

Chronicle of Grand Anse

The Story of Louison Lavergue.

Written Expressly for "The Advocate."

She was the prettiest girl in the village. In fact I have never seen a prettier girl of her age than Louison was at sixteen, when she left Grand Anse. Slight and willowy, with beautiful dark eyes shaded by long silky lashes, a mouth like a cut rose bud, beautifully formed nose, just a trifle aquiline, like so many Acadians, and a complexion which was the envy of every lady in the county. She was merry—was Louison, and could sing all the old French chansons like a bird. The sisters at the convent had, like everybody else, spied her, and together a good many useless accomplishments for one of her class. She could play the piano and violin, though she had learned the latter from her brother Pierre, who was one of the best fiddlers for miles around. Poor Pierre, he was drowned in the boom of the big saw mill while trying to rescue a comrade who had fallen off the logs. They were all generous the Lavergues, and when Pierre gave his life for his friend's, everyone said it was just like him.

Louison was the youngest daughter of old Joe Lavergue, the wood sawyer, and at sixteen kept house for the old man at his little cottage in the cove. There had been three brothers, Pierre who was drowned, Joseph, who went away to the Western States and was never heard of again, and Alphonso, who died of smallpox at River du Loup.

An older sister had married a farmer and died when giving birth to her first child, so the old man, whose wife had been dead before he came to the village, was now all alone with Louison for house-keeper in the little home.

"Ah! dat Louison, she mak me laugh, and she mak me cry, one tam she all storm, one tam all smile, the Bon Dieu he good to me for give me Louison in de ole age."

Joe thought nothing was too good for Louison as may be supposed, and while the older sister was at home Louison went to the Convent school, and played tricks on everyone after school hours.

Many years before old Joe and his family had appeared in the village, and taken up his trade of wood sawyer. He had an old raven-boned sorrel horse, and a machine for cord wood, which he hauled to the place where the wood was piled, and made more noise during the operation of cutting up a few cords of wood than the big saw mills do. He had always done my work of this kind, and after when there was no wood to cut, did odd jobs about the stable and garden. I had always to listen patiently to him when every now and then he came for a prescription for rheumatism, or lumbago, which troubled him! I often joked with him about pretending "sore back" so he called it, merely to get Louison to rub on the liniment.

"Ah! de sof' hants doctaire, she nevaire hurt, dat Louison. She rub, rub, rub, and only say 'poor fader, poor fader,' all de tam.

She was the light of the old man's eyes, was Louison, and as she grew up, the despair of the young farmers in the neighborhood.

Only during the last year had she seemed to show any preference

and for the sake of her father, and in fact for her own sake, I was led to meet her waiting out occasionally with Terans, Chamar, a fine young farmer who lived with his widowed mother in a good farm of a hundred and fifty acres at the river. Once when Louison and Terans passed the office, my good friend Pere Doinon the priest, who regarded the simple Acadians of the parish as his children, remarked to me "I hope that will be a match, Docteur, it is what I have long wished for. Terans is so steady and has been so good to his mother, he would make Louison a good husband."

I fully agreed with my friend and afterwards when Joe was telling me something about Louison, and some chit-chat she was raising, I mentioned the matter to him, saying that no doubt she would have choice of another kind to manage before many years. I was a little surprised when he said:

"I not know, Doctaire, perhaps—who can tell, girls are strange, but Louison she not seem to care so much for Terans. Him he worship Louison, tink de sun rise and set in her eyes, but her, she not say much. Me, I very much please, suppose Louison please, but fear she not lak him, she no marry him—No, sir." Which meant that Miss Louison was not as much in love with Terans as he was with her, and that her father would be pleased to see her settled.

Meantime, as intimated, the elder sister married and went away with her husband. This happened when Louison was nearly sixteen. From this time forward she seemed to shoot up, fill out, and develop into a woman and a very beautiful woman, in an incredibly short time. I often thought, as I watched her trip along the street of the village, with her beautiful little head so well set on her snowy neck and shoulders, that it was a pity to see such a glorious creature condemned to marry a small farmer and wear out her beauty in the manner of women of her class. What a future might be ahead of this girl, if, with even the education she had some person who truly loved her and could afford to give her a few advantages, every and take her away from her present surroundings.

The upper end of the parish of Grand Anse is on the Bay shore, that is, the parish extends from the Bay Chalouet back to the River Caraquet and often during the spring and fall there are severe storms on the Bay, resulting sometimes in the loss of life, and quite often in the destruction of the fishermen's boats. The little cove where the Lavergues lived was formed by an indentation of the Bay, and at the mouth of the cove there was a nasty reef, one of the most dangerous places on the coast. This reef ran out under the water for nearly a mile, and even when there was no wind there was always a ripple over the reef. Tradition gave this spot the credit for wrecking a large English vessel loaded with rich goods many years ago, but with the exception of a schooner which came ashore there about ten years before I had never known a craft wrecked on the reef.

