

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW Author of Allons to the Grand Woods, etc.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED

It was a desolate, unlovely place, even under the softening influence of the moonlight, yet as Monsieur Dugas drove around to the little stable in the rear, he heaved a great sigh of contentment.

"That is good to be home again," he observed. "Now there will be no more paying for each bit of food that goes into one's mouth, each moment of one's repose. They are robbers, those city-folk. If it were possible, they would charge for the very air that one breathes."

"Then why did you go to Mardi Gras, M'sieu?" I inquired, stung by this implied accusation of Madame Therese.

The storekeeper stared at me in surprise. "To Mardi Gras?" he echoed. "You thought that I went to see the carnival? Dieu, but you are a strange one."

He paused to chuckle at the thought, and then added, "Believe me, I am not that kind of a fool. Each year it is necessary that I journey to the city to replenish the stock of my store. If I go at this time, it is only that I may receive the carnival as *lagnappe*. You understand?"

I made no reply. That any one should journey to the city at Mardi Gras for any other purpose than that of witnessing the carnival was beyond my comprehension.

Climbing stiffly from the high seat of the jumper, Monsieur Dugas lifted me to the ground, and then, which he set about unbarnening and stabilizing the horse. Then, picking up the valises, he led the way toward the store. A black and white dog came growling through the shadows, and a fowl squawked uneasily from an unseen perch, but save for these tokens our arrival was unnoticed. No lamp sprang suddenly aglow in some dark window. No voice called to the master to know if all was well with him. Through our welcome I guessed that which I was presently to know—that there was no Madame Dugas.

To the rear of the store a small single room had been added, and going toward it Monsieur Dugas unlocked the door and entered.

"A moment," he cautioned, halting me upon the threshold. "It is crowded in here. You had best wait until I make a light."

Accordingly I paused upon the door-step, and as I did so I quickly turned my head. For from the room there came such an odor that I was well-nigh strangled with it. It was a stale, musty odor, of rancid cheese, of moldy flour, of ancient salt meat and, above all, of the flat fumes of strong cheap liquor. To the storekeeper, however, it was a familiar atmosphere, perhaps a pleasant one, for he remarked on it as he searched for the lamp.

"That smells good," he sniffed, "especially the cheese. I was afraid that, in my absence, my imbecile of a clerk would throw it away. They like strong things, these country-folk, good strong things that will remind them that they have received something for their money."

By now the storekeeper had found and lighted the lamp, and, peering inside, I stared in astonishment at the sight that met my eyes. It was a small room, even for one person, yet into it had been crowded the entire overflow of the store. Boxes, jugs and barrels littered the entire floor space, tall pyramids of gaudy labeled cans had been built up against the walls, while from the rafters overhead hung bundles and sets of harness, lending a grim and raggedness to the slovenly aspect of the whole.

In one corner a cot with tattered mosquito netting marked the resting-place of Monsieur Dugas, and save for this there was no other furniture. At the back an open fireplace yawned cold and cheerless, with a row of dirty glasses upon the narrow shelf above.

Removing his hat and overcoat, Monsieur Dugas caught up the lamp and vanished inside the store, leaving me to choke in the close but chilly atmosphere of the room. When he returned a moment later, he was burdened with an armful of filthy blankets which gave forth a cloud of dust as he threw them upon a convenient barrel-top. Then, hastily clearing a small narrow space upon the floor by thrusting a part of the litter beneath his cot, he spread the blankets lengthwise into a rude sort of bed. His foot, as though from habit, pointing toward the empty fireplace.

"So," said he, rising from his task with a grunt of satisfaction. "There is your couch, my young friend. Perhaps it is not a fine one, but it is the best that I can do. Raoul, my clerk, has slept upon it, and has been none the worse for the experience. Come, tumble in before you are cold. It would be a waste to start a fire at such an hour."

As though to set me the example he began undressing with a remarkable rapidity while I, shivering and gasping, paused only to slip off my coat and shoes before creeping beneath the dingy blankets.

