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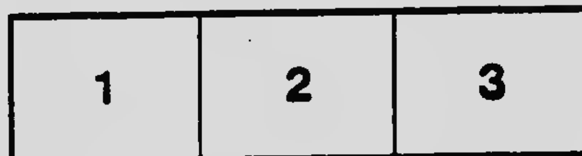

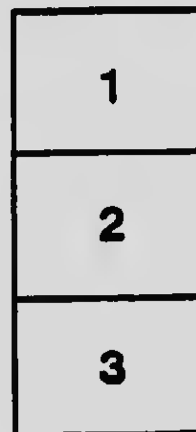

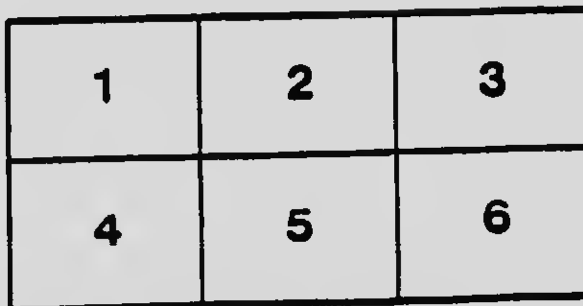

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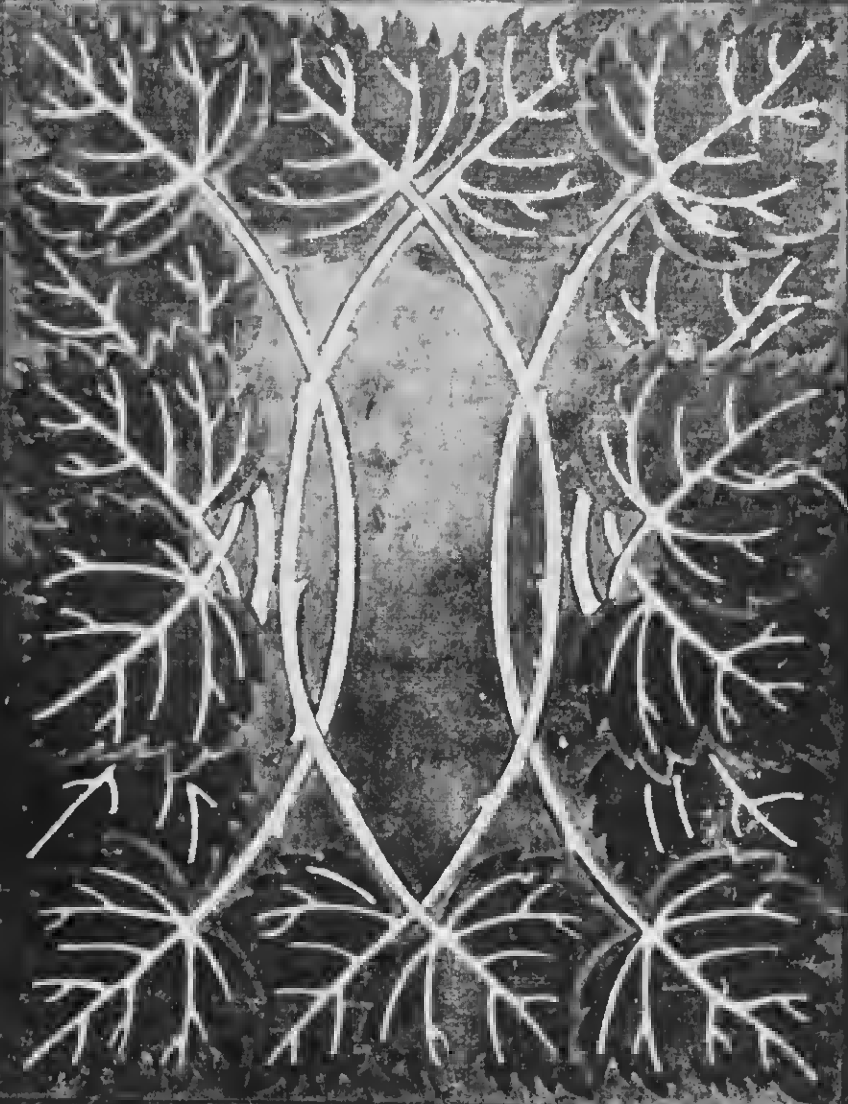

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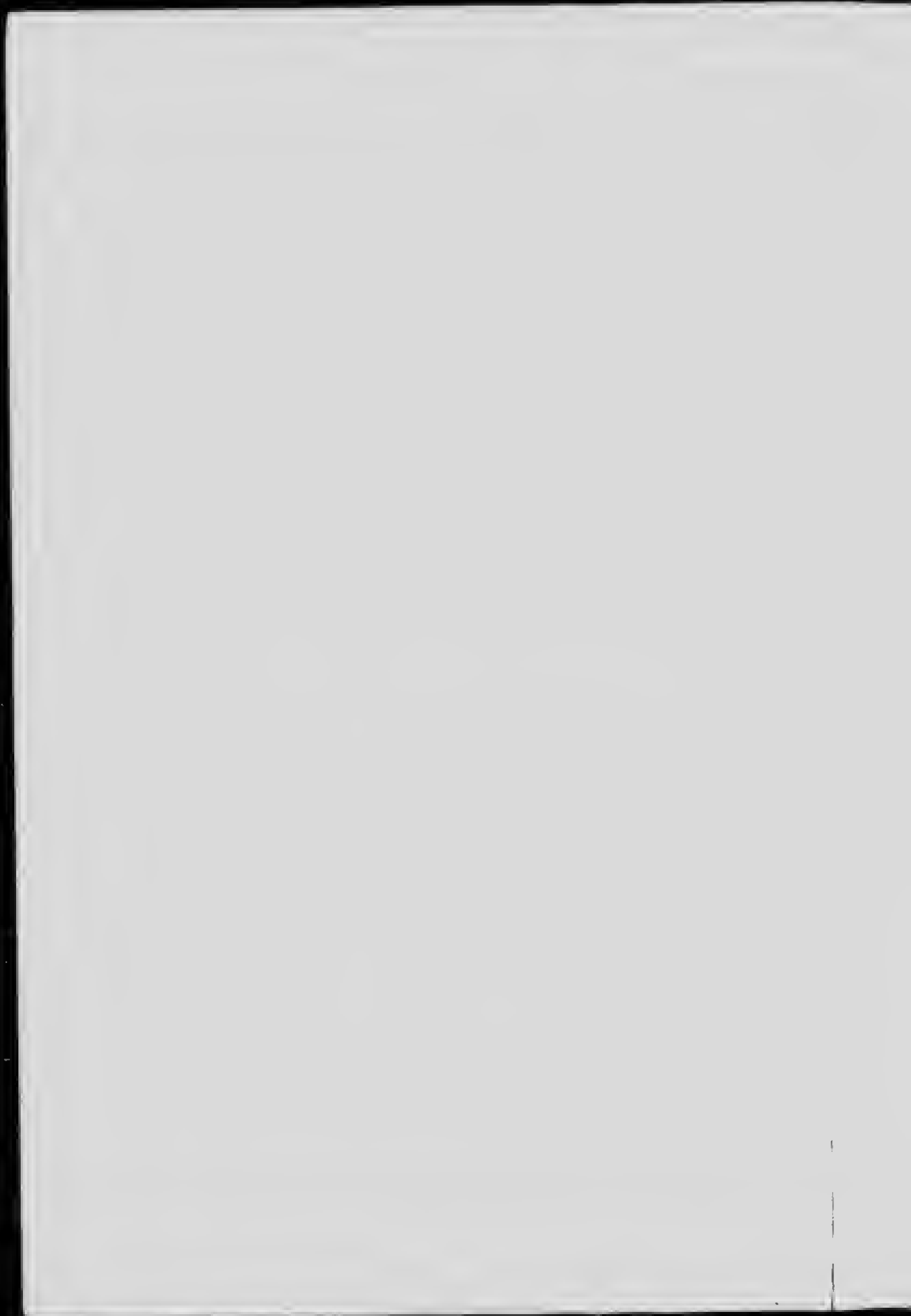

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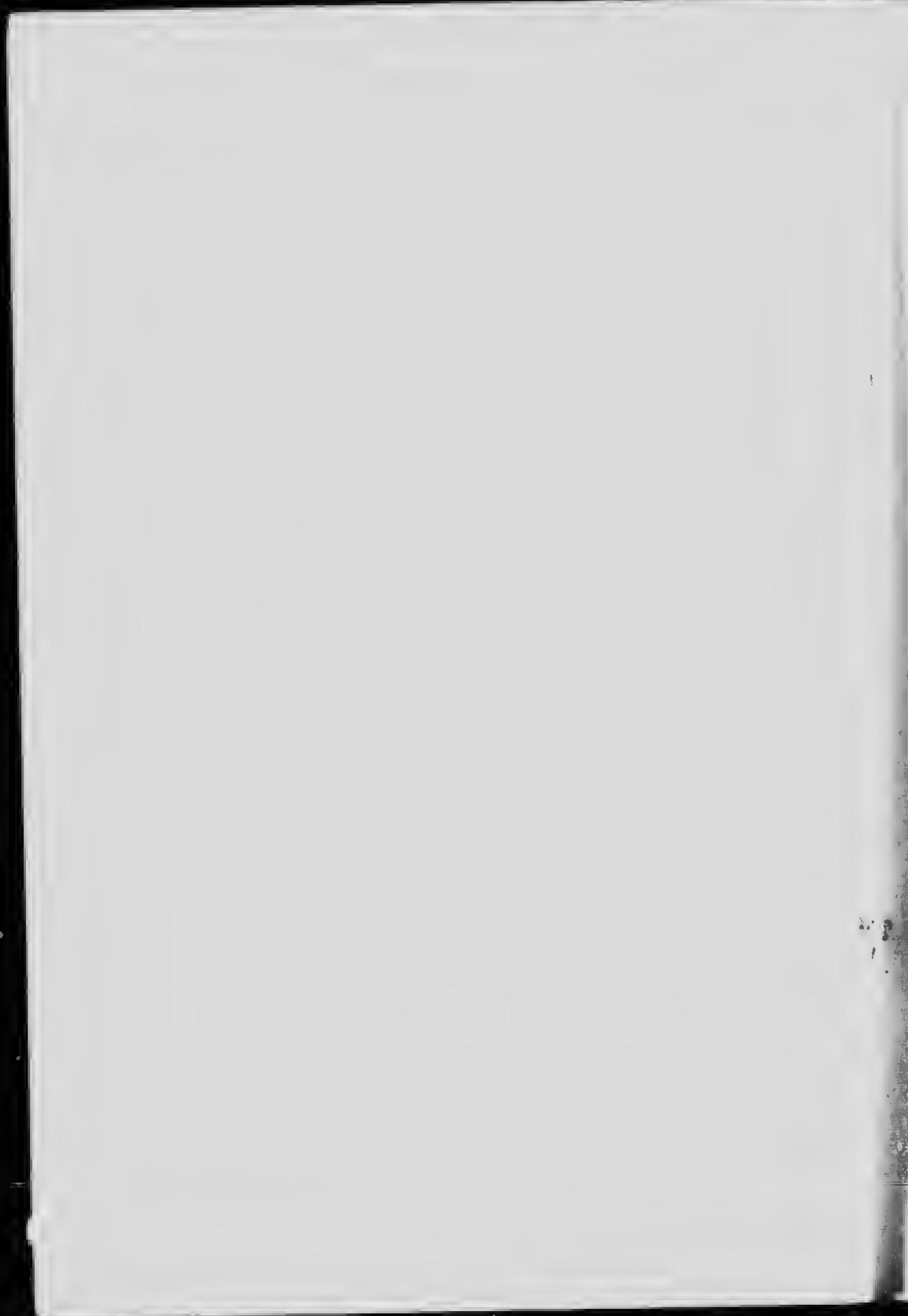

