rat-faced Isaacs and Jacobs, with more frequent huge and solitary swine slowly scavenging about in abysmal self-occupation, fewer vine-clad cottages, raggeder negroes, and more decay. Vermilionville is not the worst, at all. I have seen large, and enlarging, lives there.

Hither came the two St. Pierres. "No," Claude [Pg 227]said; "they would not go to the Beusoleil house." Privately he would make himself believe he had not returned to any thing named Beusoleil, but only and simply to Vermilionville. On a corner opposite the public square there was another "hotel;" and it was no great matter to them if it was mostly pine-boards, pale wall-paper, and transferable whitewash. But, not to be outdone by its rival round the corner, it had, besides, a piano, of a quality you may guess, and a landlady's daughter who seven times a day played and sang "I want to be somebody's darling," and had no want beyond. The travellers turned thence, found a third house full, conjectured the same of the only remaining one, and took their way, after all, towards Zoséphine's. It was quite right, now, to go there, thought Claude, since destiny led; and so he let it lead both his own steps and the thrumping boots of this dear figure in Campeachy hat and soft untrimmed beard, that followed ever at his side.

And then, after all!—looking into those quiet black eyes of Zoséphine's,—to hear that Marguerite was not there! Gone! Gone to the great city, the place “too big to live in.” Gone there for knowledge, training, cultivation, larger life, and finer uses! Gone to study an art,—an art! Risen beyond him “like a diamond in the sky.” And he fool enough to come rambling back, blue-shirted and brown-handed, expecting to find her still a tavern maid! So, farewell fantasy! 'Twas better so; much better. Now life was simplified. Oh, yes; and St. Pierre made matters better still by saying to Zoséphine:

[Pg 228]“I dinn' know you got one lill gal. Claude never tell me 'bout dat. I spec' dat why he dawn't want 'come yeh. He dawn't like gal; he run f'om 'em like dog from yalla-jacket. He dawn't like none of 'm. What he like, dass his daddy. He jus' married to his daddy.” The father dropped his hand, smilingly, upon his son's shoulder with a weight that would have crushed it in had it been ordinary cast-iron.

Claude took the hand and held it, while Zoséphine smiled and secretly thanked God her child was away. In her letters to Marguerite she made no haste to mention the young man's re-appearance, and presently a small thing occurred that made it well that she had left it untold.

With Claude and his father some days passed unemployed. Yet both felt them to be heavy with significance. The weight and pressure of new and, to them, large conditions, were putting their inmost quality to proof. Claude saw, now, what he could not see before; why his friend the engineer had cast him loose without a word of advice as to where he should go or what he should do. It was because by asking no advice he had really proposed to be his own master. And now, could he do it? Dare he try it?

The first step he took was taken, I suppose, instinctively rather than intelligently; certainly it was perilous: he retreated into himself. St. Pierre found work afield, for of this sort there was plenty; the husbandmen's year, and the herders' too, were just gathering good momentum. But Claude now stood looking on empty-handed where other men were busy with agricultural [Pg 229]utensils or machines; or now kept his room, whittling out a toy miniature of some apparatus, which when made was not like the one he had seen, at last. A great distress began to fill the father's mind. There had been a time when he could be idle and whittle, but that time was gone by; that was at Grande Pointe; and now for his son—for Claude—to become a loungee in tavern quarters—Claude had not announced himself to Vermilionville as a surveyor, or as any thing—Claude to be a hater of honest labor—was this what Bonaventure called civilize-ation? Better, surely better, go back to the old pastoral life. How yearningly it was calling them to its fragrant bosom! And almost every thing was answering the call. The town was

tricking out its neglected decay with great trailing robes of roses. The spade and hoe were busy in front flower-beds and rear kitchen-gardens. Lanes were green, skies blue, roads good. In the *bas fonds* the oaks of many kinds and the tupelogs were hiding all their gray in shimmering green; in these coverts and in the reedy marshes, all the feathered flocks not gone away north were broken into nesting pairs; in the fields, crops were springing almost at the sower's heels; on the prairie pastures, once so vast, now being narrowed so rapidly by the people's thrift, the flocks and herds ate eagerly of the bright new grass, and foals, calves, and lambs stood and staggered on their first legs, while in the door-yards housewives, hens, and mother-geese warned away the puppies and children from downy broods under the shade of the China-trees. But Claude? Even his books lay unstudied, and his [Pg 230]instruments gathered dust, while he potted over two or three little wooden things that a boy could not play with without breaking. At last St. Pierre could bear it no longer.

"Well, Claude, dass ten days han'-runnin' now, we ain't do not'in' but whittlin'."

Claude slowly pushed his model from him, looked, as one in a dream, into his father's face, and suddenly and for the first time saw what that father had suffered for a fortnight. But into his own face there came no distress; only, for a moment, a look of tender protestation, and then strong hope and confidence.

"Yass," he said, rising, "dass true. But we dawn't got whittle no mo'." He pointed to the model, then threw his strong arms akimbo and asked, "You know what is dat?"

"Naw," replied the father, "I dunno. I t'ink 'taint no real mash-in' [machine] 'cause I dawn't never see nuttin' like dat at Belle Alliance plant-ation, neider at Belmont; and I know, me, if anybody got one mash-in', any place, for do any t'in' mo' betteh or mo' quicker, Mistoo Walleece an' M'sieu Le Bourgeois dey boun' to 'ave 'im. Can't hitch nuttin' to dat t'ing you got dare; she too small for a rat. What she is, Claude?"

A yet stronger hope and courage lighted Claude's face. He laid one hand upon the table before him and the other upon the shoulder of his sitting companion:

"Papa, if you want to go wid me to de city, we make one big enough for two mule'. Dass a mash-in'—a new mash-in'—my mash-in'—my invention!"

[Pg 231]"Invench? What dat is—invench?"

Some one knocked on the door. Claude lifted the model, moved on tiptoe, and placed it softly under the bed. As he rose and turned again with reddened face, a card was slipped under the door. He took it and read, in a pencil scrawl,—

“State Superintendent of Public Education,”—

looked at his father with a broad grin, and opened the door.

Mr. Tarbox had come at the right moment. There was a good hour and a half of the afternoon still left, and he and Claude took a walk together. Beyond a stile and a frail bridge that spanned a gully at one end of the town, a noble avenue of oaks leads toward Vermilion River. On one side of this avenue the town has since begun to spread, but at that time there were only wide fields on the right hand and on the left. At the farther end a turn almost at right angles to the left takes you through a great gate and across the railway, then along a ruined hedge of roses, and presently into the oak-grove of the old ex-governor’s homestead. This was their walk.

By the time they reached the stile, Claude had learned that his friend was at the head of his line, and yet had determined to abandon that line for another

“Far up the height—Excelsior!”

Also that his friend had liked him, had watched him, would need him, and was willing then and there to [Pg 232]assure him a modest salary, whose amount he specified, simply to do whatever he might call upon him to do in his (Claude’s) “line.”

They were walking slowly, and now and then slower still. As they entered the avenue of oaks, Claude declined the offer. Then they went very slowly indeed. Claude learned that Mr. Tarbox, by some chance not explained, had been in company with his friend the engineer; that the engineer had said, “Tarbox, you’re a born contractor,” and that Claude and he would make a “strong team;” that Mr. Tarbox’s favorite study was human nature; that he knew talent when he saw it; had studied Claude; had fully expected him to decline to be his employee, and liked him the better for so doing.

“That was just a kind of test vote; see?”

Then Mr. Tarbox offered Claude a partnership; not an equal one, but withal a fair interest.

“We’ve got to commence small and branch out gradually; see?” And Claude saw.

“Now, you wonder why I don’t go in alone. Well, I’ll tell you; and when I tell you, I’ll astonish you. I lack education! Now, Claude, I’m taking you into my confidence. You’ve done nothing but go to school and study for about six years. I had a different kind of father from yours; I never got one solid year’s schooling, all told, in my life. I’ve picked up cords of information, but an ounce of education’s worth a ton of information. Don’t you believe that? eh? it is so! I say

it, and I'm the author of the A. of U. I. I like to call it that, because it brings you and I so near [Pg 233]together; see?" The speaker smiled, was still, and resumed:

"That's why I need you. And I'm just as sure you need me. I need not only the education you have now, but what you're getting every day. When you see me you see a man who is always looking awa-a-ay ahead. I see what you're going to be, and I'm making this offer to the Claude St. Pierre of the future."

Mr. Tarbox waited for a reply. The avenue had been passed, the railway crossed, and the hedge skirted. They loitered slowly into the governor's grove, under whose canopy the beams of the late afternoon sun were striking and glancing. But all their light seemed hardly as much as that which danced in the blue eyes of Mr. Tarbox while Claude slowly said:

"I dunno if we can fix dat. I was glad to see you comin'. I reckon you jus' right kind of man I want. I jus' make a new invention. I t'ink 'f you find dat's good, dat be cawntrac' enough for right smart while. And beside', I t'ink I invent some mo' b'fo' long."

But Mr. Tarbox was not rash. He only asked quiet and careful questions for some time. The long sunset was sending its last rays across the grove-dotted land, and the birds in every tree were filling the air with their sunset song-burst, when the two friends re-entered the avenue of oaks. They had agreed to join their fortunes. Now their talk drifted upon other subjects.

"I came back to Vermilionville purposely to see you," said Mr. Tarbox. "But I'll tell you privately, you wasn't the only cause of my coming."

Claude looked at him suddenly. Was this another [Pg 234]haunted man? Were there two men haunted, and only one fantasy? He felt ill at ease. Mr. Tarbox saw, but seemed not to understand. He thought it best to speak plainly.

"I'm courting her, Claude; and I think I'm going to get her."

Claude stopped short, with jaws set and a bad look in his eye.

"Git who?"

But Mr. Tarbox was calm—even complacent. He pushed his silk hat from his forehead, and said:

... "One made upOf loveliness alone;A woman, of her gentle sexThe seeming paragon.'

I refer to the Rose of Vermilionville, the Pearl of the Parish, the loveliest love and fairest fair that ever wore the shining name of Beausoleil. She's got to

change it to Tarbox, Claude. Before yon sun has run its course again, I'm going to ask her for the second time. I've just begun asking, Claude; I'm going to keep it up till she says yes."

"She's not yondah!" snarled Claude, with the frown and growl of a mastiff. "She's gone to de city."

Mr. Tarbox gazed a moment in blank amazement. Then he slowly lifted his hat from his head, expanded his eyes, drew a long slow groan, turned slowly half around, let the inhalation go in a long keen whistle, and cried:

"Oh! taste! taste! Who's got the taste? What [Pg 235]do you take me for? Who *are* you talking about? That little monkey? Why, man alive, it's the mother I'm after. Ha, ha, ha!"

If Claude said any thing in reply, I cannot imagine what it was. Mr. Tarbox had a right to his opinion and taste, if taste it could be called, and Claude was helpless to resent it, even in words; but for hours afterward he execrated his offender's stupidity, little guessing that Mr. Tarbox, in a neighboring chamber, alone and in his night-robe, was bending, smiting his thigh in silent merriment, and whispering to himself:

"He thinks I'm an ass! He thinks I'm an ass! He can't see that I was simply investigating him!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

### HE ASKS HER AGAIN.

Claude and his father left the next day,—Saturday. Only the author of the A. of U. I. knew whither they were gone. As they were going he said very privately to Claude:

"I'll be with you day after to-morrow. You can't be ready for me before then, and you and your father can take Sunday to look around, and kind o' see the city. But don't go into the down-town part; you'll not like it; nothing but narrow streets and old buildings with histories to 'em, and gardens hid away inside of 'em, and damp archways, and pagan-looking [Pg 236]females who can't talk English, peeping out over balconies that offer to drop down on you, and then don't keep their word; every thing old-timey, and Frenchy, and Spanishy; unprogressive—you wouldn't like it. Go up-town. That's American. It's new and fresh. There

you'll find beautiful mansions, mostly frame, it's true, but made to look like stone, you know. There you'll see wealth! There you'll get the broad daylight—

'The merry, merry sunshine, that makes the heart so gay.'

See? Yes, and Monday we'll meet at Jones's, 17 Tchoupitoulas Street; all right; I'll be on hand. But to-day and to-morrow—'Alabama'—'here I rest.' I feel constrained"—he laid his hand upon his heart, closed one eye, and whispered—"to stay. I would fain spend the sabbath in sweet Vermilionville. You get my idea?"

The sabbath afternoon, beyond the town, where Mr. Tarbox strolled, was lovelier than can be told. Yet he was troubled. Zoséphine had not thus far given him a moment alone. I suppose, when a hundred generations more have succeeded us on the earth, lovers will still be blind to the fact that women do not do things our way. How can they? That would be capitulation at once, and even we should find the whole business as stupid as shooting barnyard fowls.

Zoséphine had walked out earlier than Tarbox. He had seen her go, but dared not follow. He read "thou shalt not" as plain as print on her back as she walked [Pg 237]quietly away; that same little peremptory back that once in her father's calèche used to hold itself stiff when 'Thanase rode up behind. The occasional townsman that lifted his slouch hat in deep deference to her silent bow, did not read unusual care on her fair brow; yet she, too, was troubled.

