

Marianne was frail to look upon, but she had a will of iron. She took the fur cap and overcoat of M. Carolus to her room, and, slitting open her *paillasse*, hid them in the straw, then she sewed up the rent. When Basile had breakfasted she went over to the presbytery and told the *curé* of that time all that her cousin had said to her, that he was missing now, and begged his reverence to come and break the news to Basile and Bibiane. The *curé* went, Marianne following him sick with shame and sorrow, and when by-and-bye the story went through the parish that M. Carolus had departed, leaving his bride to Athanase, few were sorry, for the most part for all his learning and riches, they had considered him, on account of his irreligion, unworthy of Bibiane, and had blamed Père Pilote. It was better, they said, that he should show himself unfaithful in this, as in greater things, before than after his marriage. At the first Basile merely wondered a little that his son should have left him in so strange a manner, but when the days grew to weeks and no letter came, nor could the old man discover by what means his son had left the village, he began to fear that all was not well, and in time he came to the conclusion that M. Carolus had begun his journey on foot, meaning to walk part of the way, and that in the storm he had missed his footing and fallen from the road to the frozen river beneath, where he would lie buried in snow until the spring, then to be driven with the moving ice down to the sea. This idea took possession of Basile's mind. Carolus, in whom he had centred all his great pride, was dead, and he was an unhappy, lonely, old man, poorer than his poorest neighbour, whose children still remained to him. From that time he began to fail in mind and body.

"Bibiane and Athanase were married within the year, and went to live

in the little house a stone's throw from Pilote's. By-and-bye a child was born to them, and they were the happiest young people in three parishes. To the day of her death Bibiane never regretted her choice. As time went on all St. Bernard came to believe in the death of M. Carolus, and attributed to this cause both the weakened mind of the uncle and the strange habit the niece developed.

"Thereafter Marianne, unwatched by prying eyes, wandered throughout long nights among the trees. The leaves fell about her, the wintry winds chilled her; she saw the dawn of spring mornings and heard the frogs trilling in the summer darkness. Five years had gone by since Basile gave the ball to celebrate his son's return. A short time, but it had worked many changes. The once too proud old man, his mind gone, his powerful frame grown feeble as a little child's, seated in his arm-chair close to the stove, counted his possessions over on his fingers, and mumbled of the great things Carolus would do by-and-bye when he came back. Marianne, who had been spinning, arose to put more wood on the fire and trim the lamp, then, wrapping herself in a heavy cloak, she passed out into the moonlight and took her away across the fields to the woods, just as the bells rang out, calling the faithful to Midnight Mass. She crossed the stream and pressed on into the shadow of the pines; her long, black rosary was twisted about one hand, while the other grasped the handle of a keen, long-bladed knife. The frozen snow crackled under her feet, and the moonlight shining between the branches made all the way bright as day. She moved forward stealthily, praying, as she strained her eyes for some glimpse of the fearful form which she had beheld at distant intervals, but which had always fled like the wind at her approach. On she went, and still on, where the