

College? What'd you go off to the woods for?"

"Ah'll get tire' fraum dat teachin'—read, read, read, h'all taim. Ah'll not lak dat so much. Rader be out-door—run around—paddle de canot—wid de boys in de woods—mek' dem dance as ma musique. A-ah! Dat was foul! P'raps you tink dat not good, hein? You t'lok Jacques one beg' fool, Ah suppose?"

"I dunno," said Serena, declining to commit herself, but pressing on gently, as women do, to the point she had in view when she began the tale. "Dunno's you're any more foolish than a man that keeps on doin' what he don't like."

But what made you come away from the boys in the woods and travel down this way?"

A shade passed over the face of Jacques. He turned away from the lamp and bent over the violin on his knees, fingering the strings nervously. Then he spoke, in a changed, shaken voice.

"Ah'll tole you somet'ing, Ma'am-selle Serena. You ma frien'. Don't you h'ask me dat reason of it no more. Dat's somet'ing vaie' bad, bad, bad. Ah can't nevair tole dat—nevair."

There was something in the way he said it that gave a check to her gentle curiosity and turned it into pity. A man with a secret in his life? It was a new element in her experience; like a chapter in a book. She was lady enough at heart to respect his silence.

She kept away from the forbidden ground. But the knowledge that it was there gave a new interest to Jacques and his music. She embroidered some strange romances around that secret while she sat in the kitchen sewing.

Other people at Bytown were less forbearing. They tried their best to find out something about Fiddlin' Jack's past, but he was not communicative. He talked about Canada. All Canadian and plays."

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but it was Hose Ransom who settled the case. He was a well-known fighting man, and a respected philosopher. He swung his broad frame in front of the fiddler.

"Tell yo what we'll do. Jess nothin'! Ain't Bull Corey the blowin'est and the mos' trouble us euss' round these hall woods? And wouldn't it be a fast rate thing of some o' the wind was let out 'n him?"

General assent greeted this pointed inquiry.

"And wa'n't Fiddlin' Jack peaceable 'nough 'a long 'a he was let alone? What's the matter with lettin' him alone now?"

The argument seemed to carry weight. Hose saw his advantage, and clinched it.

"Ain't he given us a lot o' fan here this winter in an innocent kind o' way, with his old fiddle? I guess there ain't nothin' on airth he loves better'n that holler piece o' wood, an' the toons that's inside o' it. It's jess like a wife or a child to him. Where's that fiddle, anyhow?"

Some one had picked it deitly out of Corey's hand during the scuffle, and now passed it up to Hose.

"Here, Frenchy, take yer log-necked, pot-bellied music-guard. And I want you boys to understand, of any one toches that fiddle ag'in, I'll knock hell out'n him."

So the recording angel dropped an other tear upon the record of Hose Ransom, and the books were closed for the night.

CHAPTER III. For some weeks after the incident of the violin and the carving knife, it looked as if a permanent cloud had settled upon the spirits of Fiddlin' Jack.

He was sad and nervous; if any one touched him, or even spoke to him suddenly, he would jump like a deer. He kept out of everybody's way as much as possible, sat out in the wood shed when he was not at work, and could not be persuaded to bring down his fiddle. He seemed in a fair way to be transformed into "the melancholy Jacques."

It was Serena who broke the spell; it did it in a woman's way, the simplest way in the world—by taking no notice of it.

"Ain't you goin' to play for me to night?" she asked one evening, as Jacques passed through the kitchen. Whereupon the evil spirit was exercised, and the violin came back again to its place in the life of the house.

But there was less time for music now than there had been in the winter. As the snow vanished from the woods, and the frost leaked out of the ground, and the ice on the lake was honey-combed, breaking away from the shore, and finally going to pieces altogether in a warm southeast storm, the Sportsmen's Retreat began to prepare for business. There was a garden to be planted, and there were boats to be painted. The rotten old wharf in front of the house stood badly in need of repairs. The fiddler pressed himself, as Jack-of-all-trades and master of more than one.

In the middle of May the anglers began to arrive at the Retreat—a quiet, sociable, friendly set of men, most of whom were old-time acquaintances, and familiar lovers of the woods. They belonged to the "early Adirondack period," these disciples of Walton. They were not very rich, and they did not put on much style, but they understood how to have a good time; and what they did not know about fishing was not worth knowing.

Jacques fitted into their scheme of life as a well made reel fits the butt of a good rod. He was a steady artisan, a lucky fisherman, with a real genius for the use of the landing net, and a cheerful companion, who did not insist upon giving his views about artificial flies and advice about casting, on every occasion. By the end of June he found himself in steady employment as a guide.