Marguerite! she was the trouble. Zoséphine knew her child could never come back to these old surroundings and be content. The mother was not willing she should. She looked at a photograph that her daughter had lately sent her. What a change from the child that had left her! It was like the change from a leaf to a flower. There was but one thing to do: follow her. So Zoséphine had resolved to sell the inn. She was gone, now, to talk with the old ex-governor about finding a purchaser. Her route was not by the avenue of oaks, but around by a northern and then eastern circuit. She knew Mr. Tarbox must have seen her go; had a genuine fear that he would guess whither she was bound, and yet, deeper down in her heart than woman ever lets soliloquy go, was willing he should. For she had another trouble. We shall come to that presently.

Her suitor walked in the avenue of oaks.

"She's gone," he reckoned to himself, "to consult the governor about something, and she'll come back this way." He loitered out across fields, but not too far off or out of sight; and by and by there she came, with just the slightest haste in her walk. She received him with kindly reserve, and they went more slowly, together.

[Pg 238]She told where she had been, and that the governor approved a decision she had made.

“Yass; I goin’ sell my hotel.”

“He’s right!” exclaimed her companion, with joy; “and you’re right!”

“Well, ’tain’t sold yet,” she responded. She did not smile as she looked at him. He read trouble; some trouble apart from the subject, in her quiet, intense eyes.

“You know sombodie want buy dat?” she asked.

“I’ll find some one,” he promptly replied. Then they talked a little about the proper price for it, and then were very still until Mr. Tarbox said:

“I walked out here hoping to meet you.”

Madame Beausoleil looked slightly startled, and then bowed gravely.

“Yes; I want your advice. It’s only business, but it’s important, and it’s a point where a woman’s instinct is better than a man’s judgment.”

There was some melancholy satire in her responding smile; but it passed away, and Mr. Tarbox went on:

“You never liked my line of business”—

Zoséphine interrupted with kind resentment:

“Ah!”

“No; I know you didn’t. You’re one of the few women whose subscription I’ve sought in vain. Till then I loved my business. I’ve never loved it since. I’ve decided to sell out and quit. I’m going into another business, one that you’ll admire. I don’t say any thing about the man going into it,—

[Pg 239]‘Honor and shame from no condition rise: Act well your part; there all the honor lies,’—

but I want your advice about the party I think of going in with. It’s Claude St. Pierre.”

Zoséphine turned upon the speaker a look of steady penetration. He met it with a glance of perfect confiding. “She sees me,” he said, at the same time, far within himself.

It was as natural to Mr. Tarbox to spin a web as it is for a spider. To manœuvre was the profoundest instinct of his unprofound nature. Zoséphine felt the slender

threads weaving around her. But in her heart of hearts there was a certain pleasure in being snared. It could not, to her, seem wholly bad for Tarbox to play spider, provided he should play the harmless spider. Mr. Tarbox spoke again, and she listened amiably.

“Claude is talented. He has what I haven’t; I have what he hasn’t, and together we could make each other’s fortunes, if he’s only the square, high-style fellow I think he is. I’m a student of human nature, and I think I’ve made him out. I think he’ll do to tie to. But will he? You can tell me. You read people by instinct. I ask you just as a matter of business advice and in business confidence. What do you think? Will you trust me and tell me—as my one only trusted friend—freely and fully—as I would tell you?”

Madame Beausoleil felt the odds against her, but she looked into her companion’s face with bright, frank eyes and said: “Yass, I t’ink yass; I t’ink ’tis so.”

“Thanks!” said her friend, with unnecessary fervor [Pg 240]and tenderness. “Then Claude will be my partner, unless—my dear friend, shall you be so kind—I might almost say confiding—to me, and me not tell you something I think you’d ought to know? For I hope we are always to be friends; don’t you?”

“Yass,” she said, very sadly and sweetly.

“Thanks! And if Claude and I become partners that will naturally bring him into our circle, as it were; see?”

The little madame looked up with a sudden austere exaltation of frame and intensity of face, but her companion rushed on with—“And I’m going to tell you, let the risk to me be what it may, that it may result in great unhappiness to Claude; for he loves your daughter, who, I know, you must think too good for him!”

Madame Beausoleil blushed as though she herself were Marguerite and Tarbox were Claude.

“Ah! love Marguerite! Naw, naw! He dawn’t love noboddie but hees papa! Hees papa tell me dat! Ah! naw, ’tis *not* so!”

Mr. Tarbox stopped still; and when Zoséphine saw they were in the shadow of the trees while all about them was brightened by the momentary Southern twilight, she, too, stopped, and he spoke.

“What brought Claude back here when by right he should have gone straight to the city? You might have guessed it when you saw him.” He paused to let her revolve the thought, and added in his own mind—“If you had disliked the idea,

you'd 'a' suspected him quick enough"—and was pleased. He spoke again. "But I didn't stop with guessing."

[Pg 241]Zoséphine looked up to his face from the little foot that edgewise was writing nothings in the dust.

"No," continued her companion: "I walked with him two evenings ago in this avenue, and right where we stand now, without his ever knowing it—then or now—he as good as told me. Yes, Josephine, he dares to love your beautiful and accomplished daughter! The thought may offend you, but—was I not right to tell you?"

She nodded and began to move slowly on, he following.

"I'm not betraying anyone's confidence," persisted he; "and I can't help but have a care for you. Not that you need it, or anybody's. You can take care of yourself if any man or woman can. Every time your foot touches the ground it says so as plain as words. That's what first caught my fancy. You haven't got to have somebody to take care of you. O Josephine! that's just why I want to take care of you so bad! I can take care of myself, and I used to like to do it; I was just that selfish and small; but love's widened me. I can take care of myself; but, oh! what satisfaction is there in it? Is there any? Now, I ask you! It may do for you, for you're worth taking care of; but I want to take care of something I needn't be ashamed to love!" He softly stole her hand as they went. She let it stay, yet looked away from him, up through the darkling branches, and distressfully shook her head.

"Don't, Josephine!—don't do that. I want you to take care of me. You could do better, I know, if [Pg 242]love wasn't the count; but when it comes to loving you, I'm the edition deloox! I know you've an aspiring nature, but so have I; and I believe with you to love and you loving me, and counselling and guiding me, I could climb high. O Josephine! it isn't this poor Tarbox I'm asking you to give yourself to; it's the Tarbox that is to be; it's the coming Tarbox! Why, it's even a good business move! If it wasn't I wouldn't say a word! You know I can, and will take the very best care of every thing you've got; and I know you'll take the same of mine. It's a good move, every way. Why, here's every thing just fixed for it! Listen to the mocking-bird! See him yonder, just at the right of the stile. See! O Josephine! don't you see he isn't

'Still singing where the weeping willow waves'?

he's on the myrtle; the myrtle, Josephine, and the crape-myrtle at that!—widowhood unwidowed!—Now he's on the fence—but he'll not stay there,—and you mustn't either!" The suitor smiled at his own ludicrousness, yet for all that

looked beseechingly in earnest. He stood still again, continuing to hold her hand. She stole a furtive glance here and there for possible spectators. He smiled again.

“You don’t see anybody; the world waives its claim.” But there was such distress in her face that his smile passed away, and he made a new effort to accommodate his suit to her mood. “Josephine, there’s no eye on us except it’s overhead. Tell me this; if he that was yours until ten years ago was [Pg 243]looking down now and could speak to us, don’t you believe he’d say yes?”

“Oh! I dunno. Not to-day! Not *dis* day!” The widow’s eyes met his gaze of tender inquiry and then sank to the ground. She shook her head mournfully. “Naw, naw; not dis day. ’Tis to-day ’Thanase was kill’!”

Mr. Tarbox relaxed his grasp and Zoséphine’s hand escaped. She never had betrayed to him so much distress as filled her face now. “De man what kill’ him git away! You t’ink I git marrie’ while dat man alive? Ho-o-o! You t’ink I let Marguerite see me do dat! Ah! naw!” She waved him away and turned to leave the spot, but he pressed after, and she paused once more. A new possibility lighted his eyes. He said eagerly:

“Describe the man to me. Describe him. How tall was he? How old would he be now? Did they try to catch him? Did you hear me talking yesterday about a man? Is there any picture of him? Have you got one? Yes, you have; it’s in your pocket now with your hand on it. Let me see it.”

“Ah! I di’n’ want you to see dat!”

“No, I don’t suppose, as far as you know yourself, you did.” He received it from her, and with his eyes still on her, continued: “No, but you knew that if I got a ghost of a chance, I’d see you alone. You knew what I’d ask you;—yes, you did, Josephine, and you put this thing into your pocket to make it easier to say no.”

“Hah! easier! Hah! easier! I need somethin’ to [Pg 244]*help* me do dat? Hah! ’Tis *not* so!” But the weakness of the wordy denial was itself almost a confession.

They moved on. A few steps brought them into better light. Mr. Tarbox looked at the picture. Zoséphine saw a slight flash of recognition. He handed it back in silence, and they walked on, saying not a word until they reached the stile. But there, putting his foot upon it to bar the way, he said:

“Josephine, the devil never bid so high for me before in his life as he’s bidding for me now. And there’s only one thing in the way; he’s bid too late.”

Her eyes flashed with injured resentment. “Ah, you! you dawn’t know not’n’—” But he interrupted:

“Stop, I don’t mean more than just what I say. Six years ago—six and a half—I met a man of a kind I’d never met, to know it, before. You know who’ I mean, don’t you?”

“Bonaventure?”

“Yes. That meeting made a turning-point in my life. You’ve told me that whatever is best in you, you owe to him. Well, knowing him as I do, I can believe it; and if it’s true, then it’s the same with me; for first he, and then you, have made another man out of me.”

“Ah, naw! Bonaventure, *maybe*; but not me; ah, naw!”

“But I tell you, yes! you, Josephine! I’m poor sort enough yet; but I could have done things once that I can’t do now. There was a time when if some miserable outlaw stood, or even seemed, maybe, to stand between me and my chances for happiness, I [Pg 245]could have handed him over to human justice, so called, as easy as wink; but now? No, never any more! Josephine, I know that man whose picture I’ve just looked at. I could see you avenged. I could lay my hands, and the hands of the law, on him inside of twenty-four hours. You say you can’t marry till the law has laid its penalties on him, or at least while he lives and escapes them. Is that right?”

Zoséphine had set her face to oppose his words only with unyielding silence, but the answer escaped her:

“Yass, *'tis* so. *'Tis* ri-ght!”

“No, Josephine. I know you *feel* as if it were; but you don’t *think* so. No, you don’t; I know you better in this matter than you know yourself, and you don’t think it’s right. You know justice belongs to the State, and that when you talk to yourself about what *you* owe to justice, it means something else that you’re too sweet and good to give the right name to, and still want it. You don’t want it; you don’t want revenge, and here’s the proof; for, Josephine, you know, and I know, that if I—even without speaking—with no more than one look of the eye—should offer to buy your favor at that price, even ever so lawfully, you’d thank me for one minute, and then loathe me to the end of your days.”

Zoséphine’s face had lost its hardness. It was drawn with distress. With a gesture of repulsion and pain she exclaimed:

“I di’n’ mean—I di’n’ mean—Ah!”

“What? private revenge? No, of course you didn’t! But what else would it be? O Josephine! don’t [Pg 246]I know you didn’t mean it? Didn’t I tell you so? But I want you to go farther. I want you to put away forever the *feeling*. I want to move

and stand between you and it, and say—whatever it costs me to say it—‘God forbid!’ I do say it; I say it now. I can’t say more; I can’t say less; and somehow,—I don’t know how—wherever you learned it—I’ve learned it from you.”

Zoséphine opened her lips to refuse; but they closed and tightened upon each other, her narrowed eyes sent short flashes out upon his, and her breath came and went long and deep without sound. But at his last words she saw—the strangest thing—to be where she saw it—a tear—*tears*—standing in his eyes; saw them a moment, and then could see them no more for her own. Her lips relaxed, her form drooped, she lifted her face to reply, but her mouth twitched; she could not speak.

“I’m not so foolish as I look,” he said, trying to smile away his emotion. “If the State chooses to hunt him out and put him to trial and punishment, I don’t say I’d stand in the way; that’s the State’s business; that’s for the public safety. But it’s too late—you and Bonnyventure have made it too late—for me to help any one, least of all the one I love, to be revenged.” He saw his words were prevailing and followed them up. “Oh! you don’t need it any more than you really want it, Josephine. You mustn’t ever look toward it again. I throw myself and my love across the path. Don’t walk over us. Take my hand; give me yours; come another way; and if you’ll let [Pg 247]such a poor excuse for a teacher and guide help you, I’ll help you all I can, to learn to say ‘forgive us our trespasses.’ You can begin, now, by forgiving me. I may have thrown away my last chance with you, but I can’t help it; it’s my love that spoke. And if I have spoiled all and if I’ve got to pay for the tears you’re shedding with the greatest disappointment of my life, still I’ve had the glory and the sanctification of loving you. If I must say, I can say,

‘Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.’

