

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSLAW

BOOK TWO.—BAYOU PORTAGE CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED

"Ah, Jean, to live in even the smallest," she would cry. "The gleaming glass, the wonderful curtains, the smoke that is never in one's eyes. Think of it Jean. It would be like heaven, would it not?"

But I would have eyes only for the trim market gardens behind the houses. From my first glimpse of the world outside the city, nay, even upon my suburban journeys with Madame Therese, I had found my greatest interest and delight in growing things. Sometimes a garden would contain a little row of sugar cane and at sight of my eyes would begin to shine and my heart to thump. In just such waving jungles my father had played when a boy, only, in his case, there had been miles and miles of them. And those miles still flung lazy banners to the salt breeze upon Marsh Island while I, who might have been master of them all, gazed in rapt admiration at a scant huddle of stalks.

But among us there was one whose desires were more easy of attainment, and who, in gratifying them, always reduced our small company to a party of three. Fully as eager as Toinette and myself in his own slow way, Papa Ton would stride unceasingly past the wonderful houses and gardens until he finally arrived at the door of a coffee-house. Here he would begin to grumble and hold back, until, faced with Le Bossu's frank question, he would commence his excuses.

He was weary. He did not wish to walk about. The noise and confusion of the village bewildered him. Also young Valsan had put in three days before, and had left news of the camp. No, he cared nothing for the drink. He doubted if he would touch a drop. He had ended all that—the last time.

Then Le Bossu would give in, but warily. "Bien, Papa Ton," he would say. "But remember. Three glasses only. Enough is a feast, and it is when you are among strangers that you must have all your wits about you. It is a promise."

"It is a promise," Papa Ton would repeat with the impatience of a released school-boy, and I may add to his credit that, during that summer at least, the promise was always kept. The little man's influence upon the big one was very great and, after the third glass, Papa Ton would be as adamant, returning clear-eyed and steady to the bay.

As for Le Bossu, the villages of the mainland held no special charm for him. He knew and loved each detail from the nodding reeds and grasses upon the bayou's edge to the last vague line of forest upon the distant horizon.

And so, upon our excursions ashore, we missed little that was worth seeing, and through the general esteem and affection in which the little man was held, few doors were closed to us.

Thus the summer passed with its many conflicting memories of sea and shore, of the broad open reaches of the bay, the swift currents of the passes, the tumbled waters of the gulf that lay beyond; of the drowsy gray villages, the smiling fields, the ragged stretches of forest; of wind and waves of earth and sunlight and, over all, the deep, sapphire blue of the Louisiana sky. It was a wonderful summer, a glorious holiday, and I came out of it a far different being from the small feeble creature who had sought sanctuary upon the Toinette.

I had grown amazingly. I had put on weight not only of flesh, but of bone and sinew. My eyes were quick, my brain was alert, my whole body was hardened against fatigue. I could endure without inconvenience the sun and rain, and, through my residence in Papa Ton's airy hut, I had become well inured to cold. I could swim, I could walk the marsh, I could row a boat, tend sail or tiller, and, with a fair degree of accuracy, predict the coming of weather. In a word I had become a small but well-equipped machine for the fighting of Nature, and such Le Bossu declared me when, with the first early sunsets and incoming flights of game, the hour of parting arrived.

True to his promise the little man had thrown his fortunes with ours through the summer, but now the fall was at hand, and many duties were calling him. There was his boat, the *Oie Sauvage*, which he had left at the village of Anse Le Vert, and which he must get ready for the coming season. He had several engagements with hunters there as a swamp up the Bayou Vermilion which he intended to trap for otter. Perhaps in the late winter or early spring he might be able to visit Bayou Portage. It all depended upon his luck.

For the present Papa Ton's plans were uncertain, except that he proposed to remain a while longer on the bay. There was plenty of time in which to prepare for the season, and one could not be always upon the marsh. Thus the big man

protested, loudly at first, but with a marked uncertainty as the period of Le Bossu's companionship drew to an end.

