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THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

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CHAPTER VII.

THE REAL MONSIEUR DUGAS

Our return to the jumper can scarcely be described as a retreat. It was more like some terrified rout in which Monsieur Dugas, panting, shaking, and utterly demoralized, dragged me behind him up the uneven surface of the slope. Once I stumbled and fell, striking myself sharply against a live oak root. But my companion's flight was so rapid and determined that I was jerked to my feet before even I could cry out.

On arriving at the jumper Monsieur Dugas tossed me up to the seat as carelessly as though I had been a sack of meal and, springing in himself, began to lay on the whip with all the energy of his pent-up nervousness. The sleepy horse, amazed at this sudden attack, first turned his head in an inquiring stare, and then, seeing that his master was in no mood for trifling, set off at a pace of which I would never have deemed him capable.

Thus we left the hilltop at Marsh Island, and as we rattled down the shell road past the General's office, Monsieur Dugas ducked his head as from a blow. Perhaps he expected some final act of violence from the single window that looked out upon the road. Perhaps he merely bowed in covering deference to the power that was enshrined inside.

Our way lay along the same broad highway by which we had arrived, and over it the storekeeper urged his bewildered animal as though the enemy were in hot pursuit. To me it seemed a wholly unnecessary proceeding, for by now we were well beyond the trim line of white-washed fencing that enclosed the General's yard and, as I had assured myself by repeated backward glances, no tall-tale cloud of dust marred the level stretch in our rear.

However, as it was no business of mine, I kept my thoughts to myself, and began a careful scrutiny of the island that we were so rapidly leaving. Upon my left, separated from the road by a second line of white-washed fence, ran the long field that was evidently the General's kitchen garden. Its squares of well-grown vegetables were as neatly and as evenly out as those upon a checker-board, and along the paths there were at regular intervals, trim lines of young pecan trees. The field sloped gently toward the distant line of the encircling marsh, and at its rear an orange grove gleamed like a low golden wall in the morning sunlight.

It was only a glimpse of the General's vast domain, yet it spoke eloquently of the care and orderliness of his methods. We might as well gaze beyond the litter of his office as they sought out each weed, each fallen limb that marred the immaculate sweep of his many acres.

Upon my right the land fell away abruptly in a series of rough hills, sparsely grown with grass and twisted clumps of casino. Deep gullies gashed the downward stretch, their ragged sides agleam with pebbly crystals, the shrubs upon their summits leaning precariously as though to view their roots which, thrust through the crumbling soil, clutched impotently at the empty air.

It was a wild, a tortured view, still rent with the vast red wounds of that mighty struggle whereby a relentless Nature had sought his hills above the level of the marsh. Yet, in the little valley below, a shallow pond shone softly, like some beacon of peace, beneath its covering of flags and spider-lilies.

Of cane I had so far seen not a single stalk, but Monsieur Dugas had explained its absence by telling me that the plantation and sugar house lay in the rich bottom lands upon the other side of the island.

A lump rose in my throat at the thought of leaving these wonders unvisited, and I strained my eyes in their direction until the view was cut off by our descending the final slope of the hill.

That I had been denied by my grandfather, and in no uncertain manner, I understood perfectly. Yet, at the time, this made but little impression upon me. After all, I had never been able to look upon my journey as anything save a pleasant visit, and the thought that I was to return to Madame Therese even sooner than I had expected, was a comforting one. True, the island was delightful, but the General was not. After the stormy interview of a while before I was both eager and contented to return whence I had come.

All this time Monsieur Dugas had been driving in silent frantic haste, but now, as we reached the low thicket that separated the hillside from the barren stretch along the bayou bank, he suddenly pulled in his horse. The heavy pleasantness, the faint air of deference with which he had treated me before, had slipped from him as a cloak and the real Monsieur Dugas was revealed. Once more he was the surly potcher of the balcony, even as I was the small nobody of the rue Bourbon.

"Well," he snarled, addressing me with the earnestness that he would have employed in speaking to one of his own age. "What have you to say for yourself? It was clever, what you said, especially after that which had gone before. You are a boy, I know, but you are no fool. The old woman instructed you to say it, I suppose—in case of necessity!"

I stared at him in bewilderment until he roughly seized my arm. "Come," he repeated. "It was the old woman, was it not?"