Must I? Are you going to make me say that?”

Zoséphine, still in tears, silently and with drooping head pushed her way across the stile and left him standing on the other side. He sent one pleading word after her:

“Isn’t it most too late to go the rest of the way alone?”

She turned, lifted her eyes to his for an instant, and nodded. In a twinkling he was at her side. She glanced at him again and said quite contentedly:

“Yass; *’tis* so,” and they went the short remnant of the way together.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BEAUSOLEILS AND ST. PIERRES.

You think of going to New Orleans in the spring. Certainly, the spring is the time to go. When you find yourself there go some day for luncheon—if they haven't moved it, there is talk of that,—go to the Christian Women's Exchange, already mentioned, in the Rue Bourbon,—French Quarter. You step immediately from the sidewalk into the former drawing-room of a house built early in the century as a fashionable residence. That at least is its aspect. Notice, for instance, in the back parlor, crowded now, like the front one, with eating-tables, a really interesting old wooden mantelpiece. Of course this is not the way persons used to go in old times. They entered by the porte-cochère and open carriage-way upon which these drawing-rooms still open by several glass doors on your right. Step out there. You find a veranda crowded with neat white-clothed tables. Before some late alterations there was a great trellis full of green sunshine and broken breezes entangled among vines of trumpet-creeper and the Scuppernong grape. Here you will be waited on, by small, blue-calico-robed damsels of Methodist unsophistication and Presbyterian propriety, to excellent refreshment; only, if you know your soul's true interest, eschew their fresh bread and insist on having yesterday's.

However, that is a matter of taste there, and no [Pg 249]matter at all here. All I need to add is that there are good apartments overhead to be rented to women too good for this world, and that in the latter end of April, 1884, Zoséphine and Marguerite Beausoleil here made their home.

The tavern was sold. The old life was left far behind. They had done that dreadful thing that everybody deprecates and everybody likes to do—left the country and come to live in the city. And Zoséphine was well pleased. A man who had tried and failed to be a merchant in the city, he and his wife, took the tavern; so Zoséphine had not reduced the rural population—had not sinned against “statistics.”

Besides, she had the good conscience of having fled from Mr. Tarbox—put U. and I. apart, as it were—and yet without being so hid but a suitor's proper persistency could find her. Just now he was far away prosecuting the commercial interests of Claude's one or two inventions; but he was having great success; he wrote once or twice—but got no reply—and hoped to be back within a month.

When Marguerite, after her mother's receipt of each of these letters, thought she saw a cloud on her brow, Zoséphine explained, with a revival of that old look of sweet self-command which the daughter so loved to see, that they contained matters of business not at all to be called troubles. But the little mother did not show the letters. She could not; Marguerite did not even know their writer had changed his business. As to Claude, his name was never mentioned. Each supposed the other was ignorant that he was in the [Pg 250]city, and because he was never mentioned each one knew the other was thinking of him.

Ah, Claude! what are you thinking of? Has not your new partner in business told you they are here? No, not a word of it. "That'll keep till I get back," Mr. Tarbox had said to himself; and such shrewdness was probably not so ungenerous, after all. "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself," he said one evening to a man who could not make out what he was driving at; and later Mr. Tarbox added to himself, "The man that flies the kite must hold the thread." And so he kept his counsel.

But that does not explain. For we remember that Claude already knew that Marguerite was in the city, at least had her own mother's word for it. Here, weeks had passed. New Orleans is not so large; its active centre is very small. Even by accident, on the street, Canal Street especially, he should have seen her time and again.

And he did not; at any rate not to know it. She really kept very busy indoors; and in other doors so did he. More than that, there was his father. When the two first came to the city St. Pierre endured the town for a week. But it was martyrdom, doing it. Claude saw this. Mr. Tarbox was with him the latter part of the week. He saw it. He gave his suggestive mind to it for one night. The next day St. Pierre and he wandered off in street-cars and on foot, and by the time the sun went down again a new provision had been made. At about ninety minutes' jaunt from the city's centre, up the river, and on its farther shore, [Pg 251]near where the old "Company Canal" runs from a lock in the river bank, back through the swamps and into the Baratarian lakes, St. Pierre had bought with his lifetime savings a neat house and fair-sized orangery. No fields? None:

"You see, bom-bye [by-and-by] Claude git doze new mash-in' all right, he go to engineerin' agin, and him and you [Tarbox] be takin' some cawntac' for buil' levee or break up old steamboat, or raise somet'in' what been sunk, or somet'in' dat way. And den he certain' want somboddie to boss gang o' fellows. And den he say, 'Papa, I want you.' And den I say how I got fifty arpent' [42 acres] rice in field. And den he say, 'How I goin' do widout you?' And den dare be fifty arpent' rice gone!" No, no fields.

Better: here with the vast wet forest at his back; the river at his feet; the canal, the key to all Barataria, Lafourche, and Terrebonne, full of Acadian fishermen, hunters, timber-cutters, moss-gatherers, and the like; the great city in sight from yonder neighbor's balustraded house-top; and Claude there to rally to his side or he to Claude's at a moment's warning; he would be an operator—think of that!—not of the telegraph; an operator in the wild products of the swamp, the *prairies tremblantes*, the lakes, and in the small harvests of the *pointes* and bayou margins: moss, saw-logs, venison, wild-duck, fish, crabs, shrimp, melons, garlic, oranges, Périque tobacco. "Knowledge is power;" he knew wood, water, and sky by heart, spoke two languages, could read and write, and understood the ways and tastes of two or three [Pg 252]odd sorts of lowly human kind. Self-command is dominion; I do not say the bottle went never to his lips, but it never was lifted high. And now to the blessed maxim gotten from Bonaventure he added one given him by Tarbox: "In h-union ees strank!" Not mere union of hands alone; but of counsels! There were Claude and Tarbox and he!

For instance; at Mr. Tarbox's suggestion Claude brought to his father from the city every evening, now the "Picayune" and now the "Times-Democrat." From European and national news he modestly turned aside. Whether he read the book-notices I do not know; I hope not. But when he had served supper—he was a capital camp cook—and he and Claude had eaten, and their pipes were lighted, you should have seen him scanning the latest quotations and debating the fluctuations of the moss market, the shrimp market, and the garlic market.

Thus Claude was rarely in the city save in the busy hours of the day. Much oftener than otherwise, he saw the crimson sunsets, and the cool purple sunrises as he and St. Pierre pulled in the father's skiff diagonally to or fro across the Mississippi, between their cottage and the sleepy outposts of city street-cars, just under the levee at the edge of that green oak-dotted plain where a certain man, as gentle, shy, and unworldly as our engineer friend thought Claude to be, was raising the vast buildings of the next year's Universal Exposition.

But all this explains only why Claude did not, to his knowledge, see Marguerite by accident. Yet by [Pg 253]intention! Why not by intention? First, there was his fear of sinning against his father's love. That alone might have failed to hold him back; but, second, there was his helplessness. Love made Tarbox, if any thing were needed to make him, brave; it made Claude a coward. And third, there was that helpless terror of society in general, of which we have heard his friend talk. I have seen a strong horse sink trembling to the earth at the beating of an empty drum. Claude looked with amazed despair at a man's ability to overtake a pretty girl acquaintance in Canal Street, and walk and talk with her. He often asked himself how he had ever been a moment at his ease those November evenings in

the tavern's back-parlor at Vermilionville. It was because he had a task there; sociality was not the business of the hour.

And now I have something else to confess about Claude; something mortifying in the extreme. For you see the poverty of all these explanations. Their very multitude makes them weak. "Many fires cannot quench love;" what was the real matter? I will tell.

Claude's love was a deep sentiment. He had never allowed it to assert itself as a passion. The most he would allow it to be was a yearning. It was scarcely personal. While he was with Marguerite, in the inn, his diffidence alone was enough to hide from him the impression she was making on his heart. In all their intercourse he had scarcely twice looked her full in the face. Afterward she had simply become in memory the exponent of an ideal. He found himself often, [Pg 254]now, asking himself, why are my eyes always looking for her? Should I actually know her, were I to see her on this sidewalk, or in this street-car? And while still asking himself these silent questions, what does he do one day but fall—to all intents and purposes, at least—fall in love—pell-mell—up to the eyebrows—with another girl!

Do you remember Uncle Remus's story of Brer Rabbit with the bucket of honey inverted on him? It was the same way with Claude. "He wa'n't des only bedobble wid it, he wuz des kiver'd." It happened thus: An artist friend, whose studio was in Carondelet Street just off of Canal, had rented to him for a workroom a little loft above the studio. It had one window looking out over roofs and chimney-pots upon the western sky, and another down into the studio itself. It is right to say friend, although there was no acquaintanceship until it grew out of this arrangement. The artist, a single man, was much Claude's senior; but Claude's taste for design, and love of work, and the artist's grave sincerity, simplicity, and cordiality of character—he was a Spaniard, with a Spaniard's perfect courtesy—made a mutual regard, which only a common diffidence prevented from running into comradeship.

One Saturday afternoon Claude, thirsting for outdoor air, left his eyrie for a short turn in Canal Street. The *matinée* audiences were just out, and the wide balcony-shaded sidewalks were crowded with young faces and bright attires. Claude was crossing the "neutral ground" toward Bourbon Street, when he saw coming [Pg 255]out of Bourbon Street a young man, who might be a Creole, and two young girls in light, and what seemed to him extremely beautiful dresses; especially that of the farther one, who, as the three turned with buoyant step into Canal Street to their left, showed for an instant the profile of her face, and then only her back. Claude's heart beat consciously, and he hurried to lessen the distance between

them. He had seen no more than the profile, but for the moment in which he saw it, it seemed to be none other than the face of Marguerite!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE CHASE.

Claude came on close behind. No; now he could see his mistake, it was not she. But he could not regret it. This was Marguerite repeated, yet transcended. The stature was just perceptibly superior. The breadth and grace of these shoulders were better than Marguerite's. The hair, arranged differently and far more effectively than he had ever seen it on Marguerite's head, seemed even more luxurious than hers. There was altogether a finer dignity in this one's carriage than in that of the little maid of the inn. And see, now,—now!—as she turns her head to glance into this shop window! It is, and it isn't, it isn't, and it is, and—no, no, it is not Marguerite! It is like her in profile, singularly like, yet far beyond her; [Pg 256]the nose a little too fine, and a certain sad firmness about the mouth and eyes, as well as he could see in the profile, but profiles are so deceptive—that he had never seen in Marguerite.

“But how do I know? What do I know?” he asked himself, still following on. “The Marguerite I know is but a thing of my dreams, and this is not that Marguerite of my actual sight, to whom I never gave a word or smile or glance that calls for redemption. This is the Marguerite of my dreams.”

Claude was still following, when without any cause that one could see, the young man of the group looked back. He had an unpleasant face; it showed a small offensive energy that seemed to assert simply him and all his against you and all yours. His eyes were black, piercing, and hostile. They darted their glances straight into Claude's. Guilty Claude! dogging the steps of ladies on the street! He blushed for shame, turned a corner into Exchange Alley, walked a little way down it, came back, saw the great crowd coming and going, vehicles of all sorts hurrying here and there; ranks of street-cars waiting their turns to start to all points of the compass; sellers of peanuts and walking-sticks, buyers of bouquets, acquaintances meeting or overtaking one another, nodding bonnets, lifted hats, faces, faces, faces; but the one face was gone.

Caught, Claude? And by a mere face? The charge is too unkind. Young folly, yes, or old folly, may read goodness rashly into all beauty, or not care to read it in any. But it need not be so. Upon the face of youth the soul within writes its

confessions and [Pg 257]promises; and when the warm pulses of young nature are sanctified by upward yearnings, and a pure conscience, the soul that seeks its mate will seek that face which, behind and through all excellencies of mere tint and feature, mirrors back the seeker's own faiths and hopes; and when that is found, that to such a one is beauty. Judge not; you never saw this face, fairer than Marguerite's, to say whether its beauty was mere face, or the transparent shrine of an equal nobility within.

Besides, Claude would have fired up and denied the first word of the charge with unpleasant flatness. To be caught means to be in love, to be in love implies a wish and hope to marry, and these were just what Claude could not allow. May not a man, nevertheless, have an ideal of truth and beauty and look worshipfully upon its embodiment? Humph!

His eyes sought her in vain not only on that afternoon, but on many following. The sun was setting every day later and later through the black lace-work of pecan-trees and behind low dark curtains of orange groves, yet he began to be more and more tardy each succeeding day in meeting his father under the riverside oaks of the Exposition grounds. And then, on the seventh day, he saw her again.