Then came the little man's last night upon the Toinette, a fresh crisp night with a great scattered sprinkling of tiny stars. At dawn the boat of a friend would go up to the bridge, and we lay near the bar at the bayou's mouth, that Le Bossu's transfer might be easily made.

The little man spoke in brief nervous snatches, while the rest of us preserved a mournful silence. We were facing a loss, the loss of the chief figure in our little company, and our thoughts were not such as could be put into words.

Then Le Bossu rose and smiled reassuringly, although in each line of his sensitive face the wrench of the parting could be read.

"Come," he cried. "This is no way to think of speed a departing traveler. You have not even wished me luck, you three. As for you, Papa Ton, you should thank the good fortune that has brought you a helper in my place. And call already learned, you will add much more." He paused and coming over to me, laid his hands upon my shoulders in his old gesture of affection.

"And as for you, Jean, who are little Jean no longer," he continued, "how can I tell you what you have become to me? Rather let me try to show you in the days to come. Work hard and, to all that you have already learned, you will add much more. Be honest, be brave and, above all, be kind. Also love Papa Ton and our little Toinette with all your heart. If they are fortunate in having you, you are equally as fortunate in having them. You have fallen among humble folk, Jean, but in some ways it has served you well. You are brown, and strong, and straight, and your life has been as fresh and clean as the great outdoors. You have grown both in mind and body. And, believe me, you have also grown in the hearts of us all."

Thus Le Bossu bade me farewell for at the actual moment of departure, there was little time for more than a hurried clasp and word. And then, when the transfer had been made and Papa Ton had paddled back again, we three departed ones watched the departing finger of mast and sail until it had twisted out of sight amid the endless sweep of marsh.

All that day heavy silence reigned abroad the Toinette. All that day Papa Ton tramped restlessly up and down. He did not fish. He scarcely ate. He rolled innumerable cigarettes, and then forgot to light them. At dusk he departed silently to his bunk, but long before the first faint pink came into the eastern sky he was out in his pirogue, testing the bar at the bayou's mouth.

"Dieu!" he shivered, as he loomed aboard out of the mists. "It is gray out there, gray and mournful. The very bay seems to miss Bossu."

At sunrise we set sail for Bayou Portage.

CHAPTER VII.

PAPA TON STRUGGLES WITH HIS ANCIENT ENEMY

The first mellow days that followed our return to Bayou Portage passed uneventfully. We missed Le Bossu, and we also missed several other familiar figures for, owing to our early arrival, the camp still lacked its full complement of inhabitants.

The partners, Dalfrey and Borges, were back already, preparing for the coming season. Young Pierre Valsan, having sold his boat at a handsome profit, was enlarging his landing, and considering the purchase of a gasoline launch. His satisfaction at this new interest, however, was clouded by the fact that he had one to share it with, for his wife still remained upon the mainland.

It was understood that she had refused to return until cold weather, and young Pierre's discontent and loneliness were a source of much pleasure to his father.

"Bien," the old man would observe upon every occasion. "The fool is beginning to pay for his folly and I, for one, am heartily glad of it. I warned him at the time of his marriage, I even begged him not to desert me, and what did he do?—He laughed at me. Now it is my turn."

Of the Lasalles there was only the news that they would be absent for some weeks to come. Father Lasalle was still upon the bay, and tante Odile, accompanied by her brood, was making a round of visits among her married children as a means of filling out the time before her husband's return.

Thus, without its women and its toddling chattering swarm of tiny Lasalles, the camp was ill-suited to fill the void which had been caused by the departure of Le Bossu.

True, with Toinette and myself the days passed pleasantly enough. We had ourselves, our duties and, in such spare moments as our work allowed, the freedom of the marsh. Papa Ton, however, was not so fortunate. Deprived of the little man's companionship, the half-

deserted camp served only to increase his depression. Had he stayed longer upon the bay he would have been better satisfied, for in that event he would at least have had the fishing to divert him. As it was he had returned to the marsh during that brief unsatisfactory off-season which occurs between summer and fall.