QUICKENED

BY

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS AND CREEDS," "THE DOMINANT STRAIN,"
"BY THE GOOD SAINTE ANNE," ETC.

TORONTO
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TO

Doctor John Frederick Barnett

QUICKENED

CHAPTER ONE

WITH a step which betrayed his nervous impatience, he turned away from the open window of the ticket office and threaded his path across the crowded floor to the dark-eyed priest who stood in the midst of a jabbering, excited throng. The jabbering ceased suddenly, and the crowd parted before the masterful ring of the voice in their ears.

"Father Dufresne?"

"Yes."

"I wired you for a section. You have it?"

Father Dufresne's dark eyes lifted for an instant, then dropped again to the card and pencil in his lean, dark hands.

"What name?"

There was a moment's pause while he seemed studying the thin, boyish figure beneath the clerical coat. Then his reply was as brief as the question had been.

"Alstrom."

"You wrote for a berth?"

"I wired for a section."

"From?"

"New York."

The priest made swift sorting of his handful of papers.

"I remember now," he said, as he checked off a name and then a number. "You wired, this morning. It was a little late; but one of our families had given up, at the last moment."

"And you have given me their section?" Alstrom's tone grew eager.

"A lower berth," the priest corrected him. "Here is the check. Car *Algoma*, Lower Eight."

"I wished a section," Alstrom remonstrated.

"Impossible."

"Why? You said a family. Surely you weren't expecting to stuff a whole family into one berth," Alstrom urged irritably, with sudden forebodings as to what his upper berth was destined to contain.

A quaint little smile wavered in the cheeks of the priest, then came forward to curve the corners of his thin lips. Slight as it was, it held the very essence of mirth.

"There were seven of them," he said calmly; "so they had engaged a whole section."

"Seven! A section! They'd best have had the entire car," Alstrom returned shortly. "Then why can't I have the whole?"

The recording pencil swept around a wide arc, pointing to the throng which was increasing with every tick of the moon-faced clock upon the upper wall.

"We have many pilgrims; many of them are old women and feeble, and they need the berths. We have but six sleepers in all."

"But I can pay," Alstrom urged.

There was an indefinable hardening of the ascetic face, a sudden flash of scorn in the dark eyes.

"Pardon me, Mr. Alstrom," the priest said, with a

courteous inflection which scantily veiled the hostile note; "this is a pilgrimage train; it has not the exact methods of a limited express. You have your check? Two dollars. The upper berth is already taken. You will find the train outside." And Thorne Alstrom suddenly discovered that he was standing quite away from the jostling, jabbering throng which once more surrounded Father Dufresne.

More times than he could count, Thorne Alstrom had looked out at the Albany station from the sacred privacy of his sleeper on the Chicago limited. He thought he had learned its every phase of fluctuating travel. To-night, he discovered his mistake. From end to end, the great waiting-room was crammed with eager children, fidgety women and here and there a passive, pale old man. Knots of younger men gathered in doorways, or squeezed their way through the crowd in search of missing acquaintances. As a rule, save for an occasional invalid and a cripple or two, people stood upright, as if the coming journey would lose somewhat of its zest, if they allowed themselves the comparative comfort of dropping down upon the wooden seats whose curves forced one, whether or no, to lounge at ease. They stood at attention, a nervous attention punctuated with the frequent glances clockward which betray the unaccustomed traveller. Beside them on the seats was heaped a strange assortment of luggage: boxes of pasteboard and wood and tin, oval bundles covered with newspaper and zoned with many threads of thin white string, dark gray cloth extension boxes and an occasional string-bag crowded with crumpled bundles of every size and shape. And from box and bundle and string-bag alike, there protruded

the gaping necks of empty bottles, a mystifying sight to Alstrom. He had yet to learn that the annual pilgrimage of the faithful to Sainte Anne de Beaupré included the bringing back to those who had remained at home these same bottles filled at the miraculous spring beside the shrine.

With all its excitement, it was an orderly sort of crowd, as befitted the Sunday evening and the holy nature of its errand. Here and there, the shrill French clamour burst out above the general murmur; but it stilled itself as suddenly as it arose, and its cause was eagerness alone. To Alstrom, standing there in his well-bred isolation, it seemed that no word of English fell upon his ears. The patois about him sounded unfamiliar, too, bearing no hint of kinship with the tongue he had loved well during one student year in Paris. This was harsher and more strident; its dentals were blurred by a sibilant which yet had no place in the written word. Now and then, listening intently, he made out a phrase; but never an entire sentence.

His gray eyes clouded a little and his shoulders drooped, as he glanced up and down the room. What place had his well-groomed figure in this eager, alert crowd, alternately shabby and shabby-genteel, with its three-cornered shawls and its cheap "tailored" frocks, its shiny black coats and its ready-made white ties, a crowd where everybody seemed to know or to know about every other body, where the greetings were conveyed by jogging elbows and lifted brows of mock surprise in place of the more conventional signs to which he had been accustomed. He was not accustomed to their ways, and he stood out among them, disregarded and alone. He took a long breath which

was half a sigh. Then he straightened his wide shoulders, took up his suitcase and started for the door, uncertain whether the loneliness or the stifling air of the room were accountable for the depression that held him in its grasp. Whatever the cause, it was a relief to find himself outside, beneath the starry, moonless sky. The evening breeze struck sharply against his face, as he walked up the platform beside the long, dark line of cars in search of his own place in Lower Eight, *Algoma.*

The human tide about him was already setting towards the train, for the moon-faced clock on the upper wall showed that the hour of starting was at hand. Uniformed men stood in the doorways, calling that the train was ready on the first track; other uniformed men sauntered idly across the platform, or ran beside the cars, swinging their lanterns in mystic, meaning circles, then bringing them down with a swift, sure sweep while they awaited the return message from other lanterns a good half train-length away. And down across the platform swept the crowd, blindly jostling the uniforms themselves in their haste to board the cars before the signal came for the train to move away. They jostled Alstrom, too, as he sauntered along beside the line of Pullmans, and he drew himself sharply from the contact, only to find himself in the path of the priest who was balancing the child on his shoulder with the shapeless paper budget in the other hand. At Alstrom's swift apology, he looked up.

"That's all right. Don't mind. Oh, Mr. Alstrom? This next car is yours, the *Algoma.*" And he hurried on towards the coaches in the rear of the train, leaving

Alstrom to marvel at such a memory for name and face.

The priest overtook him once more, as he stood halting irresolutely in the vestibule of the crowded sleeper, staring blankly at a motley assembly such as one rarely finds within the plush-caparisoned gorgeousness of a Pullman. Many a devout French Canadian Catholic had been hoarding his earnings for weeks and months so that his wife and child might journey back to his own people and to the shrine of his people's patron saint. They had left Canada in third-class cars; it was essential that they should return in first-class luxury. Else, how impress the old people on the farm at home? Besides, it was for them all the one journey of that and of many years. It mattered little that they would have passed the night with far more comfort in one of the airy cars where conventions were wholly lacking. Pride demanded that they stow themselves away, three deep, in the shelves along the wall, shelves so narrow and so shut in with curtains that they were forced to stand and wait for the porter's instructions how to place themselves inside. And, meanwhile, scraps of argument and admonition floated out to Alstrom's ears, as he stood beside the open door, wondering if it were worth his while to force his way into the crowded car. Strange to say, of the advisability of his being on that train, that scorching night of late July, he felt no doubts at all.

"Mr. Alstrom?" By this time, he had learned to recognize the voice. "This is our car; but it doesn't look as if there were too much room. There are five of us in the stateroom. Yours is Eight; that should be just beyond the woman with the two boys."

Alstrom nodded his thanks, as he glanced beyond the two youngsters, naïvely undressing in the aisle, to the comparatively open space beyond them, where one man sat alone. Then, as the buxom mother slowly drew out her hat-pins and turned to lay aside her hat, Alstrom stepped back outside the door.

"Father Dufresne," his voice sharpened a little; "can't you give me another car?"

The priest's face showed his surprise.

"But why? They are all alike."

"Yes, but —" Then Alstrom shut his lips tightly. With a preliminary throb and quiver, the great train moved slowly out of the station, and, at the same instant, the man arose from the half-empty section and came strolling down the car to Alstrom's side.

"Are you the man for Lower Eight?" he asked, with a careless ease which, somehow, failed to give the assurance of breeding. "The rest of the car is full, and Father Dufresne told me I was to have a man below. Great pilgrimage; isn't it? They say we've fourteen hundred souls on board, and, from the looks, I'd count on twice as many bodies. There's room for your suitcase there on top of mine."

"Thanks," Alstrom made brief reply. "Yes, it's a large pilgrimage. I was just asking Father Dufresne —"

"If he couldn't put you in a less crowded car." The other man laughed shortly. "I heard you. That was the reason I came out to speak to you, to save your making a big mistake. This is the priests' car, five of them in the stateroom, and the pick of the crowd. From all I've heard of these pilgrimages — Ever been up on one of them before?" he broke off suddenly, with

a shrewd, steady glance at the face before him, as if to determine whether or not Alstrom shared his own too obvious Protestantism.