Monsieur Dugas nodded his approval. "Ah, so you have discovered him,

"That is right," said he. "You will be warmer so." And blowing out the lamp, he made his way through the maze of boxes and barrels with the same marvelous accuracy that he had exhibited upon our drive across the prairie. The cot squeaked lustily beneath the weight of his body, and then, almost instantly, there arose the sound of slow regular breathing that told me he was asleep.

As for myself, I lay upon my blankets in sobbing, tortured wakefulness, my whole small body racked with the dreadful pangs of homesickness. That these pangs were my first, served only to increase their poignancy, so that my very soul ached with its longing for Madame Therese.

Gone was the pleasure of the morning's journey, the pleased anticipation of all that was to come. I groaned. I writhed. I clutched the blankets fiercely in my agony that their rotten fabric gave way beneath my fingers. It was very dark and still in the crowded room, and to the odors that I had encountered upon the door-step, there was added the reek of ill-cured leather.

Finally my suffering became so unbearable that, as in the days of my loneliness and terror, I rose suddenly to my knees in the middle of the blankets. Out went my arms, and from my lips there issued forth a trembling, whispered supplication, although now it was addressed to One far greater than my adored M'sieu L'Empereur Napoleon.

"Dear God," I sobbed again and again, "take me back to my Madame Therese. Take me back or I will die."

It was a simple monotonous appeal, yet its faith must have been great, for I have always felt that it went straight up from the heart of that desolate prairie into the infinite Mercy beyond. At all events, as I knelt there shivering, a soft bright finger of moonlight slipped suddenly through the dark square of the uncurtained window, and rested for a moment upon my face like an answering caress.

Somehow I felt strangely comforted, and then, as I rolled back into my blankets, a sudden sharp pressure above my heart reminded me of Madame Therese's forgotten present. Quickly I drew it forth, unwrapping its covering of tissue-paper until my mother's picture lay in my hand. The finger of moonlight had now slipped to the floor, where it shimmered a thin, quivering streak of silver, and, lowering the picture into its glow, I saw upon the glass of the frame, a small round object.

Dear Madame Therese! I pressed the gold piece to my lips as surely she must have pressed it to hers. Also, before thrusting it hurriedly into my pocket, I cast a fearful glance in the direction of the storekeeper. I was beginning to understand Monsieur Dugas now, and I blessed the forgetfulness that had caused him to miss this truly golden opportunity.

How long I lay there gazing at the picture I do not know. Once more I can see the sad beautiful face in its bath of moonlight. Once more I can feel the drowsy, delicious sense of protection that crept over me before my tired eyes closed in sleep.

And so, through the strange workings of Providence, in the hour of my childhood's greatest necessity, and in the country of her youth, I was comforted by the mother whom I had never known.

CHAPTER V. MARSH ISLAND

I awoke next morning to the sound of angry voices and, upon looking sleepily about me, saw Monsieur Dugas and another man engaged in excited conversation. They stood before the open fireplace in which a fire of dry china-tree branches now crackled merrily, sending up long tongues of flame against the black sides of the iron kettle that was suspended above it. At one side the ashes had been raked away to accommodate a battered coffee pot, and Monsieur Dugas, armed with a large pewter spoon, presided over it all with an authority born of long usage.

"Exercise, my dear Raoul, is the best of tonics," he was saying between vigorous jabs at the kettle. "Also you should have been waiting for me. Had I not left when I did, I would have been charged with a night's stabling."

His companion muttered an angry oath. He was a young man, plain and simple of features, and the gaudy apparel in which he had arrayed himself for his trip to town had suffered sadly from the fogs and dews of the night before. Evidently, in his anger, he had hurried straight to the store, forgetful of the comfort of a change to less pretentious clothing.

"Just the same you will pay me for the damage, Dugas," he declared stubbornly. "You left word that I must tend store this morning, and I had no choice but to walk. You know how long I have saved for this suit, these shoes, this hat. And now look at them!"

Turning to display his plight to better advantage, he caught sight of me sitting up upon my huddle of blankets.

"Why—who—" he began. Monsieur Dugas smiled, possibly with satisfaction, for I have always felt that he counted upon my discovery to put an end to a very unpleasant discussion.

