

flute, what glimpses of the sanctuary when the choristers paced out and the priests paced in, what splashing of the bright blue sea upon some opal stretch of shore, what recollections of some quiet hour passed beneath the marble shade of mighty ruins—did there not surge in his poor little clouded brain? And what should make all this return at once upon the poor *bambino* but that glimpse of Madame Le Verrier's yellow wall? Just looking at that wall seemed to bring up the entire past within that tired little frame, weary, so weary of everything in his life save music. And that he never heard. As for his own music, he knew very well there must be something wrong about it. Either the fiddle or himself was to blame, and he rather liked to think it was himself, since if it were in the fiddle it might get worse and be of no use to him, and just be broken up and thrown out on the fields; and then where would he be? Alone, then; and no mistake. Not even a fiddle. But that yellow wall! It had recalled everything. Assunta, his mother, with her big gold earrings and clean white jacket—the jacket of the neat Italian housewife; and Lisa, the old servant, cross but good-hearted, and Bimbo, the donkey, and the goldsmith, Venturi, his father. Did his father die, or was he murdered, for being a conspirator, a Socialist? He had forgotten. Then his mother—she died of grief and poverty. Then the donkey died, and that was the saddest of all. Then Achille—by the way, how did he get called Achille? Some other name he had had, surely, but he could not remember it. Then some man bought him—yes, in exchange for something, he never knew what; and from that time he was led about and taught to dance and play and sing, and was kicked and cuffed and cursed till he ran away. But now this new country was very cold. All last winter he had lain curled up in an old shed, stealing out on mild days to earn a few coppers and so lay in a stock of food; and now here was another winter coming on, and people saying it would be much colder than the last one. And the fiddle didn't sound well in the cold. And he couldn't learn the foreign tongue, and the English were so stupid. Even the grown up English, Mrs. Flanigan, who kept a pastrycook's shop in a back street, and Adams, a cockney, who drove a cab, and who were sometimes kind to him, couldn't and wouldn't learn his Italian words. So, sauntering on from village to village, and from town to town, descending the mighty banks of the St. Lawrence, and leaving at every step the cold prosaic American and Saxon world which was his first experience of the new country, behind him, he chanced to turn aside from the high-road and to discover for himself the quaint little hamlet of St. Eustache, poplar-bordered, priest-guarded, and sanctified by the rude way-side cross.

And thus, after so many wanderings, here he lay in the widow's house, the rich widow of St. Eustache, known all through the valley for her skill in farming, for her uprightness in dealing, but no less known for her closeness in money matters, and for her singular aversion to society. Alphonse, you may be sure, helped to circulate the news. Before ten the next morning, *M. le notaire* had dropped in at the front gate cut out of the yellow wall, and was met there by Madame. But little did he get out of her.

"*Tiens!*" said the widow. "I live by myself. Good. I choose to live by myself. Good again. I have not always lived in St. Eustache, *Monsieur* Boucher. You will grant that."

"*Ah, oui, Madame,*" said M. Boucher, the notary, who knew that in her youth when she was known as Marie-Françoise-Joséphine Hertel-Duplessis, she was much respected as the descendant of a notable French family, the first of whom had been Seigneur of the entire valley. Many a visit had she paid in those days to Quebec, and once even to Montreal, and she was still much looked up to, though her marriage with old Le Verrier had considerably affected her social standing. She was one of those singularly strong, reliant, and almost masculine women who forever go wrong in matters of the heart.

"Look you!" she said to *M. le notaire*. "When I married L'Verrier, I asked for no one's advice. When I began to cultivate his farm, I asked for no one's advice. When I adopt this little boy, I do the same. It is not of you, nor of *M. le docteur*, nor of the *curé* himself, nor of the village," and her lip curled with unspeakable scorn, "nor of Maman Archambault, nor of that fool, Alphonse, that I shall ask advice. I am no girl. I have been a married woman, and I am a Duplessis. *Tiens!* *M. le notaire*, I thank you, but I know my affairs."

*M. le notaire* threw up his hands to the sky.

"*Adopt*, did you say? But what hurry! What haste! What sorrow! The boys in the village—regard, how poor, how miserable, how neglected are those! Surely Madame will choose one of these: Pierre Archambault—look, the poor woman with sixteen others; and Isidore—"

"Why did she have so many?" snapped the widow. "The *curé* says it is the will of God. I am a good Catholic, and I give money to the Church, but I do not believe that. Since she has them, let her look to them. And Isidore is the only son of his mother. One does not wish to rob a nest of one egg, and the widow Gauthier will never marry again. Soft; soft; she still weeps for the dead blacksmith."

The notary was a thin, pale, timid young man, devoted in spirit to Madame Marie-Françoise-Joséphine Hertel-Duplessis Jonquière Le Verrier, but he had never so utterly despaired in the past of making her his own as he did at that moment.