Alstrom shook his head. Much taller than his sturdy companion, he carried his slim shoulders with a curious mingling of the dignity inherited from unsullied generations and of a shyness which bordered upon self-distrust. His face was white and rather gaunt, with flexible lips and dark gray eyes, and his head was crowned with a mass of waving hair of burnished gold which, once his hat was removed, gleamed in the lights like shining metal. For one moment, he rested his eyes full upon his chance comrade. Then negligently he turned to glance out of the window. The eyes of the other never left his face. Instead, they seemed to be making a careful study of its every feature: of the curious dissonance of the eyes and hair, of the deep-graven lines about the mobile lips and between the yellow brows, of a hint of weakness in the modelling of the chin, a hint which swiftly vanished when the lips shut to a closer line. Then he dropped back in his seat and turned to face the window.

"You'll find it interesting, if you've not been up before. It's my first trip. I've heard of it for years; but I never had the chance to come till now. I suppose I was lucky to get a berth. I only decided to come, at half-past ten, this morning, when I was in New York."

For a swift instant, the eyes of the two men met by way of the window, converted to a mirror by the blackness of the night outside. Then Alstrom assented coldly, —

"You were fortunate indeed."

There was a snub in the level courtesy of the tone. However, it seemed wholly wasted.

"Yes. So Father Dufresne tells me. I suppose you also are giving thanks for the miracle, as he informed me that you came in on that same deal."

The words were assertive; but the tone was full of question. Alstrom ignored the question utterly, ignored the questioner. His twenty-seven years, spent wholly among men of his own class, had been poor preparation for meeting the advances of chance acquaintances such as this. Neither had they taught him how galling it is to a man, sure of his own inferior breeding, to be ignored. The man's eyes narrowed and his lips shut tight and hard together, as, leaning back in his seat, he once more fell to watching Alstrom by way of the mirror-like window at his side.

And Alstrom, in his turn, was watching the man intently, although, lounging negligently in his seat, he kept his eyes apparently fixed upon the scene outside the car; upon the lighted buildings beside the track, buildings whose every window was filled with heads and waving hands and fluttering kerchiefs, gathered there to bid adieu to the annual pilgrimage just starting to the northern shrine; upon the open streets that crossed the track, streets barred on either hand by a dense human line, met there to wave an envious greeting to the train which thundered past them, bearing the thousands of the faithful to the patron saint of healing. Some laughed and waved their hats in careless jollity; some, touched by the throbbing pulse of religious feeling, brushed away their tears; but some, and they were the most earnest ones of all, stood silent, motionless, with straining eyes and parted lips, gazing

after the disappearing lights, for somewhere within that snaky length of train was the invalid mother, the crippled son, whose healing was staked upon that one journey northward.

And, in all that snaky length of train, winding away between the dingy buildings and across the level streets, there were but two men for whom no friend was gathered in that crowd, to send a farewell blessing. Those two men, Protestants alike and strangers, were Thorne Alstrom and his neighbour opposite.

The train slid into the open country and, as if aware that the dark landscape could no longer hold his attention, Alstrom turned from the window and slowly drew off his gloves. As he did so, he raised his eyes to see the eyes of his neighbour fix themselves steadily upon his wrists. The next instant, the man leaned forward, an insolent familiarity in voice and manner, as he spoke.

"Pardon me; but those are most unusual buttons you have in your cuffs. I have never seen but one pair like them," he observed. Then, an instant after, — "I imagine such a crowd as this would hardly take to the smoking-room," he added. "It is probably empty. Come and have a cigar."

And Alstrom rose and followed him, albeit with a face that whitened and took on an expression of intensest loathing.

CHAPTER TWO

Daignez, Sainte Anne, en un si beau jour,
De vos enfants agréer l'amour!

THE single voices were strident, harsh, untrained and in imperfect accord; yet the combined volume of sound swelled to a thrilling harmony, rising and falling along the simplest, most unforgetable theme known to the western world. The individual was lost in the multitude, and the multitude was pouring forth its shrill, sweet prayer, a prayer so compelling in its fervour that it gathers into its tide of feeling even the dumb man and the agnostic, the prayer of the pilgrim newly arrived at the shrine of the Good Sainte Anne.

De vos enfants agréer l'amour!

The last long note died away, and once more the single voice took up the refrain, a voice old and thin, but of a haunting, piercing sweetness, —

Ah! soyez prospice, Sainte Anne, à nos vieux
Gardez nous du vice, rendez nous pieux.

It was the same theme, but staccato now and full of rhythm. It died away in its turn, to be once again followed by the slower response which rose from hundreds upon hundreds of voices, —

Daignez, Sainte Anne, en un si beau jour,
De vos enfants agréer l'amour!

It was the first of August, but chilly with the night air of the North; yet no mere evening chill was responsible for the shiver which swept over Thorne Alstrom at each repetition of the theme. Fifty feet away, his travelling companion leaned against a pillar and bit reflectively at the nail on his right hand thumb, watching Alstrom, the while, with furtive eyes. Alstrom, however, for the moment, was quite oblivious of the man who, for four and twenty hours, had been making his life a nightmare from which there was no escaping. Now the nightmare had fallen from him. With eyes alight and with his hands shut hard together behind his back, he was edging slowly forward, a step at a time, towards the side of the path of the procession which swung slowly along beneath the moonless, starlit sky.

At his right, beneath the twin towers which flank the central statue of the saint, the organ within the basilica was still throbbing with the same theme that cut the air outside. At his left was a wide, open square, high-walled, shrine-bordered and dotted with beds of brilliant flowers clustering about the feet of marble saints. Around three sides of the square crept the long procession. At its head, his blue eyes lifted and his yellow hair shining in the light of the great candles borne on his either hand, at the head of the procession marched the young crucifer, and behind him, carried on the shoulders of stalwart men, came the rose-arched shrine, girt about with flaring candles and followed by many priests. Behind the priests came the men of the choir, leading the pilgrim train which advanced with slow and rhythmic tread, singing as it came, men first,

women after. And every pilgrim bore, lifted in his right hand, a lighted yellow taper. And, as the procession wound along, the night air was throbbing with the song of hundreds of prayerful voices; and hundreds of twinkling, fluttering lights shone down upon hundreds of earnest faces, shone upward to join the light of the stars, dropping softly down from the sky above.

And ever, apart from the procession, alone in the midst of the open square, one single voice took up the answering refrain, one single figure moved swiftly to and fro, instinct with vitality and power. And, in that single figure, his white head proudly erect, his black soutane brushing the crisp, damp grass at his feet, his delicate hands now beckoning on the laggards, now beating out the rhythm of the theme, in that one slight, nervous figure lay the very life and soul of that one procession and of many more.

But the line was advancing. Already the crucifer was at Alstrom's side; Alstrom's eyes were resting on the handsome, high-bred boyish face; Alstrom's ears were half-deafened by the sonorous voices of the choir. Then came the pilgrims in their turn. He found it hard to identify these eager men and women, singing as if their very lives depended on it, with the languid, travel-tired folk whom he had seen, again and again that day, in his restless wanderings up and down the train. The day had been unbearably hot and dusty, the train crowded, the hours long, for it had not been until the dusk was falling that the boom of the Pilgrim Bell in the tower above his head had welcomed the cramped and weary throng that poured out from the fifty doors of the train. There had been scant interval for supper,

none at all for rest; yet here were these same people, alert, excited, singing away for dear life and for dearer hopes of the life to come. He looked after the last of them enviously, his spine still tingling with the theme which seemed to fill the air around him. If a religion could do that for a man —

Alstrom faced about abruptly, as the rear ranks of the procession vanished inside the lighted church, and the huge organ thundered forth the final refrain. He beckoned to his former companion, imperiously, yet with a certain deference withal.

"Come," he said; "shall we hunt lodgings; or shall we see it out inside?"

The other man laughed shortly, as seemed to be his habit.

"Let's see it out to the end," he advised. "It's a good deal of a spectacle, you know. Besides, it would be absurd to go trudging off to bed, when we've taken a six-hundred-mile journey for the simple sake of seeing what a pilgrim train is like." And he stood aside for Alstrom to precede him into the lighted church.

Ten o'clock the next morning found Alstrom once more in the basilica parvise, watching another procession creeping about the open square, listening again to their processional hymn which by now seemed to him as familiar as if, for years, it had been a part of his daily experience. The tide of pilgrims is always at its highest, during the first days of August, and already two fresh trains had arrived, each one carrying its hundreds of the faithful. One pilgrimage was just entering the church for its sermon; the other was in procession, its simple habitants offering strange contrast to the trig finery of the more worldly pilgrims

from the States who, scattering to their private devotions, yet loitered for a moment in the court to watch their more primitive fellow worshipers at the one common shrine.

Under the blazing August sun, the scene lost little of its impressiveness. True, the twinkling tapers were lacking; the great candles grouped about the shrine faded before the morning sun and flickered in the morning breeze. But the clearer light of the new day brought out to Thorne Alstrom certain points that had escaped his notice, the night before: the look of exaltation upon even the most apathetic of the faces in the line, the pitiful shabbiness of many of the pilgrims, a shabbiness eloquent of the long months of self-denial endured to make the journey even possible. And then Thorne Alstrom's eyes clouded. At the very end of the line of men, bringing up the rear with tottering, uncertain steps, there came a crippled man and a foolish, epileptic boy.

Impulsively he turned about, as a word or two of English met his ear, the first English he had heard inside the court, that morning.

"I understand so little of the French," he said apologetically. "Tell me, please, is this the time when the miracles are done?"

The girl at his elbow flushed a little, as she glanced up with suspicion in her dark eyes. Then, as she saw his lifted hat and met his direct glance, she cast aside her suspicion. After all, it was only another tourist, another like all the rest, seeking an hour's new sensation before their ancient and sacred shrine.

"It is impossible to predict the hour when the miracles will be done," she replied, in slow and formal English.

"Of course," Alstrom assented swiftly. "I know; but is there not some especial point in the pilgrimage, when — I was never here before, you know; it all is so strange."