It was too early to trap. The hunting would not be profitable for some time to come. As for fishing, one had to use a hook and line in the bayou which, after the great hauls of the summer's seining, was too tedious to contemplate. True, there was no lack of those endless preparations with which the other returned inhabitants were now busily employed, but in Papa Ton's vague restless scheme of life there was no room for even the immediate future.

"That is all right," he would growl when the others reminded him of his unpreparedness. "When the time comes I will be ready. What is the use of meddling about for days with that which can be done in an hour?"

As a consequence Papa Ton spent a long trying week in idling and grumbling, while Toinette surveyed his inaction with a look of ever-increasing anxiety. Then, as if in answer to her fears, he announced one night that he would spend the following day at the camp below.

They had brought in some new-fashioned traps there, he declared, and he would like to have a look at them. Also there was a small matter of business between a certain Zida and himself which must be settled before the rush of the season.

It would have all sounded reasonable enough, had it not been for the painstaking manner in which Papa Ton dilated upon the necessity for his visit. His tone, half of apology, half of defiance, gave one the impression that he was striving desperately to excuse a contemplated wrong.

He was gone a day and a night, and when at last he paddled back again, dull-eyed and repentant, Toinette cut short his explanations with a few brief words of advice.

"Bien, Papa Ton," said she. "What is done is done. Now, perhaps, you will go to work again."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE AWAKENING

A storm had just passed over the city, and the half-hidden moon peeping over the edges of the rapidly disappearing clouds, daintily silvered the surrounding sky. Here and there a tiny star again lit its little lamp and dared to shine forth in all its brilliancy, as though in defiance of the black-browed and fierce rain-filled clouds, that slowly passed over a distant hill.

On Maine street there stood, a little apart, a large grey house, built of cold stone, the entrance to which was made by a door of solid oak. A half dead ivy struggled around the plated iron windows as if discouraged in its growth.

The interior however made up in good measure all that the exterior lacked; and one room in particular, was worthy of attention. The floor was hardwood but covered with beautiful rugs that harmonized with the paintings of the old Masters, which hung on the walls. A great Bluthner piano occupied one whole corner, on which at present rested a Stradivarius—priceless.

A fire blazed brightly in a large open grate, setting strange and fanciful shadows, like ghosts of the past, dancing on the walls and changing the ripples of color in the room. From silver to gold, to red, then back to start again, in a low easy chair, sheltered from the least draught, sat a woman, gazing into the embers. The soft shades of a diamond pin coupled with the rays given forth from the glowing heart of an opal ring, hovered about her in almost a caress.

Silently a young man entered and peered anxiously at the still figure. Gently he advanced and bent over her chair.

"Mother," he called softly. "Yes son?" she answered looking up.

"Oh all right," settling himself at her feet. "Thought you might possibly be asleep and you know I wouldn't wake you for worlds." "No son, not asleep, just thinking in-g-n-g," and the voice trailed away into silence—then, "How was your lesson today? I was out when you returned."

"First rate," he answered and then laughed boyishly. "Poor old Chareau actually wept today when I played the Ave Maria. Called me his 'bon fils' and kept running from English to French till I was really quite dizzy."

The mother leaned forward and stroked his glossy hair. "Play it for me, John."

He nodded, and going quickly to the piano took up the violin. Tenderly he passed his hands over the thin-shelled body, and picking a string, listened, with shining eyes, to the sound it produced, "deep, and resonant, glorious, from the very soul of the instrument. He tightened his bow and the strains of Schubert's "Ave Maria" filled the room. The tones alternately grew in volume and sank into the mere rustle of whispers, but all were filled with a splendor and magnificence, and an undertone of perfect and exquisite feeling. It swept to an end, and

with a sigh he put the instrument back.