Later, came Corinne, with a present from her mother, of one of those little plaited rocking-chairs, made by the *habitants* for their own use, but which find their way up to the larger towns and villages, and are usually in great

demand, being light and durable. Corinne, hoping she might see Alphonse at the farm, had donned her Sunday gown of red satin, and a newly-knitted hood of light blue wool, beneath which her sallow skin and dry black hair did not show to their best advantage. But the great thing in St. Eustache was novelty, and the pattern of this hood had actually been brought all the way from a small frontier town on the opposite side of the river, above Montreal, and, therefore, very near the States, so Corinne knew it was probably the very freshest thing in the whole valley. In St. Eustache fashions were very important, indeed yes; and no one could say that Corinne had not the best taste of all the unmarried women.

But the widow Le Verrier did not notice the hood. She disliked Maman Archambault and her family exceedingly, and Corinne, perhaps, most of all; and now she raised the chair with one hand, and held it so, aloft in the air, with an imperious menace in her mien that would have frightened many an English young woman less accustomed to such moods than Corinne. The latter made a small kind of courtesy, and explained that she had brought it for the baby. Regard how useful for Madame to sit and rock him in!

"*Ma joy!*" said the elder woman, bringing the chair slowly to earth again, but very slowly, as if some original design of braining Corinne with it were but reluctantly relinquished, and knitting her already slightly silvered and furry brows. "Keep *chez vous*, and attend, with your mother, to the sixteen others. There is no baby here. No, Corinne Archambault. But, stay, I will show you *him*." And Madame, repenting her of her frowardness, led Corinne into her own apartment, which had never, till Achille invaded it, been entered by a soul beside herself, and disclosed the sleeping boy, recumbent on her patchwork quilt. The airs of sunny Italy had once fed that olive skin, and warmed that rounded arm. As the two women bent over him, he half woke again, and lifted those long, long lashes. Ah! what stars, what flowers, what deep dark lakes of eyes were revealed!

"*Tal-yan boy,*" he said, and curled over on his other side.

Corinne, who had a very warm heart, allowed a tear to escape her, and she glanced furtively at the widow. Bah! There were no tears there!

"Now, Corinne Archambault," said she, in her coldest and most disapproving accents, "you have seen him; you can go. Say what you like of me, but for this boy, look you, he is not Pierre, neither is he Henri, not yet André, nor even Hyacinthe-Simon, and he is not to be spoken of as you may speak in the village of those. No; Achille is his name! Ask the *curé*, who will tell you it is a grand name. And henceforth he bears another—mine. *Ouai*, Corinne Archambault. You may tell that fool Alphonse, too, if you like. Henceforth, if he gets well, he is mine, and all I have shall be his: that is, if he carries himself well, learns to hoe and plant and till the farm, and everything that becomes a man."

"And if he does not? *Ma joy!* it is not often one meets good boys. Little devils are they mostly. *Mon oncle* at L'Ange Gardien—he who has the *fromagerie* and has never had any family—a great sorrow that will be for some—he must have a boy about, he and *ma tante*, who was Rosalie Biron of Québec, and fond of children. So, they try very hard to find a good boy. They write to the *Journal*, they ask of the *curé*, they travel themselves—*mon oncle* has much money, will give anything for to find a strong, neat, amiable boy. *Eh! bien*, one came from Rivière Ouelle, and another from Batiscan, and another from L'Assomption, but there came none to please *mon oncle*. One stole his image of the good Saint Jerome; one left all the potatoes to freeze in an empty barn without covering them, and they were all like black stones for the dinner the day *M. le notaire* came to sign away the *goudronnerie*, which is also the property of *mon oncle*; and another bought a painted face like those Madame has seen in Québec at the carnival, and put it on to frighten *ma tante*, who had never heard of such a thing. And *ma tante*—she that was Rosalie Biron, of Québec herself, though not of the town, but of Beaufort near by, which Madame doubtless knows—since she has been there—was so frightened that it sent her into a fever. And many another boy did there come to the house of *mon oncle* at L'Ange Gardien, and none ever pleased him. So, Madame, if you are wise, you will let the boy go. It will be for a trouble to you if you keep him, and when there is Alphonse—"

The widow folded her arms on the top of her yellow wall—while Corinne had chattered away, they had passed out of the house and down to the gate—and looked grimly at her visitor.

"*Ah, ouai,*" she said, nodding her head ironically; "*ouai*, Mademoiselle Archambault. It will be all for Alphonse, you are so interested. *Pauvre Alphonse!* They say, I work him hard, down in the village. They say, I pay him ill, down in the village. Look you, is he thin, is he pale, is he ill, is he *triste*? No. Is he fat, is he handsome, does he eat five platefuls of soup, does he ride much and walk little? Yes. *Bien ouai*. Who is it plants the seed, and hoes the ground, and paints the doors, and feeds the animals? Even I, I myself, the widow L'Verrier. Not Alphonse, you see! Not Alphonse! Now, Corinne Archambault, you may marry that fool Alphonse if you will, but look you meddle not with the other; you know whom I mean."

