

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW Author of "Alone of the Grand Woods, etc."

CHAPTER III. A LETTER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Of the time that elapsed between my father's death and burial I have little recollection. For the most part it passed in a peculiar blur of half-conscious misery, although there are certain small details that linger quite clearly in my memory.

The day following being Mardi Gras, a funeral was out of the question. So the poor peaceful figure was laid in state in the big front room, with the shades drawn close over the French windows, and the small pointed flames of the holy candle fighting desperately against the heavy gloom.

The cure came, accompanied by an acolyte, and I will never forget the long, curious stare that the little fellow gave me. There was wonder in his eyes and also a certain fear as though, through the awful majesty of death, I had been set apart from our kind.

After the cure came my father's fellow workers at the commission house, in heavy, unfamiliar suits of black, some of them genuinely grieved, others scarce able to hide the impatience that told that they were wondering whether they would be able to get away in time to witness the parade of Rex.

These arrangements he went over with Madame Therese in the privacy of her room, while his companions paced nervously up and down outside the door discussing in low tones with the few, home-keeping visitors, the crops of the coming season.

After they had gone I spent the afternoon in watching the maskers from the window of my little room. The child must be amused, Madame Therese had said, and she had placed me there where she could slip in every now and then from her innumerable duties to give me a word of cheer.

To this day I can not see a masker without thinking of those long hours before the early dusk of that winter afternoon. Seated upon my little stool I watched the fantastic, many-colored figures that passed endlessly below me, dancing, singing, shouting in the high unnatural voice that every masker feels called upon to assume with his disguise.

Small bands of them would come tramping in from Canal Street; here a war party of Indians, there a silk-clad company of cavaliers. Down they would bear upon me, billing the air with confetti, calling brief witticisms to the watching crowds. Then as they reached the long streamer crepe upon Madame Therese's doorway, they would fall suddenly silent, and perhaps, if they were French, a hand would go up in salute to the somber majesty inside.

They were loyal subjects of Rex, those maskers, yet they could not ignore the banner of that other, greater King. And so they would pass onward, hushed for the moment by this fleeting touch of the unknown.

That night I again slept with Madame Therese, and early the following morning the arrangements that had been gone over by Mr. Gray were put into execution. They were simple arrangements, chiefly concerned with four ancient hacks that crawled through endless littered streets whose gaudy decorations seemed curiously dull and tawdry in the early light.

Madame Therese and myself to the rue Bourbon. There were still some small matters to be attended to, he said, and, as he had already lost the best part of the morning, he would look after them before returning to his work.

Madame Therese was very grateful. "You are kind, M'sieu," she murmured. "Of course you mean M'sieu Marsh's papers. I had meant to ask you to look over them."

Mr. Gray nodded. "And the boy?" he inquired. "He will stay with—"

"Yes, yes, M'sieu," Madame Therese interrupted eagerly. "Believe me, I will do the best I can. He has always been like my own child, and I have felt that if ever his father should—"

She paused and the sudden tender pressure of her embrace finished her sentence far better than any poor words could have done.

On arriving at her home, Madame Therese led the way directly to my father's room, and placed a chair before his writing-table.

"You may find nothing, M'sieu," she apologized. "M'sieu Marsh was always very silent about his affairs."

Unlocking the drawer of the writing-table, Mr. Gray peered inside. It was empty save for a single long envelope that had been placed carefully in its exact center.

"For you, Madame," said Mr. Gray, and Madame Therese, taking the envelope, read its inscription in a broken voice.

"For Madame Therese—To be opened by her only after my death." "Poor M'sieu," sobbed Madame Therese. "You see he knew it was coming, the end. And he said no word."

"That is very plain," agreed Mr. Gray. "And then, as though struck by a sudden thought, he added to me. 'This drawer here, John? Do you remember having seen any other letters or papers in it besides the one that I have found?'"

"Oh, yes, M'sieu," said I, relieved at the possible explanation of something that had puzzled me ever since the opening of the drawer. "There were several bundles of letters, each of them tied with a ribbon. My father always touched them as he did the picture of my mother. Who could have taken them?"

Mr. Gray's answer was disappointing. "Of course, of course," he muttered. "Everything was destroyed beforehand. And now for the letter, Madame."

Opening the envelope with trembling fingers, Madame Therese drew forth two smaller ones from inside. The first was addressed to herself. The second bore a name that caused Mr. Gray to cry out in surprise.

"Come, hurry, Madame," he urged. "There is some mystery here." Very slowly and carefully Madame Therese read her letter, and when she had finished she paused for a long moment before handing it to Mr. Gray.