Certainly a tourist, the girl told herself. There was no especial need for him to advertise the fact. And a bit more baldly insistent than the most of his tribe. Her glance wandered impatiently towards the score of gay and prosperous Americans crossing the gravel from the station gate, and her arching brows straightened into a sudden frown. Then she turned again to the procession, now almost at her side, and Alstrom, watching, was dazzled by the swift lighting of her face, as her dark eyes met the blue eyes of the young crucifer he had seen the night before. Then the blue eyes lifted again to the shining cross above, but the smile around the boyish lips was wholly human, wholly loving.

"What a beautiful boy face!" Alstrom spoke almost involuntarily, as if the words were forced from him.

Instantly the girl turned to face him, her resentment at the tourist tribe swept away by her pride.

"Monsieur finds him so?" she queried. "He is my brother, and postulant at the shrine."

Alstrom evaded the fact which conveyed so little to his Protestant mind.

"How proud of him you must be!" he said, with the swift, simple heartiness which had always been his chiefest charm.

Denise Allard was French, and well-bred. She therefore saw no need to snub this stranger with whom she had drifted into the exchange of a random phrase or two. She answered him with perfect ease.

"I am. I have three brothers; but this, the youngest, is also my favourite. Last night was the first time he has led a procession, and he wished me to be present. It is an event for us all, you see. I am glad that you like him. I find him very noble; but I am his sister, and prejudiced."

As she ended her phrase, spoken still in precise and formal English, a gay little smile creased the corners of her lips and lighted her eyes. Alstrom, still watching, was once more dazzled. At first glance, he had set her down as a pretty young girl. A second look assured him that her beauty was of no common order. Her dark, high-bred little face was regular in feature, mobile, sympathetic, her figure was dainty, her poses unconscious and full of grace. The feathers in her hat came scarcely to his shoulder, yet, for some inscrutable cause, it seemed to him that their eyes were meeting on a level. All in all, Denise Allard was strangely unlike his preconceived notions of the French Canadians. Moreover, Thorne Alstrom was human enough to prefer the reality to the notions. Meanwhile —

"Is Monsieur Catholic, perhaps?" she was asking, with a carelessness which removed all personality from the question.

Alstrom shook his head.

"Not — " He left the word hanging in suspension. Smiling, she capped his phrase for him.

"Not yet. But it will come in time. Then you are not here on a pilgrimage?"

Alstrom flushed.

"I came with the Albany pilgrimage," he explained. She nodded.

"Yes. It was the one for which Pierre was the cross-

bearer. I was here. There were many of you. And this morning? Have you visited all the holy places here?"

"I am not sure. The fact is, I don't know just what I ought to see."

The girl flushed at his careless words, and for a moment eyed him obliquely, with a swift recurrence of her former hostility. The same hostility rang hard in her voice, as she answered dryly, —

"There is no obligation. One sees as much or as little as one chooses."

Thorne Alstrom's hat was in his hand, and the yellowing sun struck sharply across his bent yellow head, as he made humble reply, —

"I beg your pardon. I honestly didn't mean to be rude; I only used the trite old tourist phrase. What I intended to say was that I have very little idea what there is in the place. I'm really very ignorant. I wish — "

Denise interrupted him. Once before, she had been disarmed by that note of simple boyishness in his voice. Now she responded to it again, although she kept her response strictly along the line of convention.

"There is much to see here, if one is truly interested. Pierre shall show it all to you; he will be at leisure soon. Shall we wait for him inside the church?"

"But isn't he busy? There is no reason I should bore him," Alstrom demurred, only to be met by a half-smiling rebuke.

"To show the shrine could never be a bore to Pierre," she reminded him. "His duty for the morning is nearly over; he was to meet me at eleven. Come."

With a slight smile of invitation cast backward over

her shoulder, she led the way after the last of the procession, up the low steps, out of the sunshine and into the dim, incense-laden gloom of the church. Just inside the door, she halted to make swift genuflection, then turned to the left and followed up one of the long line of chapels that border the nave on either hand. Behind her came Alstrom, his yellow head rising above the crowd; behind them both and unnoticed by either one came Alstrom's travelling companion of the day before.

A half-hour later, they came upon him once again. Pierre, now divested of his surplice and looking strangely boyish and fragile in his long black soutane, had joined them at the rail of the high altar. To Alstrom's mind, the off-hand ease of his greeting, his low, gay laugh had been wholly incongruous with his half-priestly costume, his solemn surroundings. It was plain that, as yet, the future priest had not wholly ousted the human boy. It was also plain to Denise that Pierre was attracted by the stranger; and Denise, though four years older, yet trusted Pierre's instincts implicitly. For that reason, and because she had been used, all her life, to the come and go of tourists, she allowed the talk to drift into easy friendliness, while, under her brother's lead, they loitered about the church, then crossed the narrow road and entered the Chapel of the Holy Stairs.

There, leaning on the rail above, watching the slow procession which, kneeling, bowing ever and anon to kiss the sacred relics buried in the steps, flowed up along the stairway, a human tide, silent, believing and devout, Alstrom once more forgot himself, forgot even the reasons which had brought him on this pilgrimage, forgot his companions, even, as he realized that he stood face to face with one of the mightiest religious

spectacles of all the modern world. It was not merely that a few hundred shabby men and women were toiling up a wooden stairway on their aching knees, an isolated fact before the curious eyes of a tourist population. Rather than that, it was a part of an unbroken procession which stretched backward, past the early Fathers, past the Christian era, back to the earliest forms of Pagan sacrifice, which was destined to stretch forward down the dim future of the ages so long as man should bow in homage before a power greater by far than he could ever hope to be. And his own place in the procession? Had he always held himself fully abreast of the tide?

He straightened his broad shoulders and lifted his head. Then, of a sudden, his shoulders shrank together and his head drooped once more, while it seemed to him that the tide was rushing past him and leaving him, a useless bit of driftwood, cast up upon the shore. Above the bright face of Pierre, lifted to his in question, he had caught a glimpse of another face, a face which already he had learned to dread. Ten feet away and leaning against the chapel wall, his teeth shut thoughtfully upon his right thumb nail, stood his comrade of the day before.

Thorne Alstrom drew a long, slow breath and rested his head upon his hand. Beneath his eyes was still the moving human tide, flowing ever upward and yet up; in his ears was the murmur of many prayers. Nevertheless, for the sounds and sights of the moment, ears were deaf and eyes were blind. Instead, he saw another face looking into his above the open pages of a morning paper, bought from a boy outside the car; he heard a voice, cold, cutting, saying tersely, —

"And he got away, it seems, after all."

Heard his own voice assenting, with expressionless, inert calm, —

"Yes, he got away."

CHAPTER THREE

THERE was a stir in social Quebec, when it was announced that Tony Mansfield, the carefree, the irresponsible, was going in for politics. The stir became a veritable sensation when the announcement followed that Tony, Tony who, so far as was known, had never cast a vote in his life, was about to desert the faith of his fathers and join the ranks of the Liberals.

" Just for all the world like a blasted Frenchman ! " somebody growled over his cigar in the smoking-room of the Garrison Club, that night.

" Who's that ? Mansfield ? "

The first man bent forward to throw the end of his cigar into the open fire. When it had safely lodged among the coals, he answered, —

" Yes, Mansfield. What's the matter with the man, anyway ? "

" Says he is developing a conscience," a voice suggested from across the room.

But the original speaker had once more settled back into a corner of his chair, and now he spoke with half-closed eyes and languid tone.

" Liver, more likely ; but I foresee his finish."

Tony, meanwhile, lounging heels uppermost on the veranda of the Mansfield cottage at the Island, phrased it otherwise.

"Confound it all, Tony, you always were a fearful duffer about politics," one of his friends had said bluntly. "What do you think you're going to do in the game?"

"Stand round in a corner and whoop for the winning man," Tony made bland answer.

"Oh, if that's all. But what's the use?"

"A fellow must do something," Tony urged dispassionately.

"Possibly. Still, with all your hobby horses, you ought to be fairly well occupied in your leisure moments."

Tony bent forward, his heels still on the rail, to knock his ash to the lawn below. For an instant, the problem of his equilibrium occupied his whole attention. When once more he was stretched out at his ease, —

"Yes, that's the whole bore of it," he said, with mock plaintiveness.

"What is? Occupation?"

"No. Such an infernal amount of leisure. When I was young, I liked it. Now I am old, it palls on me and turns to chaff on my tongue. On my honour, Byng, I wish now and then I was one of those chaps in a bank, with a stool and a pen over their ears and regular hours. They get more fun out of a week-end at Lorette than I could from a trip to the Zambezi."

Byng nodded.

"That's likely. You always were a luxurious chap," he interpolated.

Tony frowned.

"Don't be flippant, Byng. I really am in earnest. I want occupation. The pater left us too much money to make it decent for me to go into business. I hadn't

brains enough for a profession. Besides, there's no opening here, and I'm tied here, hand and foot, as long as the mater and Louisa see fit to abide in the city of their forefathers. I can't play golf, all day, nor in the winter, and I must have a fad of some sort. Then why not politics?"

"No reason. Still, on the other hand, why politics?"

Tony's smile was still lazy; but his eyes were keen, as he answered, —

"Because I've a sneaking desire to see whether it is possible to play the game with a pair of clean hands."

"Possible; but not probable. Besides, if you must go into the thing, why not do it decently and according to the creed of your ancestors?"

Tony lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Oh, so that's it," he observed tranquilly at length. "It's the Liberal shoe that pinches; is it?"

"It's rather off the Mansfield line."

"So am I, for the matter of that. My maternal grandpapa was an out and out Liberal, and they always did say I favoured the old gentleman. The mater says it's in the line of the nose. Myself, I suspect it's in the line of his opinions."

Byng held a match to his cigarette, then spoke with some impatience.

"Confound it, Tony; do stop chaffing, if you can. Is it a fact that you really are going to stand for the Lorette Liberals, next time?"

Tony's drawl was unruffled, as he made reply.

"Yes; that's what they say. I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to understudy Allard, you know."

"Allard? But he is working for Ottawa and a seat there. He's clever, Tony, deuced clever; but he is

bound to overreach himself. I can't make him out at all. What's the keynote of his policy, I wonder."

"His policy and mine," Tony corrected him gravely.

"And yours, if you must have it so. What are you driving at?"

Tony rose and stretched himself.

"It wouldn't sound Parliamentary to say 'Let the Johnnies have fair play'; but I fancy that's what it really amounts to. The worst of it is, we're driving tandem, not a span, and the leader is bound to break away and upset the cart, before the drive is done. There come the girls at last. Shall we walk down to the landing and see who's on the boat?"