"What old woman, M'sieu?" I finally managed to inquire. "The storekeeper snorted, impatiently. 'Madame Therese.' 'I shook my head. 'No, M'sieu, that is if you mean what I said about M'sieu Abraham. M'sieu the General was like the picture of him in my father's room. I knew it when first I entered, but I could not get it straight in my mind. But how could Madame Therese tell me such a thing when she has never seen M'sieu the General at all?"

The storekeeper still eyed me suspiciously, although he could not doubt the innocence of my gaze.

"So," he growled. "Then you are a fool after all. That is if you are not lying."

I drew up my small figure proudly. "I do not lie, M'sieu," I retorted. "Madame Therese or my father would not have allowed such a thing. It was you who did the lying, not I."

Monsieur Dugas shot me a suspicious glance.

"Be careful," he warned. "You mean?"

"About my journey," I replied. "You told M'sieu the General that it had cost you more than you could afford. That was not so."

The storekeeper seemed rather surprised than angry. He could not say that I was lying, for he had seen M'sieu the General at all. "This is a sharp one I have here," he muttered as though to himself. And then, in a louder tone, "You mean?"

"The money that Madame Therese gave you," I explained impatiently. "She said that you had been repaid for your trouble, and I also saw the bills. The top one was torn and fastened with a piece of paper. I heard M'sieu Gilbeau joking when he paid his lodging with it. 'Remove the paper and you will have two bills, Madame,' he said."

By now Monsieur Dugas was plainly annoyed. "Dieu, little one," he exclaimed. "You see everything. Also you do not forget. The store now, that back room of mine—did you happen to notice?"

It seemed to think better of his question and broke off abruptly, stroking his sparse beard in troubled silence. Evidently he was hatching some scheme in the dark confines of his crafty brain, for suddenly he ceased his stroking to smite his knee after the manner of one who has arrived at some satisfactory decision.

"Yes, that will be the best way," he muttered. "One can never tell what M'sieu the General will do. Should he change his mind it would save me a journey. Also it might give me some sort of power. Who knows?"

Now, although I did not understand the meaning of Monsieur Dugas' words, I nevertheless felt in some vague way that they applied to my future. Children are apt to form a quick and often marvellously correct estimate of those older folk with whom they are thrown in contact, and I had already decided that, whenever the storekeeper became thoughtful, I had best be on the alert. True, I blurted out my question with a sad lack of diplomacy, but I have always felt that this only served to increase the storekeeper's fear of my shrewdness of observation.

"You will return with me to the city yourself, M'sieu, or am I to go alone?" I inquired.

"That is something I have not decided as yet," began Monsieur Dugas.

Then, evidently deciding that it would be best to get the matter over with at once, he suddenly changed his tone.

"Suppose now you were not to return just now?" he asked in the most wheedling voice imaginable. "Suppose you were to pay me a little visit? Would not that be nice?"

"No, M'sieu," I replied flatly. "It would not be nice at all. I wish to return immediately to Madame Therese."

Monsieur Dugas took another tack.

"Consider the horse, the dog," said he insinuatingly. "Also there is all the great prairie for you to play upon. It would be fine for one brought up in the city. If I were to write Madame Therese, I am sure that she would advise your remaining for a while at least. Then, too, there is the chance that your grandfather will change his mind."

"But I will not change mine, M'sieu," I cried. "Madame Therese told you that, if M'sieu the General did not want me, you were to bring me back at once, and you must do so. I will not stay."

The stubborn look that I had begun to know so well came into Monsieur Dugas' eyes, and with it there was a flash of anger. That he recognized the futility of his former pose was evident in his sudden change of manner.

"See here, my friend," said he gruffly. "Through yourself I have fallen into trouble and, if it is possible for you to do so, you are going

to get me out of it again. When this is done, or when I find that you are no longer of any use to me, I will send you to the city. From now on I am your master, and you will obey me. Do you understand?"

"You will take me back to Madame Therese," said I doggedly. "You are not my master, and I will not obey you."

A look of slow cruel rage came into the storekeeper's meager features, and he glanced stealthily about the deserted thicket before he clenched his hand.

"We will see about that," he snarled with an oath, and suddenly he struck me full upon the mouth.

It was the first blow that I had ever received, and although it was a heavy one, I suffered rather from the terrified surprise of it than from the pain. Never in my life had I been struck before. True, I had been punished for certain misdeeds, but it had always been in some quiet dignified manner. A feeling of disgrace, of infinite humiliation swept over me. The blood rushed furiously to the roots of my hair, and I raised my hand before my burning face as though to hide it from the world.

