

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW
Author of "Aime of the Grand Woods, etc."
BOOK TWO.—BAYOU PORTAGE
CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED

"You have done well, Jean," she kept exclaiming. "See this big fine fellow, with his smooth gray coat. You were lucky to get him, I can tell you."

"And this lean, sharp-faced one—you can see that he imagined himself very smart and clever. Oh, it is only the little one who is after me," he thought. "To rob his traps will be but a simple matter. But you were too shrewd for him, Jean. See how he snarls at the joke that has gone against him."

So Toinette rattled on again, this time to such good purpose that I afterward finished the long and tedious process of removing the skins without a single mishap. Looking back upon it now I can not but marvel at the rare skill with which Toinette brought me triumphantly through the trials and problems of this all-important first day of my responsibility. One word of overpraise, one hint of disapproval, and I would have failed through my own self-importance or mistrust. As it was she inspired me with just the amount of confidence that was necessary to carry me through my trial with flying colors.

But more remarkable still was the manner in which Toinette hid the true state of her feelings. Perhaps she was not so bright, so eager as in former times, but her air of quiet cheerfulness struck a note of sincerity that would have been wholly lacking in any forced show of high spirits.

That night, as I sat inside the immaculate hut and watched the snap and sparkle of the driftwood, I told myself that the world was a very good place to be in, and its rarest, choicest spot was a certain trapper's camp upon Bayou Portage.

Next morning, as Toinette poured my coffee, I noticed that she had neglected to place a cup for herself. I was about to remind her of her oversight when, happening to glance at the dark fragrant stream of the coffee-pot, I saw that it suddenly sputtered and ceased at the moment when my own cup became full.

"Why did you not make enough coffee?" I asked, surprised at this second evidence of neglect. Before replying Toinette treated me to one of the little grimaces with which she always prefaced her rare efforts at teasing.

"Ah, you would like to know, Jean, would you not?" she answered in a voice half mocking, half mysterious. "Perhaps, like Madame Pierre, I am considering my complexion."

Then she branched off into a long and amusing description of the various cosmetics with which the younger Valsava's newly-retained wife was seeking to combat the ill effects of wind and sun. As a consequence the incident of the missing cup was driven from my mind although, had I been the one to suffer the deprivation, I am sure that I would not have forgotten it so easily.

That day, through bad weather, the round of the traps was rendered especially difficult, and when, long after dark, I swung the last skin from the rafters, I was too utterly weary to do more than gulp my supper and tumble into bed. Next morning, however, when again the coffee-pot held but a single cup, I kept my thoughts to myself, and waited for Toinette to go out. Then, slipping over to the cupboard where the food was stored, I confirmed my suspicions by means of a quick glance inside.

"Toinette," I demanded, when a moment later she returned, "why were you not fair with me yesterday about the coffee? Have we not always shared equally in everything?"

"Toinette blushed, but not with confusion. Rather, she seemed gratified, as though at the confirmation of some pleasant thought. "Ah, Jean, I knew that you would say that," she cried. "It is what I have been wanting all along. Nevertheless I have been fair. As yours is the harder work, so is yours the harder need."

"That is not so," I contradicted. "While I attend to the traps you look after everything else. But why deprive yourself at all with our good neighbors about? Surely any one of them will be glad to lend you what you need until Papa Ton gets back again?"

"At this Toinette's eyes clouded, and her words came forth with a rush. "Ah, yes, Jean," she cried. "That is all very well, but there is our pride. Also coffee is a little thing beside the question of bread. Believe me, in the days to come—"

nothing more until tonight. I promise you that I will tell you then. After this there was nothing to do but to calm her as best I could before setting out for the traps, where I worked throughout the morning in a state of troubled perplexity. Puzzled, anxious, I blundered through my task in a manner that sent me home with only a meager string for my pains.

At the hut I found a far different Toinette from the one of the day before. Having betrayed herself, she had been quick to realize the futility of further deception. She was worried and harassed, and she made no pretense of hiding her feelings.