And Byng also rose and cast away his cigarette, as Louisa Mansfield, followed by Gertrude Hardwicke, came around the corner of the house.

The Hardwickes were Americans, three of them. Mr. Hardwicke was a middle-aged old man of one idea. That idea was his business. He was manager of a large pulp company whose plant was near enough Quebec to allow him to go up to town for Sundays. To all appearances, he was quite oblivious of any ties outside his office walls, and it was only the insistence of his wife and daughter that brought him in from the wilderness once a week, in order that his wardrobe might be inspected and his absent mind once more focussed, for at least one day in seven, upon the fact that he had a family within such easy reach. Even during these brief periods of separation from his desk, Mr. Hardwicke was wont to console himself with a pocket full of papers and accounts which he had an odd trick of pulling forth and scanning dubiously, the while he sat at his meals. To Gertrude and her mother, the habit

was so old as to have become entirely a matter of course. Guests, however, found it disconcerting, and accordingly the Hardwickes, whose innate hospitality refused to be suppressed by the exigencies of a boarding-house table, little by little abandoned the idea of entertaining, when the head of the house was with them.

Mrs. Hardwicke was a shade better off than her husband, for she was mistress of three separate ideas: Gertrude's health, bridge, and the knitting of woollen shawls. Nobody ever knew what became of the shawls, once they were knitted; but neither did anybody ever know why it was that Mrs. Hardwicke saw fit to worry about Gertrude. The girl was as sound as a nut, hard-muscled, brown and active as a girl could be. She could walk her ten miles in rain or sun, and come in as fresh as at the start. She could manage her horse, her oar, her golf clubs and her foils with the sturdy enjoyment of a half-grown boy; she could dance half the night and appear, unruffled and serene, at early breakfast, next morning. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hardwicke spent her days pottering about after Gertrude with goloshes, and a scarf for her wilful, crisp brown hair, with pitiful beseechings to go away to rest.

And Gertrude had learned to laugh, and kiss her mother and take the superfluous goloshes, only to stow them away, next minute, into some safe corner. The girl, young as she was, was quick to realize the secret of it all. Long years before, there had been a brother, big, bonny, and brave. He had lived just long enough to teach his little sister " to ride, to row, to swim, to tell the truth and fight the devil." Then, one summer day, there had been a sudden gale across a mountain lake. After that, Gertrude was left alone, her father more

absorbed in business and her mother more futile than ever. But, looking back upon the long night which had followed that summer day, Gertrude Hardwicke could never find it in her heart to smile at even her mother's worst futilities. Neither, even in order to explain their cause, could she bring herself to discuss them with her friends.

For two years now, Gertrude Hardwicke and Louisa Mansfield had been close friends. Accordingly, it had been quite a matter of course that the Mansfields, going to their Island cottage, should ask the Hardwickes, mother and daughter, to spend some weeks with them. A boarding-house in a tourist-crammed city is an impossible sort of residence at best; the Hardwickes' plan to spend the summer in the White Mountains had been broken up, and it had been with unfeigned joy that Gertrude had settled herself and her belongings in an upper room of the spacious cottage looking up the wide blue river.

It must be confessed, however, that the combined attitude of the two mothers was not of unfeigned joy. In both families, the daughters reigned supreme and made the plans, for, in both families, the mothers were equally invertebrate, although both, viewed in the light of chaperons, were equally unexceptionable. There the likeness ended, however. Mrs. Hardwicke cultivated bridge and fuzzy woollen shawls. Mrs. Mansfield collected marmalade and wrote monographs about missions. Sometimes, when her collection threatened to swamp her, she made up boxes of outlawed jams and marmalades and shipped them off to the missionaries, doubtless arguing that the way to a heathen's conversion lay in indulging his sweet tooth. The loss

of the jam pots fretted her, however, and, to make good the loss, she retrenched by way of her shoes. Like every other woman, however rich, Mrs. Mansfield owned her pet extravagance and her pet economy. For the rest, she was sixty-five, fragile and dainty as a bit of rare old china, and her two children adored her absolutely. She returned their adoration generously and with good reason.

Had it not been that both mothers were ready to sacrifice most things for their daughters' happiness, the long mornings at the cottage would have worn perceptibly on both. Even as it was, talk languished and yawns abounded. It was a distinct relief to both when, the early luncheon over, they were free to shut themselves into their own rooms and drowse till tea-time, leaving the two girls to pass the time as they might choose. For the most part, they chose to spend it out of doors, and Tony, as a rule, was with them. Four years older than his sister, he was yet far less settled than she, a wholly irresponsible being, totally blind to the more serious side of things, unselfish and of an unfailing good temper which had made him the social favourite that he was.

" Byng has been doing a monologue in his usual graceful style," he explained to Gertrude Hardwicke, as he swung into step at her side and faced towards the little pier at the far end of the shady road.

" About what ? "

" About my opening career." Tony's laugh frightened a bird from the fence beside them.

" What's the trouble with the career ? " Gertrude asked abruptly.

" Apparently the trouble is with me," Tony assured

her, with nonchalant cheeriness. "He appears to think I'm not suited to the halls of government."

"What nonsense!" The girl spoke with some asperity.

"Of course it's nonsense, arrant nonsense. I'm fitted to grace any profession. But honestly, Miss Hardwicke — "

"Honestly?" The brown eyes, almost on a level with his own, met his eyes squarely.

"Honestly, I can't see why people are kicking up such a row about the thing," Tony urged, with a sudden approach to something as near gravity as he ever came. "It's not as if I were an idiot, or criminal. My people, as a rule, haven't gone in for politics; but I can't see that that is any reason why I shouldn't do so. A chap gets tired of doing nothing."

"Moreover," Gertrude assented in Tony's own phrase; "a chap gets tired of being in a country and of washing his hands of all responsibility regarding its management."

Tony's answering smile was rather grim.

"They say it's only those of us who are out of it who dare wash our hands. The fellows who are in it wouldn't care to undertake so big a job." Suddenly, without breaking their long, swinging stride, he turned about and faced her. "Anyway, you've got to see me through it and stand my friend," he told her. "It was you, more than anyone else, who put me up to it."

"Me? I?" Both tone and eyes showed the girl's amazement at this responsibility so unexpectedly thrust upon her.

"Yes, you," Tony iterated firmly. "We've talked it over, endless times. You've said, over and over

again, that you had no patience with a man that threw away his right to vote."

"Well, I haven't," she broke in.

"Exactly. And now they've got to vote for me. I've thought it over; now I mean to take a hand in the game. Whether I win or lose, you've got to remember it was you who first gave me the taste for the cards." He shut his lips stubbornly, after the final word.

"But, Mr. Mansfield — "

"There isn't any *but* about it. You said, one night last year — "

"But girls say all sorts of things," she urged defensively.

For one instant, Tony's eyes met her own eyes steadily; for that one instant and for the first time in their intercourse, Gertrude Hardwicke caught a glimpse of the manhood underlying the boyish irresponsibility. Then their eyes dropped apart again, as Tony answered, —

"Yes; but not girls of your sort, you know."

"Tony," his sister's voice broke in upon his words; "can't you and Gertrude hurry up? We keep treading on your heels, and Mr. Byng insists on quoting Omar in the intervals. Besides, I want to get down to the boat by the time she lands. Henri Allard told me Denise was coming down, to-night, and I want to see her before she gets away."

"Denise?" Byng's tone was full of surprise, for his knowledge of Louisa was exceedingly recent, in view of his life-long friendship for Louisa's brother. "You know her?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"No reason, only — I can't fancy you as tangent."

Louisa Mansfield laughed.

"What a rampant Tory you are! And on what a worn-out theme! We were at school together. Besides, Henri Allard is Tony's friend."

Byng shook his ponderous head.

"Tony always was a Radical," he said regretfully. "I expected better things of you. However, if you must have the boat, you must run." And he brought her, breathless, to the little pier, just as the steamer was casting off her first rope to the shore.

Side by side and leaving the two men to follow at their will, the three girls walked up the road together. Beside Gertrude Hardwicke's supple strength and Louisa's placid English beauty, Denise Allard looked like some tropical blossom, brilliant and tiny. Everything about her, costume, accent, manner, even the faint perfume that floated from her dress and hair, all these bespoke her nationality. Her dainty exuberance of mood and gesture betrayed her Gallic birth no less surely than did the occasional alien phrase which marked the purity of her English speech. Nevertheless, despite her gayety, —

"Why so pensive, Denise?" Louisa challenged her, after totally failing to rouse her to any apparant interest in the next day's plans.

"Am I pensive?" Denise laughed a little. "Perhaps it is because I was busy, thinking that the day of adventures is not already dead."

"You have had one?" Gertrude questioned, with alert curiosity.

"Yes. Call it a meeting, rather. But it was a strange chance that came to Pierre and me."

"Pierre was in it, too?"

"Yes." Denise nodded. "Else, it had not been one half so interesting."

"How you do spoil that boy, Denise!" Louisa admonished her. "To hear you talk about him, one would think he was the only brother that you have."

"No; but he is the dearest," Denise made candid answer. "François is too holy to be really intimate with me; and, as for Henri, he is so clever that sometimes I fear him."

Gertrude laughed.

"Does that imply that Pierre is neither holy nor clever, Mademoiselle Allard?" she queried, with a frankness born of the fact that two out of the three masculine Allards were strangers to her.

Now and then, Denise's sense of humour forsook her utterly. It invariably did so, when she was discussing her young brother.

"On the contrary," she answered gravely; "Pierre is both. It is only that he is so much more loyal and loving."

And, before Louisa had time to make energetic dissent, Gertrude Hardwicke judged it was time to change the subject.

"But the adventure?" she urged. "I am curious. You were at Sainte Anne, of course."

"No; at the Hôtel Dieu," Denise corrected her.

"What in the world were you doing in that chamber of horrors, child?" Louisa questioned bluntly.

"We went there, Pierre and I, to see the old carter whom we always have been accustomed to hire. He was thrown from his seat, last week, and broke his leg. Pierre came for the whole day in town, and, this afternoon, we went to see old Jacques."

"And found him, doubtless, having the time of his whole life, as Tony calls it."

"Yes. And we also found some one else, some one we never expected to see again. Did I ever tell you about Pierre's pilgrim?"

Gertrude looked up with sudden attention, for Denise's tone betrayed acute self-consciousness.

