

"Uncle Sam does not trust," Symonds interposed roughly.

The girl was about to turn away when Vachon interfered.

"Excuse me, but is it necessary that this girl should pay such enormous duty for this simple Christmas box?"

"Yes, sir, it is," and Symonds' face flushed angrily at the interference.

"And you could not trust her until the mill, she works in, has opened up again?"

Vachon queried.

"Not much!" Symonds laughed boisterously. "Law is law with Uncle Sam!"

"Then the girl shall have her box. Here is the required duty," and as he spoke, Vachon laid down the two silver half-dollars, that would have bought the violet box of candy for Cassie.

The girl smiled gratefully, trying through her tears to thank him. But he motioned her to sign her name. He watched her write, tremblingly, Marie Bondreau, and it pleased him that she should have his baby sister's name.

When he had paid the duty on his own box, the girl followed him to the door.

"Dee Chreemus box," she ventured shyly, "you gif it me—we pay soon, maybe, if we find where you lif."

Vachon smiled. "There is no need, girl, but where do you live?" he asked, thinking he might find in his own mill a vacancy which she could fill. "Doubtless," he thought, "she has been working in the Western mills, which are closed down."

"In dee leetle house by dee big pond—

intended to enter the house; but the girl's box was still in his arms.

As he entered the porch, Marie's sister, evidently surprised, withdrew into the hall.

The light of the kerosene bracket lamp fell on her face. With a startled exclamation, Henri Vachon dropped the box. Seizing the tall girl's hands, he cried excitedly, "Catharine, Catharine Le Bronte, child, I've found you at last!"

Startled, the girl shrank from the strong grasp of his hands. "You—you are—?" she asked timidly.

"I am Henri, Henri Vachon. Don't you remember how we used to coast together down the Chebogne hills?"

She let him take her hand and kiss her fingers.

"But, you—you are a man, Henri—you were not so big and tall, when we coasted together," she answered shyly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed eagerly as he followed the two girls into the small sitting room, "you do remember, then. I wish we were in Acadie tonight, Cassie. I can't make it seem real to have you here."

"Dear old Acadie!" she murmured.

"Do you know, I was thinking tonight, Cassie, of the Christmas eve when I took you for a ride on my home-made runner. All the other boys had bright, shop sleds. I never was much of a carpenter, and it was fearfully put together."

Catharine laughed. "I remember. I tore a bad hole in my red coat on some of the nails, sticking out."



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dee dress sewer's house. Dee beeg seester haf dee room wif me," the girl answered shyly.

"Oh, Miss Sloane's house!" Vachon exclaimed, "a mile and a half from here and a cold walk by the river. Child, I am going the same way. Let me carry your package. It will grow heavy before you reach home."

"Eet ees all our Chreemus," Marie explained, hesitating to trust it with him.

"Don't worry!" he hastily assured her. "I shall not run away with it. See, I'll give you my box as a bond. It's lighter than yours; but it's all my Christmas. It has come from my mother in Acadie."

Exchanging their boxes, the two walked together down the long, open road. Vachon relapsed into the Acadian dialect, Marie losing her shyness, as they talked of their beloved Acadie.

Curiously, the spark of cheer ignited in Vachon's heart at the sick man's house, glowed brighter. Somehow, he felt the icy wind less keenly as they walked the bank of the frozen river.

They had become good comrades by the time they had reached the dress-maker's home. As their feet crunched the frozen snow on the path leading to the door, a tall girl came out to meet them.

"Marie! Marie! Child, have you brought it?" she cried, excitedly.

Marie laughed joyously, "Oui, oui, seester. Dee man no want to gif it me. I no pay dee dooty. Dis man—bon, vera bon—he pay. He gif us Chreemus," she explained, indicating Vachon, who followed her up the steps. He had not

"Do you know what a dear little sport you were to coast on it at all? I was so happy when you refused to ride with the English-Canadian boys. Perhaps I wasn't proud to steer right through that crowd of kids? But, Cassie, I'll never forget the moment when that old sled went to pieces, smash into the big drift on the corner."

"That was always a bad place to turn, Henri."

"You always were comforting, Cassie. How those youngsters hooted and yelled, 'The Canuck's broke down, the Canuck's broke down!' All I could see of you was the fuzzy red tassel of your tam, on top of the snow."

"I remember that rude Smith boy pulled my hair, trying to help me out."

Henri laughed. "You were plucky, all right, and independent, too. Wouldn't let them help you out a bit. How you snowballed those English chaps!"

"Yes, and it was cold work making snowballs. I'd lost my mittens when we broke down."

"I was awfully cut up, mad and ashamed, too. I just crawled over under that big, spruce hedge and swore I wouldn't face anybody until dark."

"Poor little boy!" Catharine's voice was low and soft.

"And do you remember, Cassie, how you worked your way out of the drift and came over to comfort me? You put your, dear, dimpled, brown arms around my neck and said, 'Don't worry, Henri, we both got spilled out together.'"

Catharine blushed prettily, for the

# Big Ben



3 a.m.—

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