"So you have had ill luck, Jean," she commented, "I will be your portion for some time to come." At dinner she brightened a little, even showing some trace of her former optimism by rising repeatedly to glance out of the window. Also throughout the afternoon she made countless little journeys to a certain spot beyond the hut from which she would pick out each twist and bend of the bayou. At dusk, however, when, having finished with the skins, I suggested that we go down to the landing, she was almost fierce in her refusal.

"No, Jean," she cried. "Why set out in the dark to wait for a boat that is tied up at the bridge? Papa Ton is not coming, and I have played the fool again by watching for him all day. There remains only my promise of this morning. Come inside and I will keep it."

"Very well," I agreed. "A moment until I mend the fire." But before I could reach the pile of driftwood beneath the shed, Toinette had run after me and seized my arm.

"No, no, Jean," she begged. "The fire will do as it is. Come now—now, while I am ready to tell you." As she spoke she tugged nervously at my sleeve and so, falling into her mood, I allowed her to lead me empty-handed into the hut. The fire had burned down to a few sullen embers, leaving the room dark and cold, but Toinette uttered no word of comment as she took her place beside the cheerless hearth.

"Jean," she began abruptly in a small hard voice. "It is not easy to speak of the things that I must tell you. Also I should have spoken when first you joined us, showing you what your portion must be if you remain. Yet, in my foolish way, I hoped that, with your arrival, Papa Ton would change. Therefore, I must now make amends. When I have finished you must forget the months that you have been with us, and consider yourself as living over that day when Bossu brought back the letter to your Madame Therese. Then you must choose once more as to whether you will go or stay, and if you are wise—"

She paused while I broke in indignantly. "See here, Toinette," I cried. "Just what are you driving at? If I have failed, if I have not done my share, say it in no more words and do not go beating about like a boat in a gale."

It was the first time that I had ever raised my voice to Toinette, yet in her reply there was neither sorrow nor resentment. She had got herself well in hand by now, and her words betrayed only a species of weary impatience.

"Ah, Jean, why can you not understand," she complained. "It would make it so much easier for me." She broke off to draw a deep breath and when she went on again it was with the hurried words and averted eyes of one who recites a painful lesson.

"It is this way, Jean," she continued. "The larder is empty and Papa Ton has gone with our catch to refill it. Tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that he will return without so much as a pound of flour. All the skins will have gone over the counter of the coffee-house. And worse still, those skins that we have in hand, even such skins as we will take in the next few weeks will do for us. That is what credit will do for us, Jean, the cruel credit of those who have things to sell. It is hard to lose what you have. To lose what you have yet to get is the most terrible of all losses. But Papa Ton is not one to quit as long as the proprietor will write his name in the little book beneath the counter. Afterward he will go hungry until the debt is paid."

"So there you are, Jean, and now, perhaps, you will understand what I meant about the coffee. From now on we will be lucky if we can lend you the flour for our bread. Ah, yes, the folk are kind here, but they have little, and fresh supplies are far away. When I was smaller it was not so hard to ask them. Now it grows worse each time."

She paused, choking back a sob, while I stared into the embers with clenched fists and burning eyes. That Papa Ton would squander his catch I had expected to hear. Nay, more, I had been prepared in a way to defend him upon the broad general theory that a man may do what he likes with his own.

That, however, the fruits of my responsibility should be wasted upon the same course was a different matter. The skins were mine. I had taken them myself. For each small pelt I had paid in full with toil and fatigue. A hot fierce anger flared within me, the anger of one who has been wrongfully despoiled.

So Papa Ton meant to squander my skins? Well, I would see about that. If I was man enough to take them, I was also man enough to keep them. As well settle the matter now as later on.

STUFFY COMES BACK

Joseph John Fisher in The Antidote

Shortly after nine, the tall athletic figure of Father Cannon emerged with a swinging stride from the dingy fastness of Hogan's Alley and turned into Broad Street. A mellow moon rode high in the heavens behind a blanket of murky, wind-tossed clouds, showing her rotund face only at intervals through a rift in the cloud-bank, bathing for a brief moment, the dilapidated panorama of the Alley.