"Ah, so you have discovered him,

Raoul?" he interrupted hastily. "I thought that you would be surprised. Also, after I have taken him to his destination and have told you who he is, you will be more surprised than ever. This is all that I can tell you for the moment."

Thus, having established a curiosity in the mind of his clerk that completely overshadowed all the questions of the ruined garments, Monsieur Dugas gave a final stir to the kettle and, lifting it from its crane, dumped the contents into a greasy platter.

"Come, breakfast is ready, *mon p'tit*," he called to me. "We must eat quickly and be off, for there are still some miles ahead of us."

Hastily slipping into my shoes and coat, I took my place at the barrel-top which served as a table, and began to gulp down the hot mush that Monsieur Dugas had been preparing. It was coarse and tasteless, but fortunately there was an abundance of it. For, through the absence of my supper the night before, I was now ravenously hungry.

After a moment of indecision, Raoul joined in the meal, eating with such rapidity despite his silliness, that it was evident that, in the matter of the mush at least, he intended getting the better of his employer.

When the last particle had disappeared, Monsieur Dugas wiped his mouth upon the back of his hand, and gathering the dishes into a heap, dumped them carelessly upon the hearth.

"You will now open the store and tend it until my return, Raoul," he ordered. "Also you will set out some of the goods in here saying that I have brought them from the city. Of course there will be an extra charge for the freshness. You understand?"

Raoul nodded sulkily. "But this boy, and my clothes—" he began.

"Upon my return, Raoul, upon my return," said the storekeeper soothingly, and motioning me to follow him, led the way outside.

It was not until I had stepped out into the stable-yard that I realized how early we had arisen. The mist still hung damp and heavy above the surrounding prairie and the morning light was gray and hazy, distorting the smallest object into an unnatural size. Across the narrow walk that led around to the front of the store a pump crowned with a tin basin loomed like some huge, helmeted giant, and Monsieur Dugas, pausing before it, thrust a small sticky lump of soap into my hand.

"Make a good job of it *mon p'tit*," he advised. "Your appearance will count for something, believe me." And with this wise, if curious suggestion, he hurried away to harness his horse.

TO BE CONTINUED

A MOTHER'S LOVE

Situated on the principal street of the city was the homestead of comfort and plenty owned by the Courtenays. To everyone, who passed by, it seemed a Utopia of content to be able to live there. Besides to be a Courtenay meant that you were looked up to by the entire populace as a model of aristocracy. In such surroundings we find Henry Courtenay, the only child of the family. To his father's disappointment Henry is a real American young man. Often Henry broke the old-established customs of the Courtenays by mingling with those generally considered his inferiors. Henry, possessing a cosmopolitan spirit, was somewhat attached to the poor and often spent his leisure hours riding through the slums. It was while doing so that one day he came upon a bowery bully molesting a young girl. Without a moment's hesitation Henry dismounted and walking up to the bully, said: "Let her alone." The bully, hardly glancing at Henry, replied with a sneer, "Go about your business or I'll—"

This stirred the red manly blood in Henry beyond control. Seeing failure in the use of words a battle royal followed, while the girl stood by in fear. The bully, taken unexpectedly, for he was under the impression that his appearance was enough to scare Henry, was soon overpowered. Henry saw further to the girl's protection by accompanying her to her home. He felt rather interested in all that the girl had to say. She told him she was Inez Watts and that she worked in a factory, at which she made a few dollars a week.

This confession, however, did not make Henry lose his interest in her, and before leaving that day he obtained her permission to see her again. Time and again Henry visited the slums. No one knew of his frequent calls except Inez. Inez, indeed, liked to see him, but foreseeing the consequences should his real mission be discovered, she warned him again and again. She did not want to see him suffer on her account, because she would share his misfortune. Although Inez sometimes exaggerated what the possible consequences might be, nevertheless nothing seemed to discourage Henry.