A white stricken look had come into her face, and the grasp with which she seized me was so fierce that my eyes were damp with pain.

Upon Mr. Gray the letter seemed to have a more startling effect. At the first reading he gasped with amazement. At the second he passed an uncertain hand across his brow.

"Impossible," he murmured. "General Marsh of all people in the world." "Then you know this M'sieu General?" asked Madame Therese.

"Somehow her voice sounded very flat and very weary, and the arm about me had relaxed from its choking pressure into the limpness of despair."

"Who in my position does not know him?" replied Mr. Gray. "He is by far the wealthiest planter in the parish of St. Pierre, perhaps in all the other parishes around. I have often wondered why we could not get at least a part of his business. Now I know. And this boy—"

He broke off to stare at me with the quickened interest of one who, having looked carelessly upon some rough pebble, is suddenly informed that it is a jewel of inestimable value.

Madame Therese sighed. "It is what I feared," said she in the same dull voice. "If this M'sieu General were poor now, it might be better for the child to remain. Here in the city with its schools, its—"

"But surely, Madame," began Mr. Gray. "I know my duty, M'sieu, and I shall do it regardless of myself," she broke in. "St. Pierre, you said? There is a visitor here from that parish, a storekeeper. I shall question him about the matter, and perhaps he will take the child with him when he returns. I could not leave my house at such a time. As for you, I suppose that you also are too busy for such a thing?"

"Yes, Madame," assented Mr. Gray. "I am only an employee, you know. However, if you care to wait until the rush of the carnival is over, I do not think that it would make any material difference. Perhaps it would be even better. It would give you time in which to write and prepare the General for the arrival of his—"

Madame Therese winced as with pain. "No, no, M'sieu," she interrupted hastily. "If you will remember the letter says that this M'sieu General must be informed only by that which the writer has left behind. I could not go myself. It would be too much. Also it would not be easy for me to wait. Each moment would add a greater value to that which I am to lose. Each word, each caress—"

She broke off abruptly to bury her face in her hands, and thus Mr. Gray left her with her tired old head bowed down upon the writing-table, while I stared out from the protection of her arm, and wondered what it all could mean.

For the first time in her life Madame Therese allowed me to accompany her that day as she made the rounds of the house. Often she would pause in her work to give me a sudden, silent caress, and once she held me at arm's length and stared at me so long and earnestly that I broke into a frightened whimper.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, Madame?" I quavered. "So that I will not forget your little face, mon enfant," she replied, and crushed the clean pillow case that she was holding against her eyes with a total disregard for its destruction.

That night, after supper, Madame Therese took my father's letter from her bosom, and read it slowly by the light of the fire. "Bien," said she with the hopeless finality of her race and, having kissed me, walked heavily from the room. When she returned, an hour or so later, she took me into her lap and began to speak to me in the grave quiet voice that she used when teaching me my prayers and catechism.

"You are going away tomorrow, my little John," she informed me. "You are to live with your grandfather upon a great and wonderful plantation. You will be very happy, and some day you will also be very rich. Perhaps you do not understand this, mon enfant, but it will mean a great deal to you."

I smiled at this prospect of good things to come even though I could not understand them. "But the lodgers?" she asked, struck by a sudden thought. "Who will look after them?"

"Poor Madame Therese! How I must have stabbled her with my simple question. How it must have brought back to her the anguish of that thought which she was so bravely stifling—the thought of the utter impossibility of our being separated."

"Ah, mon enfant, mon enfant," she moaned, holding me close to her breast. "Can you not understand? You are going to leave me. I can not go with you. One of the visitors will take you away. It is your father's last wish, my little John. There is nothing that I can do."

Slowly, inexorably the meaning of her words came home to me. I clasped her wildly about the neck. I buried my face in her bosom, and clung to her as desperately as though at that very moment I were being dragged away.

"I will not go, Madame, I will not go," I screamed. "If you send me off I will come back again. They can not keep me. I will run away."

But even in her grief Madame Therese could not forget her duty. "That is wicked, my little John," she reproved me. "It is your grandfather. You will have to stay."

It stands out very clearly, does that last night, and, despite its sadness, it is my most cherished memory of Madame Therese. Once more I can see her in the fire-light, her faithful eyes a blur of tears as she told me of my duty and her own. How she cheered me with the promise of an immediate visit which, in her heart, she knew would never be made.

How she pictured the delights and wonders that we would discover upon my grandfather's plantation, straining her poor trembling lips into the semblance of a smile. How loving, how tender, how brave she was, recklessly spending upon me the last remnant of her courage, all forgetful of the lonely days to come.

