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A Christmas Eve Episode in the Province of Quebec

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(The Story that won First Prize in The Civilian Short Story Competition.)

"Good-bye, Louise, Jean, Josette, *au revoir*," says Baptiste, as he kisses his wife, boy and girl, and is preparing to jump into his *cariole*. "Take care of yourself, Louise, keep the door well locked, open to no one; they say tramps have been seen in the neighborhood; Carlo, good dog, will keep them away, and be very good, Jean and Josette. Papa is going to town on business. I will not be long, and this is '*la veille de Noël*,' my beloved ones! Perhaps I may meet Santa Claus, and if I do, yes, by gum, I will ask him to stop here on his rounds."

Hop, la Grise, a crack of the whip and the good little gray mare is off at a smart pace. The *grelots* sing merrily, and as they disappear around the turn of the road Baptiste sends his loved ones a last *au revoir*.

Baptiste Guerin is a good-hearted, healthy type of French-Canadian manhood. In his early days he had spent many a winter in the lumbering shanties of Northern Canada. At the death of his father and mother he abandoned life in the forest and settled down on the small farm which they had left him.

Ten years before our story opens he had married Louise, the daughter of a thrifty *habitant* of a neighboring vilage. He worked hard on the farm, his wife attended to the housework, and they were very happy. But when little Marie was born their happiness knew no bounds. How they did love and caress their sweet little baby. Louise would take her out into the fields where Baptiste was at work and sing her to sleep in the shade of the big pine trees. At night they would both get up at the baby's slightest move. Yes, they were very happy. But,

alas! death was hovering near and an epidemic of diphtheria broke out in the neighborhood; poor little Marie fell ill, and, in spite of the tenderest care, she was carried away one morning on the wings of the angels to the abode of eternal rest and happiness.

It was a heavy blow. Joy had fled from the once bright little homestead. Baptiste, the *boute-en-train* (life and soul) of all *corvees*, lost all his joyful ways. Poor Louise, for her husband's sake, tried hard to hide her tears, but after the day's work, during the long winter evenings, they would think or speak of nothing but their darling little Marie.

The color soon left the poor mother's face, and, when a year later, little Jean was born, she became very ill. Doctors came and prescribed rest. Baptiste spent many a sleepless night sharing his cares between his wife and the boy who was very delicate. Everything seemed to go wrong. Crops were destroyed by hail, cattle died, a barn was burnt with the winter supply of hay. He was compelled to mortgage his farm, and he became very miserable; but, in spite of all, he did not lose courage, but pluckily faced his misfortunes. For several years he struggled bravely. Little Jean, as he grew older, became much stronger, and Louise, owing to good care, partly recovered her health. One day, too, the angels brought back the spirit of Marie in the form of little Josette. From that blessed day everything seemed changed. Louise regained her strength rapidly and took a renewed interest in everything.

The years that followed brought joy and