Mistaking the action for one of self-protection, Monsieur Dugas jerked my hands away, and glared down into my eyes, his fist upraised for a second blow.

"Well?" he threatened. "Have you had enough? Are you willing now to obey me?"

Perhaps with the second blow I would have been afraid, for then I must have realized the pain. As it was I was only conscious of my feeling of degradation, and the steady defiant manner in which I returned the storekeeper's gaze must have disconcerted him no little.

"M'sieu," said I slowly—and I meant it every word—"if you strike me again, I shall kill you. I am only a boy and you are a man, but I will do it some way. Perhaps when you are asleep. I do not know."

Monsieur Dugas lowered his fist, and in his small weasel eyes I saw something that was almost like a glint of fear.

"Dieu," said he, half to himself, and half admiringly, "I believe he means it. Also his eyes are quite dry. It is the blood. Perhaps if that old wolf could see him now he might change his tune."

Then, speaking to me directly, he continued, "Nevertheless, my little game cock, you must obey me while you are with me. Kill or be killed, I will have it so."

It was the return of the old stubbornness, and with it there came to me a foresight that was, perhaps, beyond my years. It was now that my life of loneliness stood me in good stead, for when a child is without companions he must depend upon himself for entertainment, and this begets thought. Thus, as I paused before replying to the storekeeper's demand, I was enabled quite rapidly, and quite clearly, to go over the situation.

That I was helpless, and that I could scarce expect a second victory over Monsieur Dugas fully realized. Also, at present, there was not the slightest opportunity for escape. If I continued obstinate I would probably be watched, and would thereby only complicate any plans that I might lay later on. On the whole it was best for me to submit, for a time at least.

"Very well, M'sieu," said I with a sullenness that I was far from feeling. "If you will promise that there will be no more blows, I will promise to obey you while I am with you."

Monsieur Dugas' reply showed that, in mine, I had sadly underestimated his ability.

"While you are with me, eh?" he mused. "And you say that you never lie. Almost am I afraid to believe you. *Bien*, it is a bargain, little one, but you must understand that the blows will depend upon the obedience."

And with this grim assurance he picked up the reins and drove out of the thicket on to the flat sandy strip that ran along the edge of the bayou.

TO BE CONTINUED

MISS CORNELIA'S OLD MAHOGANY

By E. S. Windsor in *Rosary Magazine*

It was rather a small table. It was oddly shaped, and quaintly carved. But it was scratched and worn from the usage of years. Mrs. Tower looked at it disdainfully.

"Dear me, Cornelia, why do you keep that shabby old thing in your sitting room?" she asked.

Miss Cornelia Dale flushed. "You see, I've been reading how people are bringing out all their old mahogany lately. So I brought this down from the attic. It's solid mahogany. It was my great grandmother's." Miss Cornelia's tone as she said the last sentence was faintly proud.

Mrs. Tower shrugged her shoulders. "Well, it certainly looks its age. But if you want it around, why don't you have it renovated. There's a place over in Brighton where they do that sort of thing. I have no patience with the craze for old furniture. Give me new things."

"I like the association of old things," returned Miss Cornelia timidly.

"Associations! Bosh!" Mrs. Tower drew her fur collar up

around her neck, and said, "I must go."

Miss Cornelia watched her walk down the street. She turned from the window with a sigh. Sarah Tower had everything. A good husband with plenty of money to indulge all her wishes. While she

—Miss Cornelia paused and glanced around the room. Everything in it was shabby. The small income left her by her parents had not allowed for the renewal of furniture.

"But I don't care what Sarah says about that being shabby," she murmured, as her gaze fell on the mahogany table. "It's a beautiful shape. I've never seen one like it any place."

During the day she thought a good deal of what Sarah Tower had said about having the table renovated. It would be nice, she thought, to have it polished and shining as it had been when new. But she had no money to spare for that. She wished she had.

She could not help imagining how beautiful the table would look if cleaned and polished. At last she decided that she would do without the new coat she had been saving up to buy. But how could she get the table to the renovating place in Brighton?

As though in answer to that question, her neighbor Thomas West came in one day to ask her to lend his wife a certain crochet pattern book, his wife had a cold and could not come herself. Miss Cornelia asked him into the sitting room while she looked for the book.

He noticed the table. Miss Cornelia told him its history. Then she mentioned her desire to have it renewed, but that she did not know how to get it over to Brighton. She hadn't much money—and—

"Laws, Miss Dale, I'll take it over in my truck for you. At last she decided that she would do without the new coat she had been saving up to buy. But how could she get the table to the renovating place in Brighton?"