When I awoke the following morning, it was to find her employed in packing the last of my few possessions into a battered valise. Her face looked very old and tired, but the struggle had departed from it, leaving a sort of weary peace behind. Evidently she had fought well through the long watches of the night, and now rested upon her arms.

"Come, up with you, my little John," she called cheerily enough. "You forget that you have a journey before you."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE POWER OF A HAIL MARY

The Rev. Mr. Clarkson was puzzled by the question put to him by his wife: "Dwight, can you give me an explanation of a little prayer called the Ave Maria?"

"Ave Maria! No more than the translation, Hail, Mary. Give me the context, and perhaps I'll know just what you refer to."

"Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee."

"That will do, Amanda. That jibberish is part of an invocation addressed by Catholics to the so-called Mother of Christ. It's all both, you know, that theory of theirs that Mary was His mother through the operation of the Holy Ghost. The doctrine is too absurd for argument. They claim humanity for Christ in one breath, and in the next assure that He had not a natural conception. In a word, they confuse their doctrines on the dignity of marriage. They assert that the Nazarene idealized the marriage state and restored it to its primitive dignity, and immediately after this bald statement they condemn it, indirectly of course, by saying that when Christ was actually born He chose another way of reaching earth. He was not to be tainted by carnal conception. Really, I haven't any very strong objection to that theory, because, after all, Divinity ought to be allowed all freedom in miracles, but what provokes me is this clinging to the humanity of Christ, and devotion for His mother. How do you happen to know that bit of superstition, Amanda?"

"Why, I don't know, Dwight. Someone taught me the prayer long ago, so long that I don't even remember where I was or with whom. I have said it every day since then, and I don't believe I could fall asleep at night if I omitted it."

Mr. Clarkson's face was a study. "Then it's time you gave it up, Amanda. I hate popish mummeries."

His wife looked surprised, though she knew her husband disliked Catholicism. The talk drifted into other channels. Mr. Clarkson had been asked to substitute in the village of Freestone for three months, and as he was leaving in a day or two he had many plans to discuss with his successor. He left his wife in a few minutes. Some weeks later they had taken up residence in their new home. By some strange fortune the Congregational rectory was directly opposite the Catholic rectory. The minister showed his chagrin by ignoring the fact completely. Mrs. Clarkson was pleased rather than annoyed, for she had regard for Catholic priests.

One day on her return from the village library, Mrs. Clarkson came face to face with Father Butin, an elderly priest of dignified bearing and striking personality. He greeted Mrs. Clarkson in a friendly manner.

"I hope you will enjoy living in our little village, though I fear you will find it a great contrast to your old home."

"I have just encountered the first great contrast. I went to the library hoping to find a few books that I have been anxious to read."

"Here she received baptism, penance and Holy Eucharist. Her health returned gradually, and at the end of her sojourn she went to her father in the South. Archbishop Hayes confirmed her."

Now she spends her spare time in helping to instruct little ones for the reception of the sacraments, and also gives her services as organist in the Catholic Church. Her husband has remained obstinate. Who knows, however, what the prayers of such a courageous soul may effect?—Agnes R. McDonough in The Monitor.

STUDENTS' MISSION CRUSADE RECEIVES POPE'S BLESSING

Cincinnati, June 5.—The same blessing bestowed by Popes in the Middle Ages upon the warriors who went out in the armies of kings for the rescue of the Holy Land has been given by Pope Pius XI. to members of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. This announcement is contained in a cablegram received at the Crusade Castle, national headquarters of the C. S. M. C., May 31.

This extraordinary blessing was given by the Holy Father in an audience granted May 28 to Bishop Francis J. Beckman, of Lincoln, Neb., and Rev. Frank A. Thill, of Cincinnati, national officers of the Crusade.

The full text of the blessing given by the Pope reads as follows: "As our predecessors, the Popes of old, blessed the armed Crusade warriors who defended the sacred places against the infidel, so we bless the prayers, the works and the sacrifices of the new student Crusaders in their spiritual warfare to win the world for Christ. May success forever be yours."

A beautifully illuminated parchment containing the text is being sent to the Crusade Castle. In his own hand, the Pope added a sentiment after the Vatican scribe had completed the writing of the document.

The petition of the Crusade leaders for the old Crusade indulgences granted by the Popes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to those taking part in the campaigns for the Holy Land is being personally promoted before the Tribunal of the Sacred Penitentiary by Pope Pius.

These spiritual favors are being asked especially for those Crusaders who attend the school for leadership which will be opened at the Crusade Castle in July.

Earlier cable dispatches received during the past week announced the elevation of the Crusade to the rank of a pontifical society and the appointment of Cardinal Van Rossum, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, as protector.

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