The widow unclasped her arms and set her hat down on her head with a jerk, while Corinne shrugged her shoulders and adjusted her woollen hood more becomingly and more closely around her face, for the September sun

had gone down some ten minutes, and it was growing sharp and cold with a touch of frost in the air, the kind of night to fire the first red maple and gild the graceful birch.

"But I will keep the chair," said Madame, and she smiled.

She was naturally acquisitive. Corinne shut the gate behind her, and went down the road.

"*Bon soir, Madame,*" she volunteered. But Madame vouchsafed no reply, and stood grimly gazing at her departing form, with her arms folded in a Napoleonic attitude.

Achille the outcast, Achille the little wandering musician, Achille of the dark starry eyes and the plaintive musical voice, Achille had found a refuge. And what a comfortable refuge, to be sure! Regard how already he grows fat, how the eyes glisten, and how the limbs bound actively and spontaneously as they should; how quick and nimble the brown hands are to help Madame with the spinning, and how the voice has learnt to join in the refrain of the pretty *chanson* of Rosalie—but not Rosalie Biron, late of Québec—and the lover who tied his horse to a mulberry tree while he shot his lady-love a shining white duck with a diamond eye and a collar of gold. Regard, too, the comfortable thick stockings on his thin brown legs, spun from Madame's own wool; and the becoming red sash round his waist, and the thick dark hair brushed wavyly over his forehead; and the corduroy coat imported for him specially from a distant relative of his benefactress, Pierre Roubaud, the draper, of Three Rivers; and the pair of wooden shoes that originally came from Normandy, and had always been kept in the cupboard until it was discovered that they were just the size for Achille. Ah, Achille was in luck now, and could hardly realize the full measure of his good fortune. He seemed to bring happiness even to Madame's lonely house; for in the winter evenings she often asked Monsieur Boucher, the slim young notary, up to spend an hour or two, and old Delorme, who was otherwise *un monstre*, but who could nevertheless play superbly on an old cracked violin, came up too; and then he and Achille would tune away while the widow sat at her spinning, straight and firm as a young girl, with the notary, a willing slave, seated opposite her with his pipe; and Achille would teach old Delorme his lively Italian airs, and old Delorme would teach Achille his melancholy Canadian ones, till at the sound of one of these—*Ah, qui me passera un bois, Moi qui suis si petite*—the widow would declare it was too *triste* for anything, and summoning Alphonse, would mix a little cold whisky and water, and soon they would all part for the night. And then one exquisite night—clear and frosty and flooded with moonshine—did not the widow Marie-Françoise-Joséphine Hertel-Duplessis Jonquière Le Verrier actually consent to their taking the little one down the Ducharmes slide—the only artificial slide in the neighbourhood, and consequently a wonderful novelty? The Ducharmes were quite wealthy people, and dealt in flour, and they kept a maid-of-all-work. Down the slippery "Cone" Madame would not hear of their taking the little one; it was far too dangerous, but the slide was not so bad. And when Achille ran home, smothered in blankets and snow, half frightened, half pleased, and intensely exhilarated by the novel sensation to a nature as languid and Southern as his own, he fired the sleeping inclination of the widow; and when a second moonlight came, she went down herself, carefully guarded by her good friend the notary and Père Alexis Ducharme.

When the spring came, Achille had even better times, for he revelled in the grass and the strange new starry flowers and the open plunging waters of the foaming St. Eustache. He was never at home, yet he was never found with the other boys, and Madame knew of no school good enough for him as yet. Wait a few years, and he shall go to Québec, or at least, if the worst happens and one's rents do not come in, to Three Rivers, where it will be most safe and happy as Pierre Roubaud, the draper, the *marchandises sèches*, her cousin, could better look after him. But as the time wore on, Achille went neither to Québec nor to Three Rivers. He was quick with the language, and learned to speak French with the widow; and told her, in return, queer tales in mongrel Italian, of the old brown house in Italy with the pots of carnations in the window, and all about Bimbo, the donkey, who appeared to be the sole thing on earth the child had ever loved, but he showed no inclination for study, nor for farming, not even for music, nor for anything but genuine unmistakable loafing as far as Madame Le Verrier could make out. A moody, handsome, obstinate, picturesque young beggar; he gave her a good deal of anxious thought, chiefly because he was so unlike other boys she had known. If he were only a trifle mischievous, like that wicked Pierre, or given to occasional lying like André Lauchlin, or affectionate and clinging like Hyacinthe-Simon. But he was none of these; and Madame Marie-Françoise-Joséphine Hertel-Duplessis Jonquière Le Verrier, though she may have felt some disappointment, kept it to herself. One night, and this was a hot night in August, when Achille had been with her for about a year, she was suddenly taken very ill. This night was so hot that not a single puff of wind moved the tall stiff poplars that grew in a little grove at the side of the house where her room was; and this room, being small and very low in the ceiling, grew excessively oppressive. The widow had no light, and she knew she was very ill. To die thus was like a fish in a net, or a rat in a trap, and could not be borne. She sat up in the dark with her hands over her heart, and struggled hard for her breath. How dark it was, yet how hot, even with every window