"No; surely not. That begins to sound interesting, Mademoiselle Allard, as if there were a story somewhere in the background. Who was he?"

"No story; only an American tourist we saw at Sainte Anne, six weeks ago. He spoke to us, and Pierre liked him and showed him the place. He seemed a strong man, but sad, as if he had some trouble resting on him; and so, as he was interested, I advised him to stay to make a novena."

"Was he Catholic?" Gertrude's tone showed that, to her, the gulf between the creeds yawned wide.

"No; but what matter?" Denise said simply. "He was a man in trouble. The Good Sainte Anne is not so narrow as to save her blessings for us Catholics alone. Besides, one can always change. Anyway, he did stay on. Pierre saw him once and yet again after that, and the liking between them grew. And then, all at once, he was seen no more. Pierre and I have spoken of him often, Pierre because he liked him, I because I shall always remember him for chancing to speak to me at one of Pierre's first processions."

"And you found him, to-day?" Louisa asked, as they halted at the angle of the road which marked the parting of their ways.

"Yes. As we were passing through one of the wards, we saw a nun we knew, bending over a bed. We

stopped to speak to her, and there in the bed, changed so I scarcely knew him, lay Pierre's pilgrim. The nun told us he had been there for more than six weeks, ill with the fever which has changed him so."

"And alone in this strange country." Gertrude shook her head. "That is forlorn."

"Not quite alone. The nun told us that he has one friend who has been there, each day, to see him."

"Then it might have been a little worse," Louisa commented, as she turned to wait for Tony and Byng who had hailed her from afar.

"Perhaps. Still, he must have suffered much, to be so changed." Denise spoke thoughtfully, her eyes fixed upon the distant city, citadel-crowned and wrapped in the gold and violet haze of sunset, a city whose northern slope was surmounted with the straggling gray outline of the Hôtel Dieu. "It was a sad, sad ending to his novena, and Pierre liked him well."

Behind the departing back of Denise, the eyes of the other two girls met, and they exchanged a smile.

"Pierre!" Gertrude echoed softly.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN one of the wards of the Hôtel Dieu overlooking the Saint Charles valley and the Beauport flats beyond, Thorne Alstrom lay still and plaited the top of the sheet between his long, thin fingers, while he reflected upon the strange chance which had once more brought Denise Allard within his line of vision. It was September now. The hills beyond the Saint Charles valley were beginning to flaunt themselves in their autumn colouring, and the Isle of Orleans lay, a dazzling patch of scarlet and gold, between the wide blue channels of the parted river. Six weeks had passed away since Denise Allard's gay little *Au revoir* had fallen on Thorne Alstrom's ears. More than once during that time, he had reflected upon the hint of falsehood hidden in those parting words. And now, all at once, they had fulfilled their promise. He had seen Denise again, Denise and Pierre. Moreover, after a six-weeks separation, he was ready to confess to himself that the first attraction had but strengthened.

During the past weeks, he had become so accustomed to the isolation of the foreign city that now he scarcely glanced up, when strange footfalls halted at his bedside. His ward was one of the main arteries of the building; the come and go was incessant: nuns and doctors, friends of the patients and tourists seeking new sen-

sations. This last class caused him no interest, but no little amusement. The conscientious boredom with which they noted all things, himself included, matched the guileless fashion in which they took no pains to conceal from nun and patient alike that they were considered parts of one huge show which took in all things, from Citadel to Sous-le-Cap. The amusement was keen; but in time it became monotonous, and Alstrom learned to turn his face to the wall at the first sound of an alien boot.

That day, however, he had been helpless. His own attendant nun, feeding him broth, had paused with uplifted spoon to speak to the two young people coming down the room. Alstrom, his mouth ajar for the delinquent spoon, had glanced up, to find something familiar in the slight blond boy halted beside his bed. The next instant, he was plucking madly at the napkin at his neck. The boy had stepped aside to show Denise Allard halted at his elbow.

The nun's knot held fast, and Alstrom said Saxon things to himself, as he tweaked in vain at his improvised bib, then buried himself, bib and all, beneath the sheet, away from Denise's dancing eyes. Changed and whitened by his illness, his eyes shone darkly from the hollows of his gaunt face and his hair against the snowy pillow showed little of the tawny gold that had glistened in the August sun. Under such conditions, Denise looked down at him, unrecognizing, indifferently at first, then with irrepressible mirth as she saw him tugging weakly at his bib. Pierre, however, had better memory.

"Who ever thought to find you here?" he exclaimed so suddenly that both the nun and Denise started.

"I lost you at Sainte Anne, after the second day, and I supposed you had gone back to the States. How came you here?"

A ghost of his old smile returned to Alstrom's face, as, abandoning his effort to conceal his bib, he stretched out one lean hand to greet the boy.

"It's good of you to remember me," he answered. "I — I came here to finish my novena." But his eyes, as he spoke, were not upon the boy. Instead, they rested on Denise and, weak as he was, there was mockery in their glance.

They had left the Holy Stairs, that day six weeks before, and come back into the basilica when Denise had made her half-laughing suggestion of the full novena. One by one, the last groups of pilgrims had come forward to kneel at the altar rail and kiss the sacred relic, then had dropped away until the huge place was left in silence and in shadow. Only the whispered prayers of the cripple at the foot of the miraculous statue broke the stillness; the dusk of the arches was cut only by an occasional bar of mote-flecked sunshine. One of these struck full upon the uplifted face of the patron saint; another lay across the great high altar where the purple and white lilies drooped their fragrant, fragile heads. And close before the altar rail the three stood loitering over their farewells, while a fourth stood watching them from the doorway of one of the chapels, far down the northern wall. And the three were so unlike: the slender boy in his priestly dress, the gay little society girl whose arm was linked in his, and, facing them, the tall young stranger, alternately the blithe and winning boy, and a man whose life seemed scarred by

sorrow and by a weakness appearing almost akin to fear.

"We must go now," Denise had said at last, as she held out her hand in frank farewell. "Do you return at once to the States, or shall you make your novena?"

"My — novena?" Alstrom had echoed a little blankly, for as yet the Catholic phrases sounded strange to his ear, and he had no foreseeing notion how soon they would become to him matters of almost daily thought.

There came a little note of hesitancy in the girl's careless tone.

"So many people do," she said, with a slight accent of apology. "It is far to come — at least, it seems so to us Canadians. We travel less than you Americans, you know. And Sainte Anne is a common place for one to stay for his novena."

Pierre rushed into the gap with a hearty directness which once more betrayed the normal boy beneath the priestly soutane.

"If you do, please look me up, Mr. Alstrom. I've enjoyed meeting you, and there are still a few things left to show about the old place." And, with a nod, they had gone away, leaving Alstrom alone before the lily-decked high altar, with Denise's blithe *Au revoir* still sounding in his ears.

"Why not?" his self-adopted comrade had made reply to Alstrom's suggestion of their remaining during a possible novena. "It's not a bad place to bury one's self in for a time; in fact, few places could be better."

And so it chanced that the Regina register, that night, still bore two names, Thorne Alstrom and George Wood. And so it also chanced that, on the next day

and the next, Alstrom had met again the blond-haired boy, Pierre. On the third day, Pierre had looked in vain for "our pilgrim" as Denise had dubbed the stranger. But the stranger, smitten down with fever, was lying in the ward of the Hôtel Dieu, with a calm-faced nun beside him to smooth out the blankets as fast as he kicked them aside.

And now, six weeks later, they had met again. Denise he found unchanged, though more attractive than he had remembered her. Pierre, on the other hand, seemed to him a stranger. His soutane cast aside during his day in town, his dark gray clothes were the work of a tailor of sorts, his haberdasher put to shame Alstrom's own. For the hour, the priest was lost in the worldling. Alstrom, meeting his clean blue eyes and sunny smile, found him equally likable in either guise. It was but a moment or two that the brother and sister stood talking beside his cot. Their going on, however, was like the passing of the sun behind a cloud. The cloud in no way lightened when Wood stood in their place.

Wood lost no time in coming to the point.

"[illegible] ecclesiastical sister over by the window says [illegible] to the time when it's safe for you to begin to talk business," he observed, as he let himself down into the chair Denise had but just put aside.

Alstrom shut his teeth for an instant and tugged a corner of the sheet across his face. Fallen from his fingers, the sheet lay crumpled in deep wrinkles.

"Well?" he said at length.

"Well," Wood echoed, as he stretched out his legs and folded his stubby hands. "I judge it is your intention to take up your abode in this infernal country."

"Why not?" Alstrom asked shortly. For weeks, he had been bracing himself to meet this inevitable hour. Nevertheless, it seemed to him a bit cruel that it should be forced upon him now, when his convalescence was still so young.

Wood shrugged his shoulders.

"No reason at all against it, now you are safe inside its borders. I must say, Alstrom, you've been infernally clever in your plans, you and Fate. It took some brains to think up the Albany pilgrimage by way of exit. As a rule, fellows of your sort don't go in for such holy transportation. You got out of the thing well, and your coming down with this fever has been the master stroke of the whole business. Nobody would ever have thought to look for you in the hands of nuns."

A sudden spark of interest came into Alstrom's troubled eyes.

"How did I happen to get here, anyway?" he asked. "I've often wondered about that."

"You don't remember?"

"Nothing between that last day when we tramped along the road with the sun in our eyes — I can see that white streak of dusty road now — and my waking up here, with a nun feeding me slops. What came in between?"

Wood hesitated. Then he decided, with careful economy of risk to his ultimate salvation, that his best course lay in his telling the simple truth.

"You gave out and went into a cottage, and I hired the man to take you back to the Regina. Then I had a doctor, and he said you were in for a touch of fever, worry and bad water and all the usual things. Finding

you at Sainte Anne, he naturally took you for a Catholic, and ordered you packed up and sent in town to the Hôtel Dieu. And here you are."

"Yes," Thorne Alstrom echoed drearily; "and here I am."

"Safe and sound and getting well," Wood continued; "and with six weeks to the good added to your account. It helps on the balance wonderfully, too, though I must say it would have been more considerate of you if you hadn't gone off your head."

Alstrom cast a swift glance at the nun who sat sewing, ten feet beyond the foot of his bed.

"Did I — babble?" he asked uneasily.

"Infernally. Still," Wood shrugged his shoulders; "it didn't so much matter here. These nuns don't understand English, you know; and your utterances were rather — rather technical." And he laughed, as at his own witticism.

Alstrom's silence lasted so long that Wood felt it incumbent on him to break it.