After a considerable time of courting, they were married. Their marriage was secretly performed because Henry was quite sure his parents would object to it. Once married, he no longer feared the consequences. What mattered it to him if he had to undergo any

conceivable suffering when he was sure Inez was as long as he lived. With courage he broke the news to his parents. Mrs. Courtenay seemed to be disappointed in his action, but was ready and willing to forgive. With Mr. Courtenay matters stood different. He would listen to no explanation nor pleadings, but without a moment's hesitation, ordered Henry to leave home. He gave him a choice of leaving his wife and child staying at home or to be disinherited and have his wife. How could Henry leave Inez? Such action seemed to him impossible and he soon set to work gathering his belongings. When ready to leave his father used one more argument to persuade him to do what the "Courtenay" pride would demand in such a case. Henry interrupted his father's speech and retorted: "Father, stop this instant. Inez is made of the same common clay as any girl whom you would have me marry. I will go to the end of the world to keep her." In another moment he was gone.

After three years we find Henry, but now calling himself Tatum, living in a small and humble cottage in the poor section of the city. Earnestly he worked day after day as foreman at the Van Leder Printing Shop, trying to make ends meet and to give Inez and his little son all that he possibly could. What a contrast to his former home where every conceivable luxury was his!

Nevertheless, in all his struggles Henry seemed to feel happier than he had ever been in his father's home. In order to keep up with the ever-increasing cost of commodities Henry approached the president of the firm and asked for a raise in salary. Mr. Van Leder promised Henry a raise provided their firm won the big printing job which was open for bid. It may have looked bright for the Van Leder concern had not the Courtenay Printing Company, the largest concern of its kind in the city, also bid for the contract. The Courtenay Printing Company, of which Henry's father was president, anxiously desired to win the contract in order to uphold its former prestige. Henry's father, however, was signorant of his disinherited son's connection with the Van Leder firm. Had he been aware of it, the Van Leder concern would not have the slightest hope for the contract, and Inez wished to see Van Leder get it for the simple reason that it would mean a raise in Henry's salary. If they did. The Van Leder firm was just becoming established and must secure this contract if it was to gain a footing in the locality. Keen would hardly express the true competition between the two firms.

Meanwhile Mrs. Courtenay turned her attention to charity. Time after time she visited the slums, carrying cheer to the poor and hope for the contrite and the wretched. Her heart was broken by the binding of broken hearts. A chance would have it, Mrs. Courtenay, while looking after the needy, one day visited the cottage of the Tatums. There she found Inez and her little son, who was not well. Mrs. Courtenay did not know who Inez was, yet something drew her to like Inez. After several such visits, Mrs. Courtenay discovered to whom this humble cottage belonged. Although touched by her Courtenay pride would not allow her to disclose her identity. Hard pressed at times, still Inez refused her charity, but Mrs. Courtenay now aware for whom she was doing it, was doubly anxious to help. Her frequent visits soon won the friendship of the little boy, who generally received some little gift, which his parents could not provide for him.

One day, wishing to repay Mrs. Courtenay, the little boy gave her a key and childlike insisted that she keep it. Mrs. Courtenay would have readily taken it as a keepsake, but under the impression that the key was needed, offered it to Inez. Inez, however, told her that if she cared she might have it, as it was just an extra office key belonging to Henry. Mrs. Courtenay, pleased with the attitude of Inez, put the key into her satchel. During the conversation that followed, Inez showed Mrs. Courtenay a photograph of the office where Henry worked, even pointing out the desk occupied by him.

Mrs. Courtenay was really interested and gathered all the information possible, whereas the enthusiastic Inez was ready to answer all questions. She told Mrs. Courtenay the concern for which Henry worked and that they were going to have a bigger income provided a large printing contract was won by that firm.

Upon returning home Mrs. Courtenay soon set to work trying to persuade her husband to withdraw his low bid and allow the small firm to have the contract. Her argument was that the smaller firm ought to be given an opportunity to get well started. She never advanced her real reason for her interest in the welfare of the Van Leder concern. Mr. Courtenay, who had never allowed a possible dollar to get out of his reach, flatly refused her request.