He liked best to go with the anglers who were not too energetic, but who were satisfied to fish for a few hours in the morning and again at sunset, after a long rest in the middle of the afternoon. This was just the time for the violin; and if Jacques had his way, he would take it with him to the woods, and when the pipes were lit after luncheon on the shore of Round Island or at the mouth of Cold Brook, he would discover sweet music until the declining sun drew near the tree-tops and a very rangy silver bell for vespers. Then it was time to fish again, and the flies danced merrily over the water, and the great speckled trout leaped eagerly to catch them. For trolling all day long for lake-trout Jacques had little liking.

song of Schubert—it was to her that he would play it first. If he would persuade her to a boat-ride with him on the lake, Sunday evening, the week was complete. He even learned to know the more shy and delicate forest blossoms that she preferred, and would come in from a day's guiding with a tiny bunch of belated twin flowers, or a few purple-fringed orchids, or a handful of nodding stalks of the fragrant psylla, for her.

So the summer passed, and the autumn, with its longer hunting expeditions into the depth of the wilderness; and by the time winter came around again, Fiddlin' Jack was well settled at Moody's as a regular Adirondack guide of the old-fashioned type, but with a difference. He improved in his English, which Moody called ambition, and to which Hose Ransom gave the name of imagination, seemed to awaken with him. He saved his wages. He went into business for himself in a modest way, and made a good turn in the manufacture of deerskin mittens and snow shoes. By the spring he had nearly \$300 laid by, and bought a piece of land from Ransom on the bank of the river just above the village.

The second summer of guiding brought him in enough to commence building a little house. It was of logs, neatly squared at the corners; and there was a door exactly in the middle of the facade, with a square window at either side, and another at each end of the house, according to the common style of architecture at Bytown.

But it was in the roof that the touch of distinction appeared. For this, Jacques had modelled after his memory of a little Canadian roof. There was a delicate concave sweep in it, as it sloped downward from the peak, and the eaves projected pleasantly over the front door, making a strip of shade wherein it would be good to rest when the afternoon sun shone hot.

He took great pride in his effort; of the builder's art. One day at the beginning of May, when the house was nearly finished, he asked old Moody and Serena to stop on their way home, and he showed them the kitchen, and the living room, with the bed room partitioned off from it, and sharing half of its side-window. Here was a place where a door could be cut at the back, and a shed built for a summer kitchen—for the coolness, you understand. And here were two stoves—one for the cooking, and the other in the living room for the warming, both of the new-est.

An' look dat roof. Dat's lak' we make dem in Canada. De rain ron off easy, and de sun not shine too strong at de door. Ain't dat nice? You lak' dat roof, Ma'am-selle Serena, hein'?"

Thus the imagination of Jacques unfolded itself, and his ambition appeared to be making plans for its accomplishment. I do not want any one to suppose that there was a crisis in his affair of the heart. There was none. Indeed, it is very doubtful whether anybody in the village, even Serena herself, ever dreamed that there was such an affair.

Up to the point when the house was finished and furnished, it was to be a secret between Jacques and his violin; and they found no difficulty in keeping it.

Bytown was a Yankee village. Jacques was, after all, nothing but a Frenchman. The native tone of religion, what there was of it, was strongly Methodist. Jacques never went to church, and if he was anything, was probably a Roman Catholic. Serena was something of a sentimentalist, and a great reader of novels; but the international love-story had not yet been invented, and the idea of getting married to a foreigner never entered her head. I do not say that she suspected nothing in the wild flowers, and the Sunday evening boat-ride, and the music. She was a woman. I have said already that she liked Jacques very much, and his violin pleased her to the heart. But the new building by the river? I am sure she never even thought of it once, in the way that he did.

Well, in the end of June, just after the furniture had come for the house with the curved roof, Serena was married to Hose Ransom. He was a young widower without children, and also, either the best fellow, as well as the most prosperous, in the settlement. He stood up on the hill, across the road from the lot which Jacques had bought. It was painted white, and it had a narrow front porch, with a scroll-saw fringe around the edge of it; and there was a little garden fenced in with white palings, in which three or four willows and a blue lupine, and pink bleeding-hearts were planted.

The wedding was, as the Sportsmen's Retreat and Jacques had no objection to the ceremony. There was nothing of the discomfited lover about him. Thousen he might have confessed to in a confidential moment of intercourse with his violin; but the adjective was not in his list.

The strongest impulse in his nature was to be a giver of entertainment, and a source of joy in others, a recognized element of delight in the little world where he moved. He had the artistic temperament. In the most primitive sense so much as the act of pleasing. Music was the means which Nature had given him to fulfill this desire. He played as you might say, out of a certain kind of selfishness, because he enjoyed making other people happy. He was selfish enough, in his way, to want the pleasure of making every body feel the same delight that he felt in the clear tones, the merry cadences, the tender and caressing flow of his violin. That was consolation. That was power. That was success.

And especially was he selfish enough to want to feel his ability to give Serena a pleasure at her wedding—a pleasure that nobody else could give her. When she asked him to play, he consented gladly. The wedding guests danced as if they were enchanted. The big bridegroom came up and clapped him on the back, with the nearest approach to a gesture of affection that

backwoods etiquette allows between men.