"You mean to stay here, then?"

"I think so. Yes."

"In Quebec?"

"As well as any other place."

"What do you mean to do?"

"To do?"

"To account for your being here, I mean. A man like you doesn't take up his abode in a forsaken hole like this, without having some sort of a reason for his coming. What do you mean to do?"

"I'm not sure. I — I've had no time to think." And Alstrom's hand sought his throbbing head where the blood was pounding savagely across his temples,

taking its revenge for the swift, merciless sequence of question and reply.

"No?" Wood raised his brows. "It strikes me it's mighty near time you did think. You may get turned out of this bed, any day now. It's up to you to decide what next. What are you going in for, any way?"

"Some sort of business, I suppose," Alstrom replied vaguely, and his languid voice told only too well how far the talk was telling on his strength.

Wood, however, was merciless. His eyes upon his stubby nails, he pushed his questions one point farther.

"Exactly," he assented. "And now just where in your plans do I come in?"

Alstrom's eyes blazed in sudden fury and every trace of languor departed from his voice, as he lifted himself upon his elbow.

"For God's sake, Wood, speak out and tell me what you want!" he demanded so sternly that even Wood quailed before the dominance in his tone. "How came you here in the first place?"

Face to face, eye to eye, they measured their strength, and, for an instant, the victory lay with the thoroughbred above the mongrel. Then, as he saw the spark die out of Alstrom's eyes, the angry colour fade from his brow and cheeks, the mongrel snarled and showed his teeth. Dropping back in his chair once more, he laughed, and even the nun, bending over her work, realized that a laugh like that was not good to hear.

"Next time you plan a sudden journey, Alstrom," the very name was spoken with quiet scorn; "take the advice of a friend and change the buttons in your cuffs. It's better, too, to go yourself to the telegraph

office, instead of telephoning in your message. It saves you trouble in the end, if anybody down-stairs happens to be on the same wire." And he laughed again, insolently and with malice.

For a minute or two, Alstrom lay with his eyes closed, while his face grew bluish white as the pillow on which it rested. Only a slight compression of the lips showed that he heard and heeded Wood's final taunt, —

"I've a bottle of peroxide I've been carrying in my pocket for a week," he assured his victim calmly. "If you keep on like this, you will need it badly before long. I suppose the nun can be told how she ought to use it."

This time, the silence lasted so long that even Wood, cocksure and dense as he was, yet began to fear lest he had overreached himself and, overreaching, had defeated his own ends. It was with an utter change of tone that at length he spoke.

"Now see here, Alstrom, I want to do the fair thing by you," he urged, a bit defensively. "Here you are, safe and sound; and here am I beside you. After all, you know, it's on your account that I am here, and it seems to me you're bound in honour to be square with me."

Alstrom's lips barely moved, yet there was ineffable scorn in his faint iteration of the one word *honour*. Wood ignored the interruption.

"Of course, I don't know what you have up your sleeve, nor how much. I do know, though, it's a good deal, more than enough to keep the two of us going at a good, smart pace. In a sense, it isn't mine; but, after all, it is as much mine as it is yours. We both know I could take it away from you mighty quick, if I chose to say the word. However, that won't be my game; that

is, not if you are fair with me. If it had been my game, I'd have said the word there in Albany, six weeks ago. Instead, I thought I'd rather wait."

"Why?" The question surprised them both by the steadiness of its accent.

With equal steadiness, Wood looked into the eyes of the man in the bed before him.

"If I told you it was because I liked you, you'd say it was a rotten lie, and yet there's some truth in it, after all. I did like you; you had the luck to be born the sort of man I'd have liked to be. I liked to watch you as you went about. We were too far apart then to let me envy you. It wasn't you who had had the luck I missed; it was your grandfather before you, your grandfather and mine. I did like you, though, and when it came to where I had the drop on you, I hated —" He pulled himself up short and resumed the harder, more businesslike tone he had been using at the start. "Besides that," he added; "I am tired of being an office porter, all my days, tired and sick of doing drudgery for other people's convenience. I haven't a tie in the world, not a near one; my life is my own, to finish as I choose. I propose, with your consent, to leave off working at a porter's job, and to play at being gentleman."

"And if I don't consent?" Alstrom queried calmly.

Wood gave his customary short, sharp laugh.

"Then we'll take the first train back to New York," he said decisively.

"You mean?"

Wood turned sideways in his chair and bent forward, as if to add emphasis to his words. He spoke with slow deliberation.

"I mean this: that, for the future, it must be share and share alike between us. If you go into business, I go with you, or out you go again. I take my half of the profits, great or small, and, what's more, I audit the books, myself, to save mistakes. If you make acquaintances, you introduce me as your friend. If you go off on trips, — and I should imagine that the summer climate here, the climate that brings up the tourists, would be rather trying to your constitution, — if you go off on any trips, you ask me to go with you. And finally —" As he spoke, he bent still farther forward and sat, a hand shut hard on either knee, while he looked Alstrom straight between the eyes; "and finally, if I see at any point that you are trying to give me the slip, as sure as there's a heaven above or a hell beneath, I'll wire to New York for help and sit on your body until it comes."

Full of menace, his eyes glared down into Alstrom's own, and a braver man than Alstrom might well have quailed before the threatening brutality of their gaze. Nevertheless, once more the weaker man was dominant, dominant by sheer force of the inheritance which had taught him how to rule. A slow, lazy smile curved the corners of his lips, as his gray eyes, which of a sudden looked strangely clear and boyish, gazed quietly back into Wood's scowling face.

"And suppose I refuse to agree to this remarkably one-sided bargain?" he asked.

"Then, in any case, New York," was the brief and uncompromising reply.

"Wood," once more Alstrom rose upon his elbow, and he spoke with a perfect calm which the other man, older and stronger though he was, might well have

envied; "do you realize that this is dangerously near to blackmail?"

"I do."

"And that blackmail is generally regarded as a crime?"

"Yes." Wood's smile was grim. "I know all about that, Alstrom. However, I hardly thought you would care to carry the matter to the courts."

Once more the colour ebbed from Alstrom's face, and he dropped back inertly upon his pillows.

"Well," Wood asked at length, after waiting in vain for Alstrom to stir or to open his eyes; "do you agree to the bargain?"

There came a long, slow breath, the eyelids fluttered nervously, then lifted. Alstrom's voice, when at last he spoke, was level.

"Yes," he assented; "I — agree."

Wood rose.

"Thanks, old man," he said, with a clumsy effort at belated friendliness, an effort which Alstrom was too weak and weary to spurn. "It's been a bad half-hour for both of us; I'm glad it is over. It had to be done, though; and I think you'll gain faster, now something is settled between us. And now you needn't worry. What's done is done, and buried. In future, we'll stick together and make the best of things as well as we can. You'll find me —" He broke off suddenly and faced about to look for the nun. "Good Lord, lady, the man has fainted away!" he exclaimed in consternation.

A half-hour later, Wood tiptoed out of the ward and out of the great stone doorway of the hospital. On the steps, he halted, drew out his handkerchief and

wiped his brow and then his hat. Inside the ward, meanwhile, the doctor and the nun were whispering together about the sudden syncope which had come upon their convalescent patient.

CHAPTER FIVE

"BUT really, Denise," Henri Allard was urging.

"Really what?" she queried. "Really, Henri, you are very dull."

Henri Allard, short, dark and lithe, yet curiously commanding, shrugged his shoulders with a gesture as of one dismissing the teasing insistence of a child.

"Not so dull as busy, Denise," he protested.

Denise pouted.

"You always are so busy, now you are seeking to become a politician," she made petulant comment. Then she dismissed the petulance as suddenly as it had arisen, and her tone became merry, wheedling. "But all your politics is not so nice as I am, Henri. I am the only sister you have; and even a premier should prefer a pretty girl to all the taxes in the country." She stuck up her laughing lips to his and eyed him coquettishly.

Yielding to the inevitable with what grace he could, Henri bent down and kissed her, but grumbled, as soon as he could raise his head, —

"What do you care about this man, Denise?"

"I care?" She shook her dark little head. "I care nothing; it is only Pierre who cares."

"Then let Pierre look out for him."

"Poor Pierre! He is so busy at Sainte Anne, and has

so few holidays! How can he make new friends? Besides," once more the dark eyes smiled into those of Henri, and cajolery was in their smile; "Pierre is but a boy. It is impossible for him to win friends so easily as a man like you." Her tone threw untold admiration into the simple phrase.

In spite of himself, Henri laughed.

"A skilled coquette wastes no effort on her brothers, Denise," he reminded her.

But she was ready for him.

"On the contrary, a skilled coquette should keep herself in training by means of any man that offers. Besides, I am no coquette; I am merely humane. The man is here, a stranger. He has one friend only with him, and that friend is — insupportable." The little pause weighted the word with measureless dislike. "Aside from that, he knows no one but Pierre. And Pierre liked him; it would give him pleasure to have him received into this house."

"Let Pierre ask him then."

"How can he, twenty miles away? Besides, you are the older brother; it is for you to do."

"But I can't collar the man on the Esplanade and drag him into the house, Denise," Henri urged impatiently.

Denise shook her fluffy head.

"Oh, no; you could never be so impetuous, Henri," she mocked him. "It is your way to ponder and to plan."

Under his swarthy skin, the blood rushed to Henri Allard's cheeks. Denise had spoken truly, and he knew it, knew, too, that his innate deliberation might some day be his political undoing.

"What is it you want me to do, Denise?" he asked, casting himself down in a chair to argue the matter out.

To his obvious consternation, Denise came to perch herself on his knee. Taken at such short range, he realized himself defenceless.

"I want you to know Mr. Alstrom, and to be as nice to him as — as you are to me," she coaxed.

"But how?"

She made a wry face indicative of her ignorance.

"How should I know? Men have so many ways that we women do not understand." She rested one hand upon his shoulder, as she spoke. "Meet him when you can; be cordial to him when you meet. Then, when you have had a little talk, ask him, some day, to walk home with you."

"What then?"

She laughed softly to herself.

"Myself. Then I will see to the rest." Suddenly she became grave, and her other hand followed its mate and rested on Henri's shoulder. "Henri," she said; "you have just now called me a coquette; but you are scarcely fair to me. I have many friends, men and women, all the friends I need. I have never asked you," her little chin lifted itself proudly; "never begged you to go out and win them for me. But this man is different. We met him, Pierre and I, when he came here first. He has been ill; he is a stranger. Something tells me that he is both sorrowful and good. And his one friend with him is not of his own class. For the rest, he can do us no harm; and — it must be very dreary to be here alone, a stranger to all and weak from an illness such as his has been. It can do us no

harm; it can take but little time. Then why not seek to make his stay a little pleasant?"