No sound came from the still figure in the chair and John Newton noticed how lovingly the bewitching trails of light from the fire sent little gleams through the soft hair, bringing its knowlness out in bold relief. His mother! His! He thrilled at the thought.

"Mother," he began after he had again settled himself at her feet. "I was talking to dear old Father Casey today and I have decided to enter the Seminary in September. I know you will understand, and be glad, but father— he stopped and stood up facing the fire, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his full six feet of unshaven manhood outlined on the opposite wall. He was pleasant to look upon, this young man with his serious eyes, curly hair and boyish smile.

A sound from behind caused him to turn, to find his mother, with hands outstretched, the joy of her soul shining in her eyes.

"My son, my son," she cried, her sweet low voice breaking.

She was in his arms then, sobbing out the great joy against his broad shoulder.

"Mother, sweetheart." That was all. Each understood perfectly.

"What on earth will father say, do you suppose?" he said presently. "He is sure to make an awful row, you know; but, no use, mater dear. The boyish voice grew a trifle harsh. "I am decided."

At this instant the gong announced dinner and John gently helped his mother to the dining-room, where they were met by Henry Newton.

"Good evening Marie. Evening son."

John smiled at the same old formula; each night the same, no more no less. The boy reflected on the father's harsh face of his father and as he did so hope sank lower and lower. Years of successful business had, alas, crowded all thoughts of religion out of the older man's life, and it seemed in vain that mother and son had stormed heaven for his conversion.

At dessert John, with a look of infinite love and courage from his mother, spoke again of the subject nearest his heart. "I am twenty-one and it is about time I decided to do something definite in life. In looking over the different professions I find myself attracted to none, and I now feel that God has blessed me with the highest calling given to man—that of a priest of God. I enter the Seminary in September."

During the first of the recital Mr. Newton had remained coldly impassive but as it finished, and he heard his son's decision, he grew furious. His face grew purple and the veins stood out on his forehead and neck like whipcord. Struggling to his feet he fairly shouted.

"Look here, you, you— you sputtered and stopped for the lack of a word. "You become a priest, and my door is closed to you—forever."

"Enough," cried John, in a voice he hardly recognized as his own. "Though your door may close to me tonight, it will not change my decision. I was called and I will answer."

"Go then," cried the father, sternly; but his face showed singularly grey and haggard.

"Henry," Mrs. Newton now rose. "Surely you— She stopped with a frightened little glance at her husband as he roared. "Stop! A priest and a mine shall become a priest and be acknowledged as my son. But don't you worry," he laughed harshly, as the door closed upon John. "He will be back soon."

Mrs. Newton said nothing, but she shook her head and smiled, a sad, broken-hearted, understanding smile.

That night the south bound train carried among its pullman passengers John Newton, who had grown from boy to man in a single night. He carried no luggage save a small hand grip and his beloved violin, and in his heart he carried a picture of his mother at the last. Her sweet eyes bedewed with tears, and a tender, beautiful smile on her trembling lips. With a fervent prayer in his heart, he placed his future in the hands of God.

Eight years passed with startling rapidity, and Christmas Eve with its joyous, laughing, jostling crowd was at hand. Snow was falling, fast covering the earth with its white mantle, for the coming of the Babe. A light, in an upper room of a large house on Maine Street, showed a beautiful woman reclining on a couch, now and then wiping tears from her cheeks. In her hand she held a picture of a young priest.

"Oh, my boy, my dear son, shall I ever see you again?" she was sobbing when the door opened and Henry Newton stood on the threshold.

"Marie, Marie, my dear," he cried coming quickly to her side, and taking her into his arms. "Ah, do not hide it," he exclaimed as she made to cover the picture; "I have known for many weeks that the picture of our boy was here, and many an evening have I spent in silent converse with the son I turned from my door. When you went to the Opera I came here to your room and talked to that picture, he kissed the sweet boyish face, and then for the first time in her life, Marie Newton saw a man's scalding tears and heard a man's awful agonizing sobs.

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