The time for awarding the contract was drawing nigh. The day previous to the formal awarding Van Leder informed Henry that the big firm had won the contract. This was, indeed, a shock to Henry, who was patiently awaiting the day with hopes of having Van Leder's promise fulfilled. His hopes shattered, like a ship wrecked at sea

and with the realization that his little son was growing worse staring him in the face, Henry decided that he must get money either by fair or foul means. After some deliberation he planned to go at night to the Van Leder office and open the safe, the combination of which was known to him. Driven to desperation by the failure of the firm to secure the contract, he firmly resolved to undertake his plan that very night.

Henry and Inez were disappointed, 'tis true, but there was someone else who felt the little firm's misfortune. It was no one other than Mrs. Courtenay. Her love for her son had never lessened though he was no longer at home. Pondering over the situation Henry was now in, this was soon followed by a resolution to act. She took from an iron box a number of paper bills and enclosing them in an envelope wrote "To Mr. Henry Tatum." Scrutinizing the envelope she realized that her writing would reveal to Henry the sender. She tore up the envelope, and taking up another she printed in a disguised hand "To Mr. Henry Tatum from an old friend who comes to her enclosed." Into this envelope she placed the money and sealed it.

That night she secretly left her home on an unknown mission. She soon arrived at the Van Leder shop, admitted herself with the key the boy had given her. With a pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other she found Henry's desk. After placing the money in the drawer she closed it and prepared to leave, but her footsteps were heard. Trembling with the fear of being caught and horror stricken at the very idea, she hid.

Henry, leaving Inez, set out from his cottage on secret business. Arriving at the Van Leder shop and seeing no one around, he entered the same door Mrs. Courtenay had shortly before entered, leaving the door unlocked, behind him. Straight to the safe. Opening it he was about to take the money, when his mother noticed from her place what her son was doing first the pistol in the air. She had forgotten herself in that moment, her foremost thought being to save her son from disgrace. Henry, seized with fear, though having secured no money, broke away. He was soon out of the shop and on his way, escaping through the door he left unlocked.

With her mission performed Mrs. Courtenay, thoroughly frightened, hurried out. Just as she left the door she fell into the hands of two policemen who were attracted by the report of the pistol. They took her to the police station. Immediately she sent word to her husband. He, totally unaware of her having left the house that night, was mystified. He at once set out to aid her.

Mrs. Courtenay refused to explain her conduct to her husband. Van Leder who was also summoned, arrived at the station. Although he admitted that no money was missing still he demanded action. Mrs. Courtenay begged Van Leder to have her released. Anxious to hush the matter up, she told Van Leder that Mr. Courtenay would transfer the printing contract to him. Van Leder readily agreed and Mr. Courtenay, although reluctantly, consented to Mrs. Courtenay's terms, but with the understanding that the reason for his action be kept secret.

Once at home Mr. Courtenay demanded an explanation from his wife. She dared not tell him the truth, yet some explanation had to be given, so she began: "In my charity work I encountered a poor boy, who worked for Van Leder. I tried to induce him to accept what I had for him, but he refused. I went to the shop to leave some money in his desk, which he had pointed out to me some time ago. While there my pistol went off accidentally and its report attracted the policemen." Her final words were hardly audible due to her sobs. Courtenay, highly incensed, nevertheless believed her story, but warned her that she must give up charity work in the future.

Henry truly repented his cowardly and degrading attempt at robbery. His only consolation was the fact that he had not been caught and had not brought any disgrace either upon Inez or his little son.

The next day at work bright colors chased away the gloom, when he found a strange package of money. He was surprised and delighted, but never suspected the author of the good deed. His joy knew no bounds when later in the day Van Leder informed him that he was to get his raise in salary, because the Courtenay company had surrendered the contract to Van Leder. It was beyond his comprehension to hear that his father should give up the contract. He asked Van Leder the reason for Courtenay's action, but Van Leder refused to answer. Just as Van Leder and Courtenay never suspected that Henry unconsciously was responsible for the Van Leder concern, getting the contract, so Henry never suspected that it was his mother's love that saved him from ruin and was responsible for Van Leder getting the contract.—Andrew Klubusickie, in the Michigan Catholic.

It is not enough to see that God wishes the good we aim at, but that He wishes it through our instrumentality, in our manner and in our time; and we come to discern all this by true obedience.

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