Now he was more confident than ever that this vision and he, except in dreams, had never spoken to each other. Yet the likeness was wonderful. But so, too, was the unlikeness. True, this time, she only flashed across his sight—out of a bank, into a carriage where a very “American”-looking lady sat waiting for her and was gone. But the bank; the carriage; that lady; [Pg 258]those earlier companions,—no, this could not be Marguerite. Marguerite would have been with her mother. Now, if one could see Madame Beausoleil's daughter with Madame Beausoleil at her side to identify her and distinguish her from this flashing and vanishing apparition it would clear away a trying perplexity. Why not be bold and call upon them where they were dwelling? But where? Their names were not in the directory. Now, inventive talent, do your best.

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“Well!” said St. Pierre after a long silence. Claude and he were out on the swollen Mississippi pulling with steady leisure for the home-side shore, their skiff pointed half to and half from the boiling current. The sun was gone; a purple dusk wrapped either low bank; a steamboat that had passed up stream was now, at the turning of the bend, only a cluster of soft red lights; Venus began to make a faint silvery pathway across the waters. St. Pierre had the forward seat, at Claude's back. The father looked with fond perplexity at the strong young

shoulders swinging silently with his own, forward and backward in slow, monotonous strokes, and said again:

“Well? Whass matter? Look like cat got yo’ tongue. Makin’ new mash-in?” Then in a low dissatisfied tone—“I reckon somet’in’ mighty curious.” He repeated the last three words in the Acadian speech: “Tcheuque-chose bien tchurieux.”

“Yass,” replied the son, “mighty strange. I tell you when we come at home.”

He told all. Recounted all his heart’s longings, all [Pg 259]his dreams, every least pang of self-reproach, the idealization of Marguerite, and the finding of that ideal incarnated in one who was and yet seemed not to be, or rather seemed to be and yet was not, Marguerite. And then he went on to re-assure his father that this could never mean marriage, never mean the father’s supplanting. A man could worship what he could never hope to possess. He would rather worship this than win such kind as he would dare woo.

He said all these things in a very quiet way, with now and then a silent pause, and now and then a calm, self-contained tone in resuming; yet his sentences were often disconnected, and often were half soliloquy. Such were the only betrayals of emotion on either side until Claude began to treat—in the words just given—his father’s own heart interests; then the father’s eyes stood brimming full. But St. Pierre did not speak. From the first he had listened in silence and he offered no interruption until at length Claude came to that part about the object of his regard being so far, so utterly, beyond his reach. Then—

“Stop! Dass all foolishness! You want her? You kin have her!”

“Ah, papa! you dawn’t awnstand! What I am?”

“Ah, bah! What anybody is? What she is? She invanted bigger mash-in dan you? a mo’ better corn-stubbl’ destroyer and plant-corner?” He meant corn-planter. “She invant a more handier doubl’-action pea-vine rake? What she done mak’ her so gran’? Naw, sir! She look fine in de face, yass; and dass [Pg 260]all you know. Well, dass all right; dass de ’Cajun way—pick ’em out by face. You begin ’Cajun way, for why you dawn’t finish ’Cajun way? All you got do, you git good saddle-hoss and ride. Bom-bye you see her, you ride behind her till you find where her daddy livin’ at. Den you ride pas’ yondah every day till fo’, five days, and den you see de ole man come scrape friend wid you. Den he hass you drop round, and fus’ t’ing you know—*adjieu la caléje!*”

Claude did not dispute the point, though he hardly thought this case could be worked that way. He returned in silent thought to the question, how to find Madame Beausoleil. He tried the mail; no response. He thought of advertising; but that would never do. Imagine, “If Madame Beausoleil, late of Vermilionville,

will leave her address at this office, she will hear of something not in the least to her advantage.” He couldn’t advertise.

It was midday following the eve of his confession to his father. For the last eleven or twelve days, ever since he had seen that blessed apparition turn with the two young friends into Canal Street out of Bourbon—he had been venturing daily, for luncheon, just down into Bourbon Street, to the Christian Women’s Exchange. Now, by all the laws of fortune he should in that time have seen in there at least once or twice a day already, the face he was ever looking for. But he had not; nor did he to-day. He only saw, or thought he saw, the cashier—I should say the cashieress—glance crosswise at him with eyes that seemed to him to say:

[Pg 261]“Fool; sneak; whelp; ’Cajun; our private detectives are watching you.”

Both rooms and the veranda were full of ladies and gentlemen whose faces he dared not lift his eyes to look into. And yet even in that frame there suddenly came to him one of those happy thoughts that are supposed to be the inspirations of inventive genius. A pleasant little female voice near him said:

“And apartments up-stairs that they rent to ladies only!” And instantly the thought came that Marguerite and her mother might be living there. One more lump of bread, a final gulp of coffee, a short search for the waiter’s check, and he stands at the cashieress’s desk. She makes change without looking at him or ceasing to tell a small hunchbacked spinster standing by about somebody’s wedding. But suddenly she starts.

“Oh! wasn’t that right? You gave me four bits, didn’t you? And I gave you back two bits and a picayune, and—sir? Does Madame who? Oh! yes. I didn’t understand you; I’m a little deaf on this side; scarlet fever when I was a little girl. I’m not the regular cashier, she’s gone to attend the wedding of a lady friend. Just wait a moment, please, while I make change for these ladies. Oh, dear! ma’am, is that the smallest you’ve got? I don’t believe I can change that, ma’am. Yes—no—stop! yes, I can! no, I can’t! let’s see! yes, yes, yes, I can; I’ve got it; yes, there! I didn’t think I had it.” She turned again to Claude with sisterly confidence. “Excuse me for keeping you waiting; haven’t I met you at the [Pg 262]Y. M. C. A. sociable? Well, you must excuse me, but I was sure I had. Of course I didn’t if you was never there; but you know in a big city like this you’re always meeting somebody that’s ne-e-early somebody else that you know—oh! didn’t you ask me—oh, yes! Madame Beausoleil! Yes, she lives here, she and her daughter. But she’s not in. Oh! I’m sorry. Neither of them is here. She’s not in the city; hasn’t been for two weeks. They’re coming back; we’re expecting them every day. She heard of the death of a relative down in Terrebonne somewhere. I

wish they *would* come back; we miss them here; I judge they're relatives of yours, if I don't mistake the resemblance; you seem to take after the daughter; wait a minute."

Some one coming up to pay looked at Claude to see what the daughter was like, and the young man slipped away, outblushing the night sky when the marshes are afire.

The question was settled; settled the wrong way. He hurried on across Canal Street. Marguerite had not been, as he had construed the inaccurate statement, in the city for two weeks. Resemblances need delude him no longer. He went on into Carondelet Street and was drawing near the door and stairway leading to his friend's studio and his own little workroom above it, when suddenly from that very stairway and door issued she whom, alas! he might now no longer mistake for Marguerite, yet who, none the less for lessening hope, held him captive.

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[Pg 263]

## **CHAPTER XIV.**

### **WHO SHE WAS.**

For a moment somewhat more than her profile shone upon Claude's bewildered gaze.

"I shall see her eye to eye at last!" shouted his heart within: but the next moment she turned away, and with two companions who came across the same threshold, moved up the street, and, at the nearest corner, vanished. Her companions were the American lady and the artist. Claude wheeled, and hurried to pass around the square in the opposite direction, and, as he reached the middle of its third side, saw the artist hand them into the street-car, lift his hat, and return towards the studio. The two men met at the foot of the stairs. The Spaniard's countenance betrayed a restrained elation.

"You goin' see a picture now," he said, in a modestly triumphant tone. "Come in," he added, as Claude would have passed the studio door.

They went in together. The Spaniard talked; Claude scarcely spoke. I cannot repeat the conversation literally, but the facts are these: A few evenings before, the artist had been one of the guests at a musical party given by a lady whose name he did not mention. He happened—he modestly believed it accidental—to

be seated beside the hostess, when a young lady—"jung Creole la-thy," he called her—who was spending a few days with her, played the violin. The Spaniard's delicate [Pg 264]propriety left her also nameless; but he explained that, as he understood, she was from the Teche. She played charmingly—"for an amateur," he qualified: but what had struck him more than the music was her beauty, her figure, her picturesque grace. And when he confessed his delight in these, his hostess, seemingly on the inspiration of the moment, said:

"Paint her picture! Paint her just so! I'll give you the order. Not a mere portrait—a picture." And he had agreed, and the "jung" lady had consented. The two had but just now left the studio. To-morrow a servant would bring violin, music-rack, etc.; the ladies would follow, and then—

"You hear music, anyhow," said the artist. That was his gentle way of intimating that Claude was not invited to be a looker-on.

On the next day, Claude, in his nook above, with the studio below shut from view by the curtain of his inner window, heard the ladies come. He knows they are these two, for one voice, the elder, blooms out at once in a gay abundance of words, and the other speaks in soft, low tones that, before they reach his ear, run indistinguishably together.

Soon there comes the sound of tuning the violin, while the older voice is still heard praising one thing and another, and asking careless questions.

"I suppose that cotton cloth covers something that is to have a public unveiling some day, doesn't it?"

Claude cannot hear the answer; the painter drops his voice even below its usual quiet tone. But Claude knows what he must be saying; that the cloth covers [Pg 265]merely a portrait he is finishing of a young man who has sat for it to please a wifeless, and, but for him, childless, and fondly devoted father. And now he can tell by the masculine step, and the lady's one or two lively words, that the artist has drawn away the covering from his (Claude's) own portrait. But the lady's young companion goes on tuning her instrument—"tink, tink, tink;" and now the bow is drawn.

"Why, how singular!" exclaims the elder lady. "Why, my dear, come here and see! Somebody has got your eyes! Why, he's got your whole state of mind, a reduplication of it. And—I declare, he looks almost as good as you do! If—I"—

The voice stops short. There is a moment's silence in which the unseen hearer doubts not the artist is making signs that yonder window and curtain are all that hide the picture's original, and the voice says again,—

“I wish you’d paint my picture,” and the violin sounds once more its experimental notes.

But there are other things which Claude can neither hear, nor see, nor guess. He cannot see that the elder lady is already wondering at, and guardedly watching, an agitation betrayed by the younger in a tremor of the hand that fumbles with her music-sheets and music-stand, in the foot that trembles on the floor, in the reddened cheek, and in the bitten lip. He may guess that the painter sits at his easel with kindling eye; but he cannot guess that just as the elder lady is about to say,—

“My dear, if you don’t feel”—the tremor vanishes, the lips gently set, and only the color remains. But [Pg 266]he hears the first soft moan of the tense string under the bow, and a second, and another; and then, as he rests his elbows upon the table before him, and covers his face in his trembling hands, it seems to him as if his own lost heart had entered into that vibrant medium, and is pouring thence to heaven and her ear its prayer of love.

Paint, artist, paint! Let your brushes fly! None can promise you she shall ever look quite like this again. Catch the lines,—the waving masses and dark coils of that loose-bound hair; the poise of head and neck; the eloquent sway of the form; the folds of garments that no longer hide, but are illumined by, the plenitude of an inner life and grace; the elastic feet; the ethereal energy and discipline of arms and shoulders; the supple wrists; the very fingers quivering on the strings; the rapt face, and the love-inspired eyes.

Claude, Claude! when every bird in forest and field knows the call of its mate, can you not guess the meaning of those strings? Must she open those sealed lips and call your very name—she who would rather die than call it?

He does not understand. Yet, without understanding, he answers. He rises from his seat; he moves to the window; he will not tiptoe or peep; he will be bold and bad. Brazenly he lifts the curtain and looks down; and one, one only—not the artist and not the patroness of art, but that one who would not lift her eyes to that window for all the world’s wealth—knows he is standing there, listening and looking down. He counts himself all unseen, yet presently shame drops [Pg 267]the curtain. He turns away, yet stands hearkening. The music is about to end. The last note trembles on the air. There is silence. Then someone moves from a chair, and then the single cry of admiration and delight from the player’s companion is the player’s name,—

“Marguerite Beausoleil!”

Hours afterward there sat Claude in the seat where he had sunk down when he heard that name. The artist's visitors had made a long stay, but at length they were gone. And now Claude, too, rose to go out. His steps were heard below, and presently the painter's voice called persuadingly up:—

“St. Pierre! St. Pierre! Come, see.”

They stood side by side before the new work. Claude gazed in silence. At length he said, still gazing:

“I'll buy it when 'tis finish'.”

But the artist explained again that it was being painted for Marguerite's friend.

“For what she want it?” demanded Claude. The Spaniard smiled and intimated that the lady probably thought he could paint. “But at any rate,” he went on to say, “she seemed to have a hearty affection for the girl herself, whom,” he said, “she had described as being as good as she looked.” Claude turned and went slowly out.

When at sunset he stood under the honey-locust tree on the levee where he was wont to find his father waiting for him, he found himself alone. But within speaking distance he saw St. Pierre's skiff just being [Pg 268]drawn ashore by a ragged negro, who presently turned and came to him, half-lifting the wretched hat that slouched about his dark brows, and smiling.