"Jack, you're the boss fiddler o' this hull county. Have a drink now? I guess you're mighty dry."

"Merci non," said Jacques. "I drink only de mussek the night. Bef I drink too 'nough, I get drunk."

In between the dances, and while the supper was going on, he played quieter tunes—ballads and songs that he knew Serena liked. After supper came the final reel; and when that was wound up, with immense hilarity, the company ran out to the side door of the tavern to shout a noisy farewell to the bridal party, as it drove down the road toward the house with the white palings. When they came back, the fiddler was gone. He had slipped away to the little cabin with the curved roof.

All night long he sat there playing in the dark. Every tune that he had ever known came back to him—grave and merry, light and sad. He played them over and over again, passing round and round among them, as if on a stream of music. The eddies, now forming an echo of a certain theme from Chopin—you remember the nocturne in G minor, the second one? He did not know who Chopin was. Perhaps he did not even know the name of the music. But the air had fallen upon his ear somewhere, and had stayed in his memory; and now it seemed to say something to him that had an especial meaning.

At last he let the bow fall. He patted the brown wood of the violin after his old fashion, loosened the strings a little, wrapped it in its green baize cover, and hung it on the wall. "Hang thou there, thou little violin," he murmured. "It is now that I shall take the good care of thee, as never before, for thou art the wife of Jacques Tremblay. And the wife of 'Ose Ransom, she is a friend to us, both of us; and we will make the music for her many years, I tell thee, many years—for her, and her good man, and for the children—yes?"

But Serena did not have many years to listen to the playing of Jacques Tremblay: on the white porch, in the summer evenings, with bleeding hearts a bloom in the garden; or by the winter fire, when the pale blue moonlight lay on the snow without, and the yellow lamplight filled the room with homely radiance. In the fourth year after her marriage she died, and Jacques stood beside Hose at the funeral.

There was a child—a little boy—delicate and blue-eyed, the living image of his mother. Jacques appointed himself general attendant, nurse in extraordinary, and concert musician to this child. He gave up his work as a guide. It took him too much away from home. He was tired of it. Besides, what did he want of so much money? He had his house. He could gain enough for all his needs by making snow-shoes and the deerskin mittens at home. Then he could be near little Billy. It was pleasanter so.

When Hose was away on a long trip in the woods, Jacques would move up to the white house and stay on guard. His fiddle learned how to sing the prettiest slumber songs. Moreover it could caw in the morning, just like the cock; and it could make a noise like a mouse, and like the cat, too; and there were more tunes inside of it than in any music-box in the world.

As the boy grew older, the little cabin with the curved roof became his favorite playground. It was near the river, and Fiddlin' Jack was always ready to make a boat for him, or help him catch minnows in the mill dam. The child had a taste for music, too, and learned some of the old Canadian songs, which he sang in a curious broken patois while his delighted teacher accompanied him on the violin. But it was a great day when he was eight years old, and Jacques brought out a small fiddle for which he had secretly sent to Albany, and presented it to the boy.

"You see dat feedle, Billiee? Dat's for you! You mek' your lesson on dat. When you kin mek' mussek, den you play on de violon—lak' dis one—listen!"

Then he drew the bow across the strings and dashed into a melody of the jolliest airs imaginable.

The boy took to his instruction as kindly as could have been expected. School interrupted it a good deal; and play with the other boys carried him away often; but after all, there was nothing that he liked much better than to sit in the little cabin on a winter evening and pick out a simple tune after his teacher. He must have had some talent for it, too, for Jacques was very proud of his pupil, and prophesied great things of him. Indeed, he was so sure that he could have been a "Ose Ransom," the fiddler would say to a circle of people at the hotel, where he still went to play for parties; "you know dat small Ransom boy? Well, I'm t'ichin' heem play de feedle; an' I tell you, one day he play better dan de teacher. Ah, dat's gr-r-r-rat 'n'g, de mussek, ain't it? Mek' you laugh, mek' you cry, mek' you dance! Now you dance. Tell your pardnerre. En avant! Kip' stop to de mussek!"

CHAPTER IV. Thirty years brought many changes to Bytown. The wild woodland flavor evaporated out of the place almost entirely; and instead of an independent centre of rustic life, it became an annex to great cities. It was exploited as a summer resort, and discovered as a score of boarding-houses alternately languished and flourished. The summer cottage also appeared and multiplied; and with it came many of the peculiar features which man elaborates in his struggle toward the finest civilization—afternoon teas, and amateur theatricals, and lawn-hammer coats, and a casino, and even a few servants in livery.

The very name of Bytown was discarded as being too American and commonplace. An Indian name was discovered, and considered much more romantic and appropriate. You will look in vain for Bytown on the map now. Nor will you find the old saw-mill there any longer,



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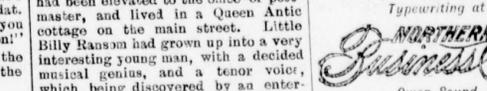
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