Only here and there were lights to be seen in Hogan's Alley, almost without exception, with unwashed globes, seemingly through unwashed windows; and these were for the most part to be found in pool-rooms, one-time saloons or noisy, crowded dance halls, from whence issued strains of tin-panny ditties mis-called music. Taken all in all the Alley was a thing to be shunned, unlovely by day or night, and unloved, save for those to whom its dreary confines meant a semi-respite from the long arm of the law.

Perhaps the most patronized place next to the noisy places of amusement was a shabby two-story building, over whose door a weather-beaten sign bore the inscription: "The Haven-Aid Society." Here in this dreary old house many a tired, homeless vagabond had secured a bed and a bowl of soup for a dime.

During the winter months midnight found all the beds occupied and most of the floor space; but now, though Spring had come, by no means was the "Haven" lacking in patronage.

Once a week Father Cannon entered the "Haven," for there were some who came to spend their last night on earth in the only place they could call home. Even tonight he had given the last Sacraments to an aged wanderer, who was known as Casper; and pity had surged through his stout, godly heart when he thought of the pale, drawn face of the man, a face which looked as if it had seen better days.

As Father Cannon strode briskly along he thought of these things, dreaming of the time when he might be able to better such conditions, a dream which, by no means was impossible of realization.

Suddenly his reverie was shattered. Along Broad Street, in a shadowy stretch of walk near the mouth of Hogan's Alley, he came upon a scene which impelled him to instant action. Two burly toughs were beating a third man unmercifully. He recognized them instantly as denizens of the Alley, but at the injustice of the thing his innate love of fair play surged through him. Father Cannon was no coward. He ran forward, his kind gray eyes now flashing with anger. The blow that one of the toughs received on the point of his ugly, scowling jaw was the hardest he ever taken. He measured his length in the street, the fight all gone out of him, then picked himself up painfully and fled the spot. His confederate, fearful of that hammer-like fist, followed the example of his cronies and took to his heels in the darkness.

Father Cannon knelt down beside the prostrate form, rubbing his knuckles the while. "What's the matter with you fellows?" he asked not unkindly. Then he helped the vanquished one to his feet. "My, you're a sight! Can you walk?" The beaten one nodded weakly.

"All right, then. I'll take you to my house. It isn't far from here. Come along now. I'll patch you up. You need it!" The man protested feebly, but Father Cannon's strong right arm guided him in the general direction of St. Mary's. Once arrived at the parsonage, the elderly housekeeper uttered little exclamations of dismay at the man's battered appearance, but Father Cannon reassured her. "Tis all right, Anna. My friend here needs a little patching, that's all."

The expiration of a half hour found the battered one in some semblance of repair, for Father Cannon's fingers were skillful ones. The tough even essayed a grin with swollen lips.

"Now, my friend, what is your name?" asked Father Cannon. The man hesitated a moment. It's—Bolton, Father, Stuffy Bolton; but Stuffy is the handle that I go by. Just Stuffy. You're Father Cannon, aren't you?"

"The same, my lad. Now you wait a moment till I put these things back into the bath-room—I want to talk to you." The priest gathered up bandages and the paraphernalia he had used in administering to Stuffy's hurts, and left the room. On a table stood a beautiful crucifix, resplendent in the rays of Father Cannon's reading lamp. Stuffy's eyes opened a trifle wider. A low whistling sound came from his lips and he moved nervously in his chair. "Holy smoke," he said, half aloud, "gee—what a pip!" The thing was worse what to Stuffy represented a small-sized fortune. Why not? Grab it. Bolt for the door. He would cross the river and head for another town. Easy, dead easy. Perspiration stood out on his brow, and then

a queer something tagged at his heart—a something which he tried to fight, but which held him fast in Father Cannon's easy chair. "I can make it," he mumbled. "What the hell is the matter with me anyhow?" And then Father Cannon returned from upstairs.

"And now, Stuffy, where to from here? Back to Hogan's Alley, I suppose." "Yes, I guess so, Father; I got a room over old man Kapnitz's second-hand store."

Father Cannon's eyes twinkled. "Stuffy, how would you like to go to work?" A fleeting shadow of what might have been dismay crossed Stuffy's face for an instant before he answered.