“Sim like you done fo'got me,” he said. “Don't you 'member how I use' live at Belle Alliance? Yes, seh. I's de one what show Bonaventure de road to Gran' Point'. Yes, seh. But I done lef' dah since Mistoo Wallis sole de place. Yes, seh. An' when I meet up wid you papa you nevva see a nigger so glad like I was. No, seh. An' likewise you papa. Yes, seh. An' he ass me is I want to wuck fo' him, an' I see he needin' he'p, an' so I tu'n in an' he'p him. Oh, yes, seh! dass mo' 'n a week, now, since I been wuckin' fo' you papa.”

They got into the skiff and pushed off, the negro alone at the oars.

“Pow'ful strong current on udder side,” he said, pulling quietly up-stream to offset the loss of way he must make presently in crossing the rapid flood. “Mistoo Claude, I see a gen'leman dis day noon what I ain't see' befo' since 'bout six year' an' mo'. I disremember his name, but——”

“Tarbox?” asked Claude with sudden interest.

“Yes, seh. Dass it! Tah-bawx. Sim like any man ought to 'member dat name. Him an' you papa done gone down de canal. Yes, seh; in a pirogue. He come in a big hurry an' say how dey got a big crevasse up de river on dat side, an' he want

make you papa see one man what livin' on Lac Cataouaché. Yes, seh. An you papa say you fine you supper in de pot. An' Mistoo Tah-bawx he say he want you teck [Pg 269]one hoss an' ride up till de crevasse an' you fine one frien' of yose yondah, one ingineer; an' he say—Mistoo Tah-bawx—how he 'low to meet up wid you at you papa' house to-morrow daylight. Yes, seh; Mistoo Tah-bawx; yes, seh.”

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## CHAPTER XV.

### CAN THEY CLOSE THE BREAK?

The towering cypresses of the far, southern swamps have a great width of base, from which they narrow so rapidly in the first seven or eight feet of their height, and thence upward taper so gradually, that it is almost or quite impossible for an axe-man, standing at their roots, to chop through the great flare that he finds abreast of him, and bring the trees down. But when the swamps are deep in water, the swamper may paddle up to these trees, whose narrowed waists are now within the swing of his axe, and standing up in his canoe, by a marvel of balancing skill, cut and cut, until at length his watchful, up-glancing eye sees the forest giant bow his head. Then a shove, a few backward sweeps of the paddle, and the canoe glides aside, and the great trunk falls, smiting the smooth surface of the water with a roar that, miles away, reaches the ear like the thunder of artillery. The tree falls: but if the woodsman has not known how to judge and choose wisely when the inner wood is laid bare under the first big [Pg 270]chip that flies, there are many chances that the fallen tree will instantly sink to the bottom of the water, and cannot be rafted out. One must know his craft, even in Louisiana swamps. “Knowledge is power.”

When Zoséphine and Mr. Tarbox finished out that Sunday twilight walk, they talked, after leaving the stile behind, only on business. He told her of having lately been, with a certain expert, in the swamps of Barataria, where he had seen some noble cypress forests tantalizingly near to navigation and market, but practically a great way off, because the levees of the great sugar estates on the Mississippi River shut out all deep overflows. Hence these forests could be bought for, seemingly, a mere tithe of their value. Now, he proposed to buy such a stretch of them along the edge of the shaking prairie north of Lake Cataouaché as would show on his part, he said, “caution, but not temerity.”

He invited her to participate. "And why?" For the simple reason that the expert, and engineer, had dropped the remark that, in his opinion, a certain levee could not possibly hold out against the high water of more than two or three more years, and that when it should break it would spread, from three to nine feet of water, over hundreds of square miles of swamp forests, *prairies tremblantes*, and rice and sugar fields, and many leagues of railway. Zoséphine had consented; and though Mr. Tarbox had soon after gone upon his commercial travels, he had effected the purchase by correspondence, little thinking that the first news he should hear on returning to New Orleans [Pg 271] would be that the remotely anticipated "break" had just occurred.

And now, could and would the breach be closed, or must all Baratavia soon be turned into, and remain for months, a navigable yellow sea? This, Claude knew, was what he must hasten to the crevasse to discover, and return as promptly to report upon, let his heart-strings draw as they might towards the studio in Carondelet Street and the Christian Women's Exchange.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE OUTLAW AND THE FLOOD.

What suffering it costs to be a coward! Some days before the crevasse occurred, he whom we know as the pot-hunter stood again on the platform of that same little railway station whence we once saw him vanish at sight of Bonaventure Deschamps. He had never ventured there since, until now. But there was a new station agent.

His Indian squaw was dead. A rattlesnake had given her its fatal sting, and the outcast, dreading all men and the coroner not the least, had, silently and alone, buried her on the prairie.

The train rolled up to the station again as before. Claude's friend, the surveyor, stepped off with a cigar in his mouth, to enjoy in the train's momentary stay the delightful air that came across the open prairie. [Pg 272] The pot-hunter, who had got rid of his game, ventured near his former patron. It might be the engineer could give him work whereby to earn a day's ready money. He was not disappointed. The engineer told him to come in a day or two, by the waterways the pot-hunter knew so well, across the swamps and prairies to Bayou Terrebonne and the little court-house town of Houma. And then he added:

“I heard this morning that somebody had been buying the swamp land all around you out on Lake Cataouaché. Is it so?”

The Acadian looked vacant and shook his head.

“Yes,” said the other, “a Madame Beausoleil, or somebody—What’s the matter?”

“All aboard!” cried the train conductor.

“The fellow turned pale,” said the surveyor, as he resumed his seat in the smoking-car and the landscape began again to whirl by.

The pot-hunter stood for a moment, and then slowly, as if he stole away from some sleeping enemy, left the place. Alarm went with him like an attendant ghost. A thousand times that day, in the dark swamp, on the wide prairie, or under his rush-thatch on the lake-side, he tortured himself with one question: Why had she—Zoséphine—reached away out from Carancro to buy the uncultivable and primeval wilderness round about his lonely hiding-place? Hour after hour the inexplicable problem seemed to draw near and nearer to him, a widening, tightening, dreamlike terror, that, as it came, silently pointed its finger of death at him. He was glad enough to leave his cabin next day [Pg 273] in his small, swift pirogue—shot-gun, axe, and rifle his only companions—for Terrebonne.

It chanced to be noon of the day following, when he glided up the sunny Terrebonne towards the parish seat. The shores of the stream have many beauties, but the Acadian’s eyes were alert to any thing but them. The deep green, waxen-leaved casino hedges; the hedges of Cherokee rose, and sometimes of rose and casino mingled; the fields of corn and sugar-cane; the quaint, railed, floating bridges lying across the lazy bayou; the orange-groves of aged, giant trees, their dark green boughs grown all to a tangle with well-nigh the density of a hedge, and their venerable trunks hairy with green-gray lichens; the orange-trees again in the door-yards, with neat pirogues set upon racks under their deep shade; the indescribable floods of sunlight and caverns of shadow; the clear, brown depths beneath his own canoe; or, at the bottom, the dark, waving, green-brown tresses of water-weeds,—these were naught to him.

But the human presence was much; and once, when just ahead of him he espied a young, sunbonneted woman crouching in the pouring sunshine beyond the sod of the bayou’s bank, itself but a few inches above the level of the stream, on a little pier of one plank pushed out among the flags and reeds, pounding her washing with a wooden paddle, he stopped the dip of his canoe-paddle, and gazed with growing trepidation and slackening speed. At the outer end of the plank, the habitual dip of the bucket had driven aside the water-lilies, and made a round,

glassy space that [Pg 274]reflected all but perfectly to him her busy, young, downcast visage.

“How like”—Just then she lifted her head. He started as though his boat had struck a snag. How like—how terribly like to that young Zoséphine whose ill-concealed scorn he had so often felt in days—in years—long gone, at Carancro! This was not, and could not be, the same—lacked half the necessary years; and yet, in the joy of his relief, he answered her bow with a question, “Whose was yonder house?”

She replied in the same Acadian French in which she was questioned, that there dwelt, or had dwelt, and about two weeks ago had died, “Monsieur Robichaux.” The pot-hunter’s paddle dipped again, his canoe shot on, and two hours later he walked with dust-covered feet into Houma.

The principal tavern there stands on that corner of the court-house square to which the swamper would naturally come first. Here he was to find the engineer. But, as with slow, diffident step he set one foot upon the corner of the threshold, there passed quickly by him and out towards the court-house, two persons,—one a man of a county court-room look and with a handful of documents, and the other a woman whom he knew at a glance. Her skirts swept his ankles as he shrank in sudden and abject terror against the wall, yet she did not see him.

He turned and retreated the way he had come, nothing doubting that only by the virtue of a voodoo charm which he carried in his pocket he had escaped, for the time being, a plot laid for his capture. For the small, [Pg 275]neatly-robed form that you may still see disappearing within the court-house door beside the limping figure of the probate clerk is Zoséphine Beausoleil. She will finish the last pressing matter of the Robichaux succession now in an hour or so, and be off on the little branch railway, whose terminus is here, for New Orleans.

When the pot-hunter approached Lake Cataouaché again, he made on foot, under cover of rushes and reeds taller than he, a wide circuit and reconnoissance of his hut. While still a long way off, he saw, lighted by the sunset rays, what he quickly recognized as a canoe drawn half out of the water almost at his door. He warily drew nearer. Presently he stopped, and stood slowly and softly shifting his footing about on the oozy soil, at a little point of shore only some fifty yards away from his cabin. His eyes, peering from the ambush, descried a man standing by the pirogue and searching with his gaze the wide distances that would soon be hidden in the abrupt fall of the southern night.

The pot-hunter knew him. Not by name, but by face. The day the outlaw saw Bonaventure at the little railway station this man was with him. The name the pot-hunter did not know was St. Pierre.

The ambushed man shrank a step backward into his hiding-place. His rifle was in his hand and he noiselessly cocked it. He had not resolved to shoot; but a rifle is of no use until it is cocked. While he so stood, another man came into view and to the first one's side. This one, too, he knew, despite the soft hat that had taken the place of the silk one; for this [Pg 276] was Tarbox. The Acadian was confirmed in his conviction that the surveyor's invitation for him to come to Houma was part of a plot to entrap him.

While he still looked the two men got into the canoe and St. Pierre paddled swiftly away. The pot-hunter let down the hammer of his gun, shrank away again, turned and hurried through the tangle, regained his canoe, and paddled off. The men's departure from the cabin was, in his belief, a ruse. But he knew how by circuits and short cuts to follow after them unseen, and this he did until he became convinced that they were fairly in the Company Canal and gliding up its dark colonnade in the direction whence they had evidently come. Then he returned to his cabin and with rifle cocked and with slow, stealthy step entered it, and in headlong haste began to prepare to leave it for a long hiding-out.

He knew every spot of land and water for leagues around, as a bear or a fox would know the region about his den. He had in mind now a bit of dry ground scarce fifty feet long or wide, deeply hidden in the swamp to the north of this lake. How it had ever happened that this dry spot, lifted two or three feet above the low level around it, had been made, whether by some dumb force of nature or by the hand of men yet more untamable than he, had never crossed his thought. It was beyond measure of more value to him to know, by what he had seen growing on it season after season, that for many a long year no waters had overflowed it. In the lake, close to his hut, lay moored his small centerboard lugger, and into [Pg 277] this he presently threw his few appliances and supplies, spread sail, and skimmed away, with his pirogue towing after.

His loaded rifle lay within instant reach. By choice he would not have harmed any living creature that men call it wrong to injure; but to save himself, not only from death, but from any risk of death, rightful or wrongful, he would, not through courage, but in the desperation of frantic cowardice, have killed a hundred men, one by one.

By this time it was night; and when first the lugger and, after it was hidden away, the pirogue, had carried him up a slender bayou as near as they could to the point he wished to reach, he had still to drag the loaded pirogue no small distance through the dark, often wet and almost impenetrable woods. He had taken little rest and less sleep in his late journeyings, and when at length he cast himself down before his fire of dead fagots on the raised spot he had chosen, he slept heavily. He felt safe from man's world, at least for the night.

Only one thing gave him concern as he lay down. It was the fact that when, with the old woods-habit strong on him, he had approached his selected camping ground, with such wariness of movement as the dragging pirogue would allow, he had got quite in sight of it before a number of deer on it bounded away. He felt an unpleasant wonder to know what their unwilling boldness might signify.

He did not awake to replenish his fire until there were only a few live embers shining dimly at his feet. [Pg 278]He rose to a sitting posture; and in that same moment there came a confusion of sound—a trampling through bushes—that froze his blood, and robbed his open throat of power to cry. The next instant he knew it was but those same deer. But the first intelligent thought brought a new fear. These most timid of creatures had made but a few leaps and stopped. He knew what that meant! As he leaped to his feet the deer started again, and he heard, to his horror,—where the ground had been dry and caked when he lay down,—the plash of their feet in water.

Trembling, he drew his boots on, made and lighted a torch, and in a moment was dragging his canoe after him in the direction of the lugger. Presently his steps, too, were plashing. He stooped, waved the torch low across the water's surface, and followed the gleam with his scrutiny. But he did so not for any doubt that he would see, as he did, the yellow flood of the Mississippi. He believed, as he believed his existence, that his pursuers had let the river in upon the swamp, ruin whom they might, to drive him from cover.