The fishermen always gave the place a wide berth, landing their fares at another cove some miles further down the coast. Of late years the government has built an excellent breakwater, which reaches out beyond the reef, consequently the danger is now a thing of the past.

It was late in the fall, just before the first snow, for I remember that afternoon having gone over to a barn where my sleighs were stored to examine them and see what repairs were needed in one which was broken—a country doctor, out of necessity have all his travelling gear ready for all sorts of weather, not knowing the moment he may be called to drive ten or twenty miles. Coming back I met the one who remarked that the weather was threatening and it had like snow. My office was in my house, and I remember it was nearly dark when I got in and after a splash of the fire, sat down to write a serious case, I had in the upper end of the parish, the words I hit the lamp and just as that time old Joe Lavergue came in to get paid for



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some work he had been doing. I thought the old man looked cold, so before letting him go out in the cold, I gave him a little brandy for which he was very thankful. Soon after this we had dinner and I returned to the office to enjoy an after dinner smoke as was my custom. I had hardly got settled when the door opened suddenly and Louison Lavergue stood before me. The girl was panting, and utterly exhausted from running, and it was a moment or two before she could speak coherently.

"Doctor, Doctor! There is a large ship on the bay beating directly beyond the long reef. The wind is rising rapidly, in fact it is now blowing hard, and the ship is trying to beat off shore. Father sent me, he says she is in danger, he tell me to get some men."

Now my house was at the end of the village, nearest the cove, and from the opposite side of the great road I could see the outer end of the reef, or rather the ripple where the reef was, when there was no wind, so I at once seized my hat and started to go across the road. I was astonished at the force of the wind when I opened the door, but I ran across the road and could just make out a few twinkling lights showing through the gloom far out in the Bay. Returning to the office I told the girl to remain where she was while I went down the road in search of some men but she said she preferred returning to her father, so instead of going myself I called a boy who worked for me and de-patched him down the road. Then wrapping myself up and informing my wife where I was going I set off for the cove with Louison.

I have lived for many years on the sea coast, but never can I remember facing such a terrible wind as beat in our faces and though I am a strong man I was completely done up by the time I reached the Lavergue cottage. Louison, on the contrary, though slightly winded, seemed as fresh as ever, five minutes after she reached her home, and was soon bustling about making me comfortable in her humble way. We found Old Joe peering anxiously into the growing darkness, but unable to see anything through the driving spray. Though I could see from the higher ground the ship's lights at times, nothing could be seen from the cottage.

"Am fraid dat ship she go shore, Doctaire, de wind she blow right in de cove, and unless de Captain he know de reef, she come in it sure. Ah! de poor sailomans!"

Joe was right. The wind was now blowing a hurricane, directly from the Northeast, and unless the vessel had got up the bay, beyond the reef, she must inevitably strike in her next tack. Four or five men now opened the door and entered the cottage. They led between them a good "bore" who having heard of the affair, insisted on coming. The poor old man

was completely done out and Louison had her hands full bringing back his breath by slapping him on the back.

In the middle of this excitement a gun was heard far out in the bay and one of the men exclaimed "Ah! Dieu! The pore ship she go on the reef and nothing can be done."

Louison left the cove the moment the gun so ended, and rushed to the window wringing her hands.

"Can nothing be done? Ah, God! Can nothing be done. The poor sailors."

She spoke perfect English, Louison did, with every little French accent, and I thought she never looked more beautiful than when she turned to me, with her lovely eyes streaming and asked if nothing could be done.

We doctors, particularly country doctors, have often to think for our-selves, and do our thinking very quickly. Ever since the girl had appeared at my office door, I had been thinking hard, as the saying is, and though I said nothing at the time, I was almost in despair. I could see no chance of doing anything to help the poor unfortunates who were even now appealing to us by the only means in their power for assistance.

To anyone who knows the coast as I do, it was quite plain that no boat could for a moment live in such a sea and wind. Possibly, if one had a well equipped life-boat such as I have since seen on the coast of the Eastern States, we might have reached the ship, but for an open fisherman's boat it was quite impossible.

Again the gun boomed, and then again, and the good Cure dropped on his knees by the chair he had been crouched on, and prayed, while Louison strode up and down the small room with hands crushed together, moaning.

Again and again the gun boomed. Suddenly the door of the cottage burst open and three young men rushed in. It was now snowing, and their clothes were covered with wet snow. As they dashed the moisture from their faces, one of them rushed up to Louison and clasping her arm, asked her in French what was the matter. The girl stared at him for an instant, and burst out:

"Ah, Tenaus! You ask me what is the matter, hear you not the gun calling, calling! The poor men, the poor men. Listen!"

And as the gun again boomed out through the terrific storm the girl raised her hands and cried:

"Ah! you call yourselves men, you, who are there and hear the poor people asking for help, perhaps there are women and children on

Continued on page 3.

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