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high boy. Well, it was comforting to think how much good the twenty-five was doing the poor things at the mission.

One dreary afternoon when it was snowing and raining at the same time and she was in one of her periods of regret for the twenty-five dollars as she sat before the fire listlessly, there was a knock at her front door. Who could it be in such weather?

She hastened to open the door. A man in a raincoat, his hat drawn over his face stood without. "I heard you had a piece of old mahogany for sale," he said. "I am collecting such things, and—"

"Will you come in," said Miss Cornelia, and opened wide the door, while motioning him to walk into the sitting room. She closed the hall door and followed him. He had removed his hat. He said, "I'm pretty wet to come in," then as he glanced at her, he started. "Why, Cornelia, you! Cornelia!" he exclaimed.

Miss Cornelia was suddenly in a tremble. The years had changed him, but she knew those eyes. "Mark Vinton!" She tried to speak, but her voice seemed gone. She could only stare at him.

"Why, Cornelia, how handsome you are. Still your wonderful complexion and luxuriant hair! While I see how grey I am."

Miss Cornelia found her voice. "I am glad to see you," she said. "Sit down."

"Yes, when I take off this wet mackintosh," he laughed. "Now—"

Miss Cornelia herself could stand no longer. She sat down. Her visitor stood before her a moment looking at her. Then he sank on one knee beside her.

"Cornelia, I have only lately known that you were unmarried, as I am. But I had no hope that you would care to see me. Then you had left the village. I did not know when I was directed here to see some old mahogany, that it was you I would see. Cornelia, can't we begin over again?"

Miss Cornelia looked at him with an expression of sadness in her eyes. "There is still the one thing between us, Mark. I can't marry outside the true Church. But, maybe, if I had had more patience in the old days, I could have brought you into a good Catholic."

Mark Vinton smiled happily. "I have been in the Holy Catholic Church for some years, Cornelia. Some of the things you had said got me to thinking about religion. But I might not have come into the Church if I had not chanced to make the acquaintance of a young priest. When I saw the holy life he led, and the good he did—well—I began to think more seriously—and I am trying to be a good Catholic."

Miss Cornelia's eyes told him that all the old love was left for him. In Mrs. Mark Vinton's beautiful city home, there are two pieces of mahogany which she and her husband prize highly: a table of unique design, and a high-boy, both polished and restored. But for them their estrangement might not have been ended.

When Thomas West returned from Brighton the next day, he told Miss Cornelia that the manager at the renovating place had said he would give her a good price for the table if she would sell it.

"Oh, I wouldn't sell it," said Miss Cornelia. "It belonged to my great grandmother."

Thomas West was more practical than sentimental. "Money is money," he returned dryly. "If you change your mind, let me know."

Miss Cornelia thought that she would never change her mind. She wanted that table in her sitting room. She could hardly wait for it to be brought back to her, looking beautiful in its polish.

However, when one morning at Church, Father Matthews made a strong appeal for help for a Western Mission church which had been destroyed by fire, and most of the members of the parish were responding liberally to the priest's appeal, Miss Cornelia began to think that it was sinful for her to indulge herself by keeping the mahogany table. She could sell it and give the money to the poor suffering people at the mission.

Then she thought of the much needed coat that she was doing without to pay for the renovation of the table. Her old coat was terribly shabby. Ought she not to sell the table and get herself a new coat? After a sleepless night, she decided to sell the table, and give the money to the mission. She would not keep a cent of it.

When Thomas West went for the table on the day when it was to be ready she told him her decision.

He brought her back twenty-five dollars. "But I bet you, Miss Cornelia, that they sell it for twice as much," he said. "They want to know if you have any more pieces of old mahogany. I told them about your high-boy. They are going to tell a dealer in antiques and he will come to see it." Thomas West refused Miss Cornelia's offer to pay him for his trouble. "I'm only too glad to do anything for you, Miss Cornelia."

Miss Cornelia gave the twenty-five to the mission fund. But she thought, "If I sell the high-boy I'll get me a new coat."

The weeks passed and she heard nothing from the dealer in antiques. The weather got very cold. Miss Cornelia's coat was so thin and shabby that she was ashamed to go out in it. At times she regretted having given the twenty-five dollars to the mission. Then she would feel ashamed of herself. But she did need a coat so very much. She had given up hope of selling the

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