Presently he stepped into the canoe, cast his torch into the water, took his paddle, and glided unerringly through a darkness and a wild tangle of undergrowth, large and small, where you or I could not have gone ten yards without being lost. He emerged successfully from the forest into the open prairie, and, under a sky whose stars told him it would soon be day, glided on down the little bayou lane, between walls of lofty rushes, up which he had come in the evening, and presently found the lugger as he had left her, [Pg 279]with her light mast down, hidden among the brake canes that masked a little cove.

The waters were already in the prairie. As he boarded the little vessel at the stern, a raccoon waddled in noiseless haste over the bow, and splashed into the wet covert of reeds beyond. If only to keep from sharing his quarters with all the refuge-hunting vermin of the noisome wilderness, the one human must move on. He turned the lugger's prow towards the lake, and spread her sails to the faint, cool breeze. But when day broke, the sail was gone.

Far and wide lay the pale green leagues of reeds and bulrushes, with only here and there a low willow or two beside some unseen lagoon, or a sinuous band of darker green, where round rushes and myrtle bushes followed the shore of some

hidden bayou. The waters of the lake were gleaming and crinkling in tints of lilac and silver stolen from the air; and away to the right, and yet farther to the left, stood the dark phalanxes of cypress woods.

Thus had a thousand mornings risen on the scene in the sight of the outlaw. Numberless birds fluttered from place to place, snatching their prey, carolling, feeding their young, chattering, croaking, warbling, and swinging on the bending rush. But if you looked again, strange signs of nature's mute anguish began to show. On every log or bit of smaller drift that rain-swollen bayous had ever brought from the forest and thrown upon their banks some wild tenant of the jungle, hare or weasel, cat, otter, or raccoon, had taken refuge, sometimes alone, but oftener sharing it, in [Pg 280]common misery and silent truce, with deadly foes. For under all that expanse of green beauty, the water, always abundant, was no longer here and there, but everywhere.

See yonder reed but a few yards away. What singular dark enlargement of stem is that near its top, that curious spiral growth?—growth! It is a great serpent that has climbed and twined himself there, and is holding on for the life he loves as we love ours. And see! On a reed near by him, another; and a little farther off, another; and another—and another! Where were our eyes until now? The surface of the vast brake, as far as one can see such small things, is dotted with like horrid burdens. And somewhere in this wild desolation, in this green prospect of a million deaths waiting in silence alike for harmful and harmless creatures, one man is hiding from all mankind.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### WELL HIDDEN.

Of all the teeming multitudes of the human world, the pot-hunter knows not one soul who is on his side; not one whom he dare let see his face or come between him and a hiding-place. The water is rising fast. He dare not guess how high it will come; but rise as it may, linger at its height as it may, he will not be driven out. In his belief a hundred men are ready, at [Pg 281]every possible point where his foot could overstep the line of this vast inundation, to seize him and drag him to the gallows. Ah, the gallows! Not being dead—not God's anger—not eternal burnings; but simply facing death! The gallows! The tree above his head—the rope around his neck—the signal about to be spoken—the one wild moment after it! These keep him here.

He has taken down sail and mast. The rushes are twelve feet high. They hide him well. With oars, mast, and the like, he has contrived something by which he can look out over their tops. He has powder and shot, coffee, salt, and rice; he will not be driven out! At night he spreads his sail and seeks the open waters of the lake, where he can sleep, by littles, without being overrun by serpents; but when day breaks, there is no visible sign of his presence. Yet he is where he can see his cabin. It is now deep in the water, and the flood is still rising. He is quite sure no one has entered it since he left it. But—the strain of perpetual watching!

When at dawn of the fifth day he again looked for cover in the prairie, the water was too high to allow him concealment, and he sought the screen of some willows that fringed the edge of the swamp forest, anchoring in a few rods' width of open water between them and the woods. He did not fear to make, on the small hearth of mud and ashes he had improvised in his lugger, the meagre fire needed to prepare his food. Its slender smoke quickly mingled with the hazy vapors and shadows of the swamp. As he cast [Pg 282]his eye abroad, he found nowhere any sign of human approach. Here and there the tops of the round rushes still stood three feet above the water, but their slender needles were scarcely noticeable. Far and near, over prairie as over lake, lay the unbroken yellow flood. There was no flutter of wings, no whistle of feathered mate to mate, no call of nestlings from the ruined nests. Except the hawk and vulture, the birds were gone. Untold thousands of dumb creatures had clung to life for a time, but now were devoured by birds of prey and by alligators, or were drowned. Thousands still lived on. Behind him in the swamp the wood-birds remained, the gray squirrel still barked and leaped from tree to tree, the raccoon came down to fish, the plundering owl still hid himself through the bright hours, and the chilled snake curled close in the warm folds of the hanging moss. Nine feet of water below. In earlier days, to the northward through the forest, many old timbers rejected in railway construction or repair, with dead logs and limbs, had been drifted together by heavy rains, and had gathered a covering of soil; canebrake, luxurious willow-bushes, and tough grasses had sprung up on them and bound them with their roots. These floating islands the flood, now covering the dense underbrush of the swamp, lifted on its free surface, and, in its slow creep southward, bore through the pillared arcades of the cypress wood and out over the submerged prairies. Many a cowering deer in those last few days that had made some one of these green fragments of the drowned land a haven of despair, the human castaway left unharmed.

[Pg 283]Of all sentient creatures in that deluge he was suffering most. He was gaunt and haggard with watching. The thought of pursuit bursting suddenly around him now fastened permanently upon his imagination. He feared to sleep. From the direction of the open water surprise seemed impossible; but from the forest! what instant might it not ring with the whoop of discovery, the many-

voiced halting challenge, and the glint of loaded Winchester? And another fear had come. Many a man not a coward, and as used to the sight of serpents as this man, has never been able to be other than a coward concerning them. The pot-hunter held them in terror. It was from fear of them that he had lighted his torch the night of his bivouac in the swamp. Only a knowledge of their ordinary haunts and habits and the art of avoiding them had made the swamp and prairie life bearable. Now all was changed. They were driven from their dens. In the forest one dared not stretch forth the hand to lay it upon any tangible thing until a searching glance had failed to find the glittering eye and forked tongue that meant "Beware!" In the flooded prairie the willow-trees were loaded with the knotted folds of the moccasin, the rattlesnake, and I know not how many other sorts of deadly or only loathsome serpents. Some little creatures at the bottom of the water, feeding on the soft white part of the round rush near its root, every now and then cut a stem free from its base, and let it spring to the surface and float away. Often a snake had wrapped himself about the end above the water, and when this refuge gave way and drifted [Pg 284]abroad he would cling for a time, until some less forlorn hope came in sight, and then swim for it. Thus scarce a minute of the day passed, it seemed, but one, two, or three of these creatures, making for their fellow-castaway's boat, were turned away by nervous waving of arms. The nights had proved that they could not climb the lugger's side, and when he was in her the canoe was laid athwart her gunwales; but at night he had to drop the bit of old iron that served for an anchor, and the very first night a large moccasin—not of the dusky kind described in books, but of that yet deadlier black sort, an ell in length, which the swamper call the Congo—came up the anchor-rope. The castaway killed it with an oar; but after that who would have slept?

About sunset of the fifth day, though it was bright and beautiful, the hunter's cunning detected the first subtle signs of a coming storm. He looked about him to see what provision was needed to meet and weather its onset. On the swamp side the loftiest cypresses, should the wind bring any of them down, would not more than cast the spray of their fall as far as his anchorage. The mass of willows on the prairie side was nearer, but its trees stood low,—already here and there the branches touched the water; the hurricane might tear away some boughs, but could do no more. He shortened the anchor-rope, and tried the hold of the anchor on the bottom to make sure the lugger might not swing into the willows, for in every fork of every bough was a huge dark mass of serpents plaited and piled one upon another, and ready at any moment [Pg 285]to glide apart towards any new shelter that might be reached.

While eye and hand were thus engaged, the hunter's ear was attentive to sounds that he had been hearing for more than an hour. These were the puff of 'scape-

pipes and splash of a paddle-wheel, evidently from a small steamer in the Company Canal. She was coming down it; that is, from the direction of the river and the city.

Whither was she bound? To some one of the hundred or more plantations and plantation homes that the far-reaching crevasse had desolated? Likely enough. In such event she would not come into view, although for some time now he had seen faint shreds of smoke in the sky over a distant line of woods. But it filled him with inward tremors to know that if she chose to leave the usual haunts of navigation on her left, and steam out over the submerged prairies and the lake, and into the very shadow of these cypresses, she could do it without fear of a snag or a shallow. He watched anxiously as the faint smoke reached a certain point. If the next thin curl should rise farther on, it would mean safety. But when it came it seemed to be in the same place as the last; and another the same, and yet another the same: she was making almost a straight line for the spot where he stood. Only a small low point of forest broke the line, and presently, far away, she slowly came out from behind it.

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[Pg 286]

## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **THE TORNADO.**

The Acadian stooped at once and with a quick splash launched his canoe. A minute later he was in it, gliding along and just within the edge of the forest where it swept around nearly at right angles to the direction in which the steamboat was coming. Thus he could watch the approaching steamer unseen, while every moment putting distance between himself and the lugger.

The strange visitor came on. How many men there were on her lower deck! Were they really negroes, or had they blackened their faces, as men sometimes do when they are going to hang a poor devil in the woods? On the upper deck are two others whose faces do not seem to be blackened. But a moment later they are the most fearful sight of all; for only too plainly does the fugitive see that they are the same two men who stood before the doorway of his hut six days before. And see how many canoes on the lower deck!

While the steamer is yet half a mile away from the hidden lugger, her lamps and fires and their attendant images in the water beneath glow softly in the fast

deepening twilight, and the night comes swiftly down. The air is motionless. Across the silent waste an engine bell jangles; the puff of steam ceases; the one plashing paddle-wheel at the stern is still; the lights glide more and more slowly; with a great crash and [Pg 287]rumble, that is answered by the echoing woods, the anchor-chain runs out its short measure, and the steamer stops.

Gently the pot-hunter's paddle dipped again, and the pirogue moved back towards the lugger. It may be that the flood was at last numbing his fear, as it had so soon done that of all the brute-life around him; it was in his mind to do something calling for more courage than he had ever before commanded in his life, save on that one day in Carancro, when, stung to madness by the taunts of a brave man, and driven to the wall, he had grappled and slain his tormentor. He had the thought now to return, and under cover of the swamp's deep outer margin of shadow, silently lift into the canoe the bit of iron that anchored the lugger, and as noiselessly draw her miles away to another covert; or if the storm still held back, even at length to step the mast, spread the sail, and put the horizon between him and the steamer before daybreak. This he had now started to do, and would do, if only courage would hold on and the storm hold off.

For a time his canoe moved swiftly; but as he drew near the lugger his speed grew less and less, and eye and ear watched and hearkened with their intensest might. He could hear talking on the steamer. There was a dead calm. He had come to a spot just inside the wood, abreast of the lugger. His canoe slowly turned and pointed towards her, and then stood still. He sat there with his paddle in the water, longing like a dumb brute; longing, and, without a motion, struggling for courage enough to move forward. It would [Pg 288]not come. His heart jarred his frame with its beating. He could not stir.

As he looked out upon the sky a soft, faint tremor of light glimmered for a moment over it, without disturbing a shadow below. The paddle stirred gently, and the canoe slowly drew back; the storm was coming to betray him with its lightnings. In the black forest's edge the pot-hunter lingered trembling. Oh for the nerve to take a brave man's chances! A little courage would have saved his life. He wiped the dew from his brow with his sleeve; every nerve had let go. Again there came across the water the very words of those who talked together on the steamer. They were saying that the felling of trees would begin in the morning; but they spoke in a tongue which Acadians of late years had learned to understand, though many hated it, but of which he had never known twenty words, and what he had known were now forgotten—the English tongue. Even without courage, to have known a little English would have made the difference between life and death. Another glimmer spread dimly across the sky, and a faint murmur of far-off thunder came to the ear. He turned the pirogue and fled.

Soon the stars are hidden. A light breeze seems rather to tremble and hang poised than to blow. The rolling clouds, the dark wilderness, and the watery waste shine out every moment in the wide gleam of lightnings still hidden by the wood, and are wrapped again in ever-thickening darkness over which thunders roll and jar, and answer one another across the sky. [Pg 289]Then, like a charge of ten thousand lancers, come the wind and the rain, their onset covered by all the artillery of heaven. The lightnings leap, hiss, and blaze; the thunders crack and roar; the rain lashes; the waters writhe; the wind smites and howls. For five, for ten, for twenty minutes,—for an hour, for two hours,—the sky and the flood are never for an instant wholly dark, or the thunder for one moment silent; but while the universal roar sinks and swells, and the wide, vibrant illumination shows all things in ghostly half-concealment, fresh floods of lightning every moment rend the dim curtain and leap forth; the glare of day falls upon the swaying wood, the reeling, bowing, tossing willows, the seething waters, the whirling rain, and in the midst the small form of the distressed steamer, her revolving paddle-wheels toiling behind to lighten the strain upon her anchor-chains; then all are dim ghosts again, while a peal, as if the heavens were rent, rolls off around the sky, comes back in shocks and throbs, and sinks in a long roar that before it can die is swallowed up in the next flash and peal.