"Well, maybe I would," he faltered but the tone lacked conviction. "Stuffy, by any chance were you born a Catholic?" "Yes, Father,—I was."

"Fine. I'm glad of that. It's never too late to come back, and I'm right here to help you, Stuffy. As soon as you feel fit, I want you to come up here and work for me. Spring is here, and there are hedges to trim, flowers to lay out, a fence to be fixed, painting to be done—in fact, there are innumerable things to be done in the yard."

Stuffy stared. Here was a man who literally talked him out of the dissent which was on top of his tongue. Father Cannon arose. "All right, Stuffy; I'll look for you one week from today. Come, I'll light you to the door. It is late and my office is unsaid."

It was a bewildered Stuffy who slowly bent his steps towards Hogan's Alley; and suddenly it dawned on him that he had promised Father Cannon to go to work. At heart Stuffy was a philosopher. It might have been worse; this much he conceded. But that priest—how he could hit!

With vice you will find a sprinkling of virtue, and Stuffy, alley rat, untutored, more of a barbarian than a civilized man, had his quota; Stuffy had loyalty in his system, and gratitude, and things you will find lacking. One thing that he admired was physical prowess. He shuddered when he reflected what might have happened to him at the hands of his enemies had it not been for the timely advent of the stalwart priest. But to go to work! For a little while it looked black; his horizon seemed to close in upon him. Yes; he would keep his word.

"Rats," he muttered, half aloud, much to the amazement of a passer-by. It was nearing ten when Father Cannon turned into the spacious yard which lay between the parsonage and the street. Just as he inserted his key into the door a muffled noise issued from the church, as if some heavy object had fallen to the floor. He listened intently, and then the sound of angry voices came to his keen ears. Intuition told him something was wrong. Without a moment's hesitation he vaulted the hedge and went down the narrow walk which lay between the house and the church, on a dead run. Anxiety in his heart, he went up the steps which led to the sacristy, two at a time. To his amazement the door was open, and he discerned a faint flow of light within, his ears the while catching the heavy tread of running feet. Suddenly the blinding rays of a flashlight fell full in his eyes, and two burly, dim figures crested against him, sending him writhing to his knees.

Stunned for a moment, the breath almost knocked from his stout frame, he arose painfully and limped into the chancel. There, in the sickly rays from the corner light which dimly found its way through the church windows, lay Stuffy Bolton, the blood slowly trickling down his face from an ugly cut on his forehead. At Father Cannon's exclamation, Stuffy sat up. "Holy smoke, that was a rap!"

The priest stared a doubt clouding his mind for a brief moment. Then, "Stuffy, what in the world has happened?" Stuffy mopped his forehead with a fast crimsoning handkerchief before he essayed an answer.

"I—I tried to stop them, Father. I overheard Red and Tommy planning to lift your new crucifix. I raced down here all the way from Hogan's Alley to warn you in time. When I got here no one was home. You were out, I guess, and so was the housekeeper. I turned from your door, wondering what to do next, when I caught a glimpse of Red and Tommy sneaking along the hedge. They were between me and the sacristy door. I waited. At first I thought I would call a dick from the street, but it just isn't our style, Father, to squeal. Then I made up my mind I'd fight them again. When I got around to the door on tiptoe, darned if they weren't already inside. Red's got a thousand keys, Father, so you see it was no hard matter for them to get in. Next I tiptoed over to the wood pile in the yard and found a club. Then I went for them. Red was holding the flash and there stood Tommy on the altar, lifting that crucifix. The crack I gave him ought to last him for a month. Then I started for Red. Just as I swung the club, Tommy nailed me with a black-jack, I guess. I heard Red yell, 'Grab it, Tommy, and here I am.' I—I tried to repay you, Father, but I—I guess I bungled. I'll kill that red head one of these days!" he snarled, rubbing his head.

"God bless you, Stuffy," Father Cannon exclaimed, a quaver in his voice, and a suspicious moisture in his eyes, as he helped Stuffy to his feet. "I'm sorry about your head. 'Twas a brave deed. We will have Doctor Stone sew it up for you. The hospital is around the corner. Come along now."