The deserted lugger is riding out the tornado. Whirled one moment this way and another that, now and again taking in water, her forest-shelter breaks the force of many a gust that would have destroyed her out in the open. But in the height of the storm her poor substitute for an anchor lets go its defective hold on the rushy bottom and drags, and the little vessel backs, backs, into the willows. She escapes such entanglement as would capsize her, and by and by, when the wind lulls for a moment and then comes with all [Pg 290]its wrath from the opposite direction, she swings clear again and drags back nearly to her first mooring and lies there, swinging, tossing, and surviving still,—a den of snakes.

The tempest was still fierce, though abating, and the lightning still flashed, but less constantly, when at a point near the lugger the pirogue came out of the forest, laboring against the wind and half-filled with water. On the face of the storm-beaten man in it each gleam of the lightning showed the pallid confession of mortal terror. Where that frail shell had been, or how often it had cast its occupant out, no one can ever know. He was bareheaded and barefooted. One cannot swim in boots; without them, even one who has never dared learn how may hope to swim a little.

In the darkness he drew alongside the lugger, rose, balanced skilfully, seized his moment, and stepped safely across her gunwale. A slight lurch caused him to throw his arms out to regain his poise; the line by which he still held the canoe straightened out its length and slipped from his grasp. In an instant the pirogue

was gone. A glimmer of lightning showed her driving off sidewise before the wind. But it revealed another sight also. It was dark again, black; but the outcast stood freezing with horror and fright, gazing just in advance of his feet and waiting for the next gleam. It came, brighter than the last; and scarcely a step before him he saw three great serpents moving towards the spot that gave him already such slender footing. He recoiled a step—another; but instantly [Pg 291] as he made the second a cold, living form was under his foot, its folds flew round his ankle, and once! twice! it struck! With a frantic effort he spurned it from him; all in the same instant a blaze of lightning discovered the maimed form and black and red markings of a “bastard hornsnake,” and with one piercing wail of despair, that was drowned in the shriek of the wind and roar of the thunder, he fell.

A few hours later the winds were still, the stars were out, a sweet silence had fallen upon water and wood, and from her deck the watchmen on the steamer could see in the north-eastern sky a broad, soft, illumination, and knew it was the lights of slumbering New Orleans, eighteen miles away.

By and by, farther to the east, another brightness began to grow and gather this light into its outstretched wings. In the nearest wood a soft twitter came from a single tiny bird. Another voice answered it. A different note came from a third quarter; there were three or four replies; the sky turned to blue, and began to flush; a mocking-bird flew out of the woods on her earliest quest for family provision; a thrush began to sing; and in a moment more the whole forest was one choir.

What wonderful purity was in the fragrant air; what color was on the calm waters and in the deep sky; how beautiful, how gentle was Nature after her transport of passion! Shall we ever subdue her and make her always submissive and compliant? Who knows? Who knows what man may do with her when once he has got self, the universal self, under perfect [Pg 292] mastery? See yonder huge bull-alligator swimming hitherward out of the swamp. Even as you point he turns again in alarm and is gone. Once he was man’s terror, Leviathan. The very lions of Africa and the grizzlies of the Rockies, so they tell us, are no longer the bold enemies of man they once were. “Subdue the earth”—it is being done. Science and art, commerce and exploration, are but parts of religion. Help us, brothers all, with every possible discovery and invention to complete the conquest begun in that lost garden whence man and woman first came forth, not for vengeance but for love, to bruise the serpent’s head. But as yet, both within us and without us, what terrible revolts doth Nature make! what awful victories doth she have over us, and then turn and bless and serve us again!

As the sun was rising, one of the timber-cutters from the steamer stood up in his canoe about half a mile away, near the wood and beside some willows, and halloed and beckoned. And when those on the steamer hearkened he called again, bidding them tell “de boss” that he had found a canoe adrift, an anchored boat, and a white man in her, dead.

Tarbox and St. Pierre came in a skiff.

“Is he drowned?” asked Mr. Tarbox, while still some distance off.

“Been struck by lightnin’ sim like,” replied the negro who had found the body.—“Watch out, Mistoo Tah-bawx!” he added, as the skiff drew near; “dat boat dess lousy wid snake’!”

Tarbox stood up in the skiff and looked sadly upon [Pg 293]the dead face. “It’s our man,” he said to St. Pierre.

“Dass what I say!” exclaimed the negro. “Yes, seh, so soon I see him I say, mos’ sholy dass de same man what Mistoo Tah-bawx lookin’ faw to show him ’roun’ ’bout de swamp! Yes, seh, not-instandin’ I never see him befo’! No, seh.—Lawd! look yondeh! look dat big bahsta’d hawn-snake! He kyant git away: he’s hu’t! Lawd! dass what kill dat man! Dat man trawmp on him in de dark, and he strack him wid his hawny tail! Look at dem fo’ li’l’ spot’ on de man’ foot! Now, Mistoo Tah-bawx! You been talk’ ’bout dem ah bahsta’d hawn-snake not pizen! Well, mos’ sholy dey *bite* ain’t pizen; but if dat hawn on de een of his tail dess on’y tetch you, you’ gone! Look at dat man! Kill’ him so quick dey wa’n’t time for de place to swell whah he was hit!” But Tarbox quietly pointed out to St. Pierre that the tiny wounds were made by the reptile’s teeth.

“The coroner’s verdict will probably be ‘privation and exposure,’” said he softly; “but it ought to be, ‘killed by fright and the bite of a harmless snake.’”

On his murmured suggestion, St. Pierre gave orders that, with one exception, every woodsman go to his tree-felling, and that the lugger and canoe, with the dead man lying untouched, be towed by skiff and a single pair of oars to the head of the canal for inquest and burial.

“I’ll go with him,” said Tarbox softly to St. Pierre. “We owe him all we’re going to get out of these woods, and I owe him a great deal more.” When a [Pg 294]little later he was left for a moment without a hearer, he said to the prostrate form, “Poor fellow! And to think I had her message to you to come out of this swamp and begin to live the life of a live man!”

The rude funeral moved away, and soon the woods were ringing with the blow of axes and the shout and song of black timber-men as gayly as though there never had been or was to be a storm or a death.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### “TEARS AND SUCH THINGS.”

Marguerite and her friend had no sooner taken their seats to drive home from the studio the day the sketch was made than Marguerite began a perfect prattle. Her eyes still shone exaltedly, and leaped and fell and darkened and brightened with more than the swift variety of a fountain in the moonlight, while she kept trying in vain to meet her companion's looks with a moment's steady regard.

Claude was found! and she trembled with delight. But, alas! he had heard her passionate call and yet stood still; had looked down upon her in silence, and drawn again the curtain between them. She had thought until the last moment, “He will come; he will confront us as we pass out the door—will overtake us at the foot of the stairs—on the sidewalk—at the carriage window.” But it had not been so; and [Pg 295]now they were gone from the place; and here sat this friend, this gay, cynical knower of men's and women's ways, answering her chatter in short, smiling responses, with a steady eye fixed on her, and reading, Marguerite believed, as plainly as if it were any of the sign-boards along the rattling street, the writing on her fluttering heart. And so, even while she trembled with strange delight, pain, shame, and alarm pleaded through her dancing glances, now by turns and now in confusion together, for mercy and concealment. But in fact, as this friend sat glancing upon the young face beside her with secret sympathy and admiration, it was only this wild fear of betrayal that at length betrayed.

Reaching the house, the street door was hardly shut behind them when Marguerite would have darted up to her chamber; but her friend caught her hands across the balustrade, and said, with roguery in her own eyes:

“Marguerite, you sweet rowdy—”

“W'at?”

“Yes, *what*. There's something up; what is it?”

The girl tried to put on surprise; but her eyes failed her again. She leaned on the rail and looked down, meanwhile trying softly to draw away up-stairs; but her friend held on to one hand and murmured:

“Just one question, dearie, just one. I’ll not ask another: I’ll die first. You’ll probably find me *in articulo mortis* when you come down-stairs. Just one question, lovie.”

“*W’at* it is?”

[Pg 296]“It’s nothing but this; I ask for information.” The voice dropped to a whisper,—“Is he as handsome as his portrait?”

The victim rallied all her poor powers of face, and turned feebly upon the questioner:

“Po’trait? Who?” Her voice was low, and she glanced furtively at the nearest door. “I dawn’t awnstan you.” Her hand pulled softly for its freedom, and she turned to go, repeating, with averted face, “I dawn’t awnstan you ’t all.”

“Well, never mind then, dear, if you don’t understand,” responded the tease, with mock tenderness. “But, *ma belle Créole*—”

“*Je suis Acadienne.*”

“You’re an angel, faintly disguised. Only—look around here—only, Angelica, don’t try to practise woman’s humbug on a woman. At least, not on this old one. It doesn’t work. I’ll tell you whom I mean.” She pulled, but Marguerite held off. “I mean,” she hoarsely whispered,—“I mean the young inventor that engineer told us about. Remember?”

Marguerite, with her head bowed low, slowly dragged her hand free, and moved with growing speed up the stairs, saying:

“I dawn’t know what is dat. I dawn’t awnstan you ’t all.” Her last words trembled as if nigh to tears. At the top of the stairs the searching murmur of her friend’s voice came up, and she turned and looked back.

“Forgive me!” said the figure below. The girl stood a moment, sending down a re-assuring smile.

[Pg 297]“You young rogue!” murmured the lady, looking up with ravished eyes. Then she lifted herself on tiptoe, made a trumpet of both little hands, and whispered:

“Don’t—worry! We’ll bring it out—all right!”

Whereat Marguerite blushed from temple to throat, and vanished.

The same day word came from her mother of her return from Terrebonne, and she hastened to rejoin her in their snug rooms over the Women's Exchange. When she snatched Zoséphine into her arms and shed tears, the mother merely wiped and kissed them away, and asked no explanation.

The two were soon apart. For Marguerite hungered unceasingly for solitude. Only in solitude could she, or dared she, give herself up to the constant recapitulation of every minutest incident of the morning. And that was ample employment. They seemed the happenings of a month ago. She felt as if it were imperative to fix them in her memory now, or lose them in confusion and oblivion forever. Over them all again and again she went, sometimes quickening memory with half-spoken words, sometimes halting in long reverie at some intense juncture: now with tingling pleasure at the unveiling of the portrait, the painter's cautionary revelation of the personal presence above, or Claude's appearance at the window; now with burnings of self-abasement at the passionate but ineffectual beseechings of her violin; and always ending with her face in her hands, as though to hide her face even from herself for shame that with all her calling—her [Pg 298]barefaced, as it seemed to her, her abject calling—he had not come.

“Marguerite, my child, it is time for bed.”

She obeyed. It was all one, the bed or the window. Her mother, weary with travel, fell asleep; but she—she heard the clock down-stairs strike, and a clock next door attest, twelve—one—two—three—four, and another day began to shine in at the window. As it brightened, her spirits rose. She had been lying long in reverie; now she began once more the oft-repeated rehearsal. But the new day shone into it also. When the silent recital again reached its end, the old distress was no longer there, but in its place was a new, sweet shame near of kin to joy. The face, unhidden, looked straight into the growing light. Whatever else had happened, this remained,—that Claude was found. She silently formed the name on her parted lips—“Claude! Claude! Claude! Claude!” and could not stop though it gave her pain, the pain was so sweet. She ceased only when there rose before her again the picture of him drawing the curtain and disappearing; but even then she remembered the words, “Don't worry; we'll bring it out all right,” and smiled.

When Zoséphine, as the first sunbeam struck the window-pane, turned upon her elbow and looked into the fair face beside her, the eyes were closed in sleep. She arose, darkened the room, and left it.

## CHAPTER XX.

### LOVE, ANGER, AND MISUNDERSTANDING.

The city bells had sounded for noon when the sleeper opened her eyes. While she slept, Claude had arrived again at his father's cottage from the scene of the crevasse, and reported to Tarbox the decision of himself and the engineer, that the gap would not be closed for months to come. While he told it, they sat down with St. Pierre to breakfast. Claude, who had had no chance even to seek sleep, ate like a starved horse. Tarbox watched him closely, with hidden and growing amusement. Presently their eyes fastened on each other steadily. Tarbox broke the silence.

"*You* don't care how the crevasse turns out. I've asked you a question now twice, and you don't even hear."

"Why you don't ass ag'in?" responded the younger man, reaching over to the meat-dish and rubbing his bread in the last of the gravy. Some small care called St. Pierre away from the board. Tarbox leaned forward on his elbows, and, not knowing he quoted, said softly,—

"There's something up. What is it?"

"Op?" asked Claude, in his full voice, frowning. "Op where?—w'at, w'at is?"

"Ah, yes!" said Tarbox, with affected sadness. "Yes, that's it; I thought so.

'Oh-hon for somebody, oh hey for somebody.'"

[Pg 300]Claude stopped with a morsel half-way to his mouth, glared at him several seconds, and then resumed his eating; not like a horse now, but like a bad dog gnawing an old bone. He glanced again angrily at the embodiment of irreverence opposite. Mr. Tarbox smiled. Claude let slip, not intending it, an audible growl, with his eyes in the plate. Mr. Tarbox's smile increased to a noiseless laugh, and grew and grew until it took hopeless possession of him. His nerves relaxed, he trembled, the table trembled with him, his eyes filled with tears, his brows lifted laboriously, he covered his lips with one hand, and his abdomen shrank until it pained him. And Claude knew, and showed he knew it all; that was what made it impossible to stop. At length, with tottering knees, Mr. Tarbox rose and started silently for the door. He knew Claude's eyes were

following. He heard him rise to his feet. He felt as though he would have given a thousand dollars if his legs would but last him through the doorway. But to crown all, St. Pierre met him just on the threshold, breaking, with unintelligent sympathy, into a broad, simple smile. Tarbox laid one hand upon the door for support, and at that moment there was a hurtling sound; something whizzed by Tarbox's ear, and the meat-dish crashed against the door-post, and flew into a hundred pieces.

The book-agent ran like a deer for a hundred yards and fell grovelling upon the turf, the laugh still griping him with the energy of a panther's jaws, while Claude, who, in blind pursuit, had come threshing into his father's arms, pulled his hat over his eyes and strode [Pg 301]away towards the skiff ferry. As Mr. Tarbox returned towards the cottage, St. Pierre met him, looking very grave, if not displeased. The swamper spoke first.

"Dass mighty good for you I was yondah to stop dat boy. He would 'a' half-kill' you."

"He'd have served me ex-actly right," said the other, and laughed again. St. Pierre shook his head, as though this confession were poor satisfaction, and said,—

"Dass not safe—make a 'Cajun mad. He dawn't git mad easy, but when he *git* mad it bre'k out all ove' him, yass. He goin' feel bad all day now; I see tear' in his eye when he walk off."

"I'm sorry," said Tarbox sincerely, and presently added, "Now, while you look up a picked gang of timber-men, I'll see if I can charter a little stern-wheel steamer, get that written permission from Madame Beausoleil to cut trees on her land, and so forth, and so forth. You'll hardly see me before bedtime again."

It was the first hour of the afternoon when Claude left his little workroom and walked slowly down to, and across, Canal Street and into Bourbon. He had spent the intervening hours seated at his work-table with his face in his hands. He was in great bitterness. His late transport of anger gave him no burdensome concern. Indeed, there was consolation in the thought that he should, by and by, stand erect before one who was so largely to blame, and make that full confession and apology which he believed his old-time Grande [Pg 302]Pointe schoolmaster would have offered could Bonaventure ever have so shamefully forgotten himself. Yet the chagrin of having at once so violently and so impotently belittled himself added one sting more to his fate. He was in despair. An escaped balloon, a burst bubble, could hardly have seemed more utterly beyond his reach than now did Marguerite. And he could not blame her. She was right, he said sternly to himself—right to treat his portrait as something that reminded her of nothing,

whether it did so or not; to play on with undisturbed inspiration; to lift never a glance to his window; and to go away without a word, a look, a sign, to any one, when the least breath or motion would have brought him instantly into her sacred presence. She was right. She was not for him. There is a fitness of things, and there was no fitness—he said—of him for her. And yet she must and would ever be more to him than any one else. He would glory in going through life unloved, while his soul lived in and on the phantom companionship of that vision of delight which she was and should ever be. The midday bells sounded softly here and there. He would walk.

As I say, he went slowly down the old rue Bourbon. He had no hunger; he would pass by the Women's Exchange. There was nothing to stop there for; was not Madame Beausoleil in Terrebonne, and Marguerite the guest of that chattering woman in silk and laces? But when he reached the Exchange doors he drifted in as silently and supinely as any drift-log would float into the new crevasse.

[Pg 303]The same cashier was still on duty. She lighted up joyously as he entered, and, when he had hung his hat near the door, leaned forward to address him; but with a faint pain in his face, and loathing in his heart, he passed on and out into the veranda. The place was well filled, and he had to look about to find a seat. The bare possibility that *she* might be there was overpowering. There was a total suspension of every sort of emotion. He felt, as he took his chair and essayed to glance casually around, as light and unreal as any one who ever walked the tight-rope in a dream. The blood leaped in torrents through his veins, and yet his movements, as he fumbled aimlessly with his knife, fork, and glass, were slow and languid.

A slender young waitress came, rested her knuckles on the table, and leaned on them, let her opposite arm hang limply along the sidewise curve of her form, and bending a smile of angelic affection upon the young Acadian, said in a confidential undertone:

“The cashier told me to tell you those ladies have come.”

Claude rose quickly and stood looking upon the face before him, speechless. It was to him exactly as if a man in uniform had laid a hand upon his shoulder and said, “You're my prisoner.” Then, still gazing, and aware of others looking at him, he slowly sank again into his seat.

“She just told me to tell you,” said the damsel. “Yes, sir. Have you ordered?”

“Humph?” He was still looking at her.

“I say, have you given your order?”

[Pg 304]“Yass.”

She paused awkwardly, for she knew he had not, and saw that he was trying vainly to make her words mean something in his mind.

“Sha’n’t I get you some coffee and rolls—same as day before yesterday?”

“Yass.” He did not know what she said. His heart had stopped beating; now it began again at a gallop. He turned red. He could see the handkerchief that was wadded into his outer breast-pocket jar in time with the heavy thump, thump, thump beneath it. The waitress staid an awful time. At last she came.

“I waited,” she sweetly said, “to get *hot* ones.” He drew the refreshments towards him mechanically. The mere smell of food made him sick. It seemed impossible that he should eat it. She leaned over him lovingly and asked, as if referring to the attitude, “Would you like any thing more?—something sweet?” His flesh crawled. He bent over his plate, shook his head, and stirred his coffee without having put any thing into it.

She tripped away, and he drew a breath of momentary relief, leaned back in his chair, and warily passed his eyes around to see if there was anybody who was not looking at him and waiting for him to begin to eat.

Ages afterward—to speak with Claude’s feelings—he rose, took up his check, and went to the desk. The cashier leaned forward and said with soft blitheness:

“They’re here. They’re up-stairs now.”

Claude answered never a word. He paid his check. [Pg 305]As he waited for change, he cast another glance over the various groups at the tables. All were strangers. Then he went out. On the single sidewalk step he halted, and red and blind with mortification, turned again into the place; he had left his hat. With one magnificent effort at dignity and unconcern he went to the rack, took down the hat, and as he lowered it towards his head cast a last look down the room, and—there stood Marguerite. She had entered just in time, it seemed to him, but just too late, in fact, to see and understand the blunder. Oh, agony! They bowed to each other with majestic faintness, and then each from each was gone. The girl at the desk saw it and was dumb.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### LOVE AND LUCK BY ELECTRIC LIGHT.

Mr. Tarbox was really a very brave man. For, had he not been, how could he have ventured, something after the middle of that afternoon, in his best attire, up into Claude's workroom? He came to apologize. But Claude was not there.

He waited, but the young man did not return. The air was hot and still. Mr. Tarbox looked at his watch—it was a quarter of five. He rose and descended to the street, looked up and down it, and then moved briskly down to, and across, Canal Street and into Bourbon. He had an appointment.

[Pg 306]Claude had not gone back to his loft at all. He was wandering up and down the streets. About four he was in Bienville Street, where the pleasure-trains run through it on their way out to Spanish Fort, a beautiful pleasure-ground some six miles away from the city's centre, on the margin of Lake Pontchartrain. He was listlessly crossing the way as a train came along, and it was easy for the habit of the aforetime brakeman to move him. As the last platform passed the crossing, he reached out mechanically and swung aboard.

Spanish Fort is at the mouth of Bayou St. John. A draw-bridge spans the bayou. On the farther, the eastern, side, Claude stood leaning against a pile, looking off far beyond West End to where the sun was setting in the swamps about Lake Maurepas. There—there—not seen save by memory's eye, yet there not the less, was Bayou des Acadiens. Ah me! there was Grande Pointe.

“O Bonaventure! Do I owe you”—Claude's thought was in the old Acadian tongue—“Do I owe you malice for this? No, no, no! Better *this* than *less*.” And then he recalled a writing-book copy that Bonaventure had set for him, of the schoolmaster's own devising: *Better Great Sorrow than Small Delight*. His throat tightened and his eyes swam.

A pretty schooner, with green hull and new sails, came down the bayou. As he turned to gaze on her, the bridge, just beyond his feet, began to swing open. He stepped upon it and moved towards its centre, his eyes still on the beautiful silent advance of the vessel. [Pg 307]With a number of persons who had gathered from both ends of the bridge, he paused and leaned over the rail as the schooner, with her crew looking up into the faces of the throng, glided close by. A female form came beside him, looking down with the rest and shedding upon the air the soft sweetness of perfumed robes. A masculine voice, just beyond, said:

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”

Claude started and looked up, and behold, Marguerite on the arm of Tarbox!

His movement drew their glance, and the next instant Mr. Tarbox, beaming apology and pouring out glad greetings, had him by the hand. Burning, choking, stammering, Claude heard and answered, he knew not how, the voice of the

queen of all her kind. Another pair pressed forward to add their salutations. They were Zoséphine and the surveyor.

Because the facilities for entertaining a male visitor were slender at the Women's Exchange, because there was hope of more and cooler air at the lake-side, because Spanish Fort was a pretty and romantic spot and not so apt to be thronged as West End, and because Marguerite, as she described it, was tired of houses and streets, and also because he had something to say to Zoséphine, Mr. Tarbox had brought the pretty mother and daughter out here. The engineer had met the three by chance only a few minutes before, and now as the bridge closed again he passed Zoséphine over to Claude, walked only a little way with them down a path among the shrubbery, and then lifted his hat and withdrew.

[Pg 308]For once in his life Mr. G. W. Tarbox, as he walked with Marguerite in advance of Claude and her mother, was at a loss what to say. The drollness of the situation was in danger of overcoming him again. Behind him was Claude, his mind tossed on a wild sea of doubts and suspicions.

"I told him," thought Tarbox, while the girl on his arm talked on in pretty, broken English and sprightly haste about something he had lost the drift of—"I told him I was courting Josephine. But I never proved it to him. And now just look at this! Look at the whole sweet mess! Something has got to be done." He did not mean something direct and openhanded; that would never have occurred to him. He stopped, and with Marguerite faced the other pair. One glance into Claude's face, darkened with perplexity, anger, and a distressful effort to look amiable and comfortable, was one too many; Tarbox burst into a laugh.

"Pardon!" he exclaimed, checking himself until he was red; "I just happened to think of something very funny that happened last week in Arkansas—Madame Beausoleil, I know it must look odd,"—his voice still trembled a little, but he kept a sober face—"and yet I must take just a moment for business. Claude, can I see you?"

They went a step aside. Mr. Tarbox put on a business frown, and said to Claude in a low voice,—

"Hi! diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon the little dog laughed to see the sport and the dish ran away with the spoon [Pg 309]you understand I'm simply talking for talk's sake as we resume our walk we'll inadvertently change partners—a kind of Women's Exchange as it were old Mother Hubbard she went to the cupboard to get her poor dog a bone but when she got there the cupboard—don't smile so broadly—was bare and so the poor dog had none will that be satisfactory?"

Claude nodded, and as they turned again to their companions the exchange was made with the grace, silence, and calm unconsciousness of pure oversight,—or of general complicity. Very soon it suited Zoséphine and Tarbox to sit down upon a little bench beside a bed of heart's-ease and listen to the orchestra. But Marguerite preferred to walk in and out among the leafy shadows of the electric lamps.

And so, side by side, as he had once seen Bonaventure and Sidonie go, they went, Claude and Marguerite, away from all windings of disappointment, all shadows of doubt, all shoals of misapprehension, out upon the open sea of mutual love. Not that the great word of words—affirmative or interrogative—was spoken then or there. They came no nearer to it than this,—

“I wish,” murmured Claude,—they had gone over all the delicious “And-I-thought-that-you’s” and the sweetly reproachful “Did-you-think-that-I’s,” and had covered the past down to the meeting on the bridge,—“I wish,” he murmured, dropping into the old Acadian French, which he had never spoken to her before,—“I wish”—

“What?” she replied, softly and in the same tongue.

[Pg 310]“I wish,” he responded, “that this path might never end.” He wondered at his courage, and feared that now he had ruined all; for she made no answer. But when he looked down upon her she looked up and smiled. A little farther on she dropped her fan. He stooped and picked it up, and, in restoring it, somehow their hands touched,—touched and lingered; and then—and then—through one brief unspeakable moment, a maiden’s hand, for the first time in his life, lay willingly in his. Then, as glad as she was frightened, Marguerite said she must go back to her mother, and they went.