It was a tired and depressed Father Cannon who returned to the parsonage an hour later, after he had reported the robbery to the police. Trials and tribulations had been the lot of his priestly life, but this latest loss weighed far more heavily upon him.

By dint of strict economy and numerous sacrifices, of which his flock were little aware, he had very recently fully paid for a new chalice and a crucifix for St. Mary's. But as he sat and stared into space, his depression left him; his thoughts turned to Stuffy's active exhibition of gratitude. The stout Irish heart of him took on a quicker beat, and a wistful longing resolved itself into a firm determination to fully recover the soul of the man whom Fate had thrown across his path. A month had slipped quietly by. Father Cannon sat in his study one bright Spring morning, staring into space, his kindly face bearing a careworn look. Sparrows, their number legion, chirped noisily in the back yard, for the very joy of being alive. A faint smell of lilac came through the open window of his study. But he was oblivious of all these things. For one thing, he still felt the loss of the crucifix keenly, and it seemed that the police could find no trace of it; and on top of it all there had been no word from Stuffy. The call of the gang was too strong; that, was it. He had left the hospital; of that the priest was sure.

The doorbell broke his reverie. A parishioner, perhaps, or probably old Casper at the "Haven" was worse. It had been five weeks since he had given him the last Sacraments, but still the pain-wracked old frame held on to life. Father Cannon opened the door. There stood Stuffy Bolton, his face a little pale and drawn, but quite whole, twisting his gray checked cap nervously.

"Well, Stuffy—it's good you are here. I was on the point of coming after you," the priest laughed. Stuffy grinned. "Aw, I'd a come back, Father; you know that," protested Stuffy.

"All right, sir. Now how about these hedges that need trimming, the fence and all that; when are you going to start?" Father Cannon queried, his eyes twinkling.

Stuffy grinned again. "Well, let me see. I've got some business to tend to this morning; how about this afternoon?"

The clouds of depression had quite dispersed, and Father Cannon was his smiling self again. "Big crap game in the Alley, eh, Stuffy, you can't miss?"

"No, no, Father, honest. I'm through. I just wanted to see old man Kapnitz and tell him he can have his old two-by-four dump of a bedroom. I'll be here by one, sure."

"All right, Stuffy. I'll be looking for you. Run along now, I'm busy this morning."

For an hour Stuffy strolled along, no particular destination suggesting itself to him. Plenty of time to see old man Kapnitz. In the course of his wanderings, his eye fell upon a billboard. An aviator was in town, and he was to give an exhibition of stunt flying that afternoon at Trevar's Park, including a parachute jump by the famous daredevil, Signor Fleets. Stuffy hesitated. He pondered the problem of seeing the flying circus and going to work in St. Mary's church yard at the same time. An aeroplane held a peculiar fascination for him, and relegating his promise to Father Cannon to the morrow, he boarded a car to Trevar's park.

The noon hour found him with a curious frown, inspecting a bi-plane which reposed quietly on the field in front of the park grandstand, whilst a grimy, profane mechanic busied himself with the motor.

Over to one side of the group two men stood in earnest discussion, within earshot of Stuffy. One of the men, an over-dressed individual, his derby at a rakish angle, a dead cigar flopping with the motion of his lips, waxed vehement. It was obvious that something was amiss. He slammed one pudgy fist into the palm of his other hand.

"I tell you Smithers, we've got to get somebody. We took Fleets to the hospital at nine this morning. Appendicitis, I guess. We stand to lose a wand of dough if we don't have a jump this afternoon."

Stuffy edged nearer. The vehement one jammed his derby further down over one eye, and spat viciously. "If we can't do anything else, we'll get some bum around here to jump. Give him \$500.00, just so you get him to jump!"

Stuffy swaggered over to the irate promoter. "Say, do I understand you to need a man for the parachute jump this afternoon?" "Great cats, yes! You a jumper? Ever jump before?"

"No, but I seen 'em rig up plenty parachutes for a jump. What's in it?" " \$500.00! You got the nerve to do it?"

"Yes, sir. I'll do it. What time is the jump coming off?" "Three sharp." The promoter's bloated face was wreathed in smiles. "Come on, I'll buy you a

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