And Henri, as always happened when Denise took on that tone, weakly yielded and gave the wished-for promise.

Chance and chance alone brought the first step towards the fulfilment of that promise.

Long years before, Henri Allard and Tony Mansfield had become firm friends by reason of propinquity and of kindred taste in the matter of punishments. During one ecstatic summer day, Tony had hung out of his nursery window and watched a succession of furniture vans empty their contents into the house next door. Next morning, starting early upon a voyage of discovery in his own back yard, he promptly made out a youngster of like age with himself wandering aimlessly about the back yard of the house next door. Tony applied one eye to a crack in the division fence. Then, finding the crack inadequate, he scrambled up and hung himself by his armpits from the top of the fence.

"Thay," he queried without preface; "which do you like betht: to be thpanked, or thtood in the corner?"

"*Comment?*" inquired the boy, as he peered vaguely about in search of the source of the question, and Tony, who apparently had been born bilingual, repeated the query in French.

His surprise once allayed, however, Henri dropped into a fair substitute for English, for his vanity was keen, and he had no mind to allow Tony, dangling and kicking his toes against the boards, to assert his linguistic supremacy. And Tony, dangling smilingly above him, continued to discuss the best methods of accepting

spankings, until he was ruthlessly plucked down by his nurse and borne away to put his theory into practice.

Henri, open-eyed and agape, had watched Tony's disappearing amid a flurry of sturdy heels extended in mid-air, had heard from afar Tony's plucky ultimatum, —

"Anyhow, it doethn't latht tho long, and, bethideth, they daththen't hurt you tho very much, after all. It'th mainly bluffing."

From that hour, their friendship dated, for Henri, contrary to the deliberation which otherwise marked his entire experience, had cast his whole childish heart at the feet of this intrepid new acquaintance who, conquered by force, still gave forth his shout of defiance.

All this had taken place exactly twenty-two years before. The Allards and the Mansfields no longer lived side by side, yet in all that time there had been few days when the two friends had not met. Together, they had gone through school, through McGill, through a year of European wandering. Then, returned once more to Quebec, they went their separate ways, Henri to a minor post in the Parliament Buildings, Tony to the thousand and one petty interests which fill the time of an avowedly idle man; yet the days were rare when one or other of them did not cross the space between the home on the Cape and the house on the Grande Allée. Henri, meanwhile, had developed into a man whose gravity threatened to become his besetting sin. Tony, on the other hand, accepted life as a joke of which his personality was the major premise. Totally unlike, the two friends rarely agreed, yet, strange to say, they never had been known to clash.

Between their sisters, the relation was more formal,

far more perfunctory. Had the brothers been less intimate, the two girls would have met but rarely, for they had few things in common. As it was, however, they met from time to time, called each other *Louisa* and *Denise*, and exchanged gifts at Christmas and at Easter. In the intervals of their meetings, as a rule, they forgot each other entirely. Denise was alternately extravagantly gay and extravagantly devout. Louisa's existence was the placid monotony of the well-bred, intelligent English society girl. She furnished the golden mean to Denise's wild extremes. Lacking her charm, she yet made good in the impression of absolute reliability which she created upon all with whom she came in contact. Louisa Mansfield had never been really young. Neither, on the contrary, would she ever be really old.

And Gertrude Hardwicke, well-poised and gay and healthily buoyant, occupied the middle place between the two girls, French and English. Louisa was her friend, Denise a comparative stranger; yet now and then she was nearer than Louisa could ever hope to be to comprehending the wayward and fluctuating moods of Denise. As far as the two men were concerned, her whole alliance was with Tony. The gravity of Henri, she made frank confession, frightened her and left her dumb. And Henri Allard, strange to say, was wholly oblivious of the fact. To his mind, reticence was a maidenly grace. He deplored the chatter of Denise; upon Gertrude, struck speechless in his chilly presence, he called, and called again.

One of these calls had been included in his programme for the afternoon of his talk with Denise. Quite early, shortly after four o'clock, he was walking rapidly down

Louis Street, bound for the cosy up-stairs sitting-room where Gertrude poured the tea, while the click of Mrs. Hardwicke's wooden needles and the creak of Mrs. Hardwicke's chair furnished a decorous accompaniment to all the talk. Henri liked the room, so free from all taint of the boarding-house life surrounding it; he liked the decorous, impersonal chaperonage of Mrs. Hardwicke, who in his presence rarely spoke, except to address a petulant remark to some refractory stitch. Most of all, he liked Gertrude: her downright manner, her pretty frocks, her shrewd, sensible comments upon men and things. His calls upon her were his favourite form of social dissipation, and, accordingly, it was with scanty pleasure that, crossing the Ring, he fell in with Tony Mansfield, bound on the same errand as himself.

Tony hailed him cheerily.

"Thirsting for a cup of Hardwicke tea, old man?" he queried. "Then wait for a chap; it's greedy to try to rush in ahead. Besides, apart from the ruin of your moral tone, it's mighty poor policy. The first fellow on the scene is bound to get the top piece of bread-and-butter, and that's always dry as the opening phrases of the talk."

Henri laughed and linked his arm in Tony's, as that tall youth swung into step by his side.

"But, if we arrive together, one of us must still be the victim," he said.

"No; not entirely. We can divide," Tony made affable suggestion. "I'll take the talk, while you get the bread-and-butter. That for a starter. Later on, we'll tackle Mother Hardwicke, turn and turn about. I confess it demoralizes me, when she interrupts the conversation to observe 'Purl two.' I'm no mountain

brook, let alone a pair, and I find it more upsetting than the conventional 'Hear! Hear!' of an excited audience, and I've usually noticed that even that makes a speaker lose his place and get it all off over again."

"Tony," Henri spoke crisply; "I hear the Lorette election comes off next month."

"Yes, the twentieth," Tony assented carelessly.

"Are you ready for it?"

"I don't see what *ready* there is about it," Tony answered as carelessly as before. "Every one in the region knows me and my family; they know just what I can do and how great a duffer I probably am. In a sense, it's a disadvantage to face a public that has known you in your first knickerbockers; but, in another sense, it's rather an advantage. They know, from the start, the very worst you are likely to do."

"I know," Henri assented gravely. "My own county is also near Quebec."

"But far from Ottawa."

Henri shook his head.

"Too far, perhaps, for me to travel. Meanwhile, what about your policy?"

"My policy?" Tony looked blank.

"Yes. Your line of action. Is it clear in your mind?"

"Oh, hang!" Tony said concisely. "So that is what you are driving at? Policy be hanged! I haven't any, and don't mean to have. It's nothing but a handicap in the race."

"But a winning card for the election," Henri reminded him.

"Then the election can go to thunder," Tony

assured him calmly. "Tie myself down to a stated policy I can't and won't; at least, not so early in the game. Do you want my political platform? Well, then. I believe in certain things that, for the present, force me into the Liberal party. I should be a sneak, if I joined the other side. Just as long as I honestly hold those same opinions, I stay with the party that also holds them. If anybody can convince me that they're really wrong, then I must move on. Meanwhile, according to those opinions, I'll take a hand in the game. But —" Turning, he faced Henri squarely. "But, once I discover that my own hands are getting soiled, I'll throw the cards face up on the table and get out, even if I happen to be holding every trump in the pack. Understand this once for all, Henri, or it's all off between us, all off between me and politics."

"Then you mean —" Henri began slowly.

Tony doubled up his fists, then stuck his fists, tight doubled, into the side pockets of his coat.

"I mean," he said slowly; "that I believe it is every man's right and duty to make up his mind where his country ought to go, and then use the best skill and strength he has to help her to go there. That doesn't mean, though, that he can't change his mind. It's possible, even for us, Henri, to get a little wiser with the coming years. Even a politician is bound to keep himself open to conviction, don't you know." He paused. Then, "Selah!" he made irrepressible comment. "Come along, man, or Miss Hardwicke's alcohol will all be burned out, and the top piece of bread-and-butter will be bone dry."

However, the top piece of bread-and-butter had been already appropriated. Gertrude, rising from beside

the tray to greet them, introduced its possessor to them as Mr. Alstrom.

"One of our fellow-boarders," she added; "whom I have lured in to get a cup of tea."

Tony, already bending above Mrs. Hardwicke's hand, glanced up at the unfamiliar name. The glance was followed by a look of honest liking, a look which rested approvingly upon the tall, slim figure, upon the old-young face capped with its thatch of vivid yellow hair. A gentleman born, Tony told himself, and a fellow who had known his bad half-hour. And forthwith, leaving Mrs. Hardwicke to her purling and Gertrude to the eager attentions of Henri, he drew up a chair and plunged into friendly talk with the stranger.

"Who's the new boy, Miss Hardwicke?" he demanded, when at length Alstrom had gone his way.

"A stranger in our gates. He is a fellow-countryman of mine who sits next mother at the table. She thinks he's rather nice, and they flap the American flag between them, and create quite a distinct atmosphere in this carnival of nations."

Tony laughed.

"This place is always cosmopolitan," he answered; "I fancy it has been from the start. How many races have you now on hand?"

Gertrude counted swiftly.

"Scotch, Irish, English, American, Parisian and both sorts of Canadian. I heard we were to have a Brazilian potentate or something; but he didn't materialize."

"Meanwhile," Tony observed; "I like your boy."

"Boy!" Gertrude challenged him directly. "He is as old as you."

"Mayhap. He may be older, for anything I know to the contrary. But there's something about him that appeals to me and makes me want to lick his enemies. Somehow or other, he gives me the feeling that he has had a hard time of it, and needs people to stand back of him."

"Mr. Mansfield!" Mrs. Hardwicke's tone sounded startled, and she allowed her knitting to drop into her lap. "You don't suppose he—" she hesitated in search of some specious charge; "drinks, or does anything discreditable?"

"Drinks? No; not with a face like that. He looks more as if he needed the tonic of a good dose of Scotch at bedtime. For the rest, I doubt it. He hasn't the eyes of a criminal."

Gertrude interposed.

"Mother didn't mean anything so strong as that," she said lightly.

Mrs. Hardwicke took up her knitting once more.

"No; not really criminal, just imprudent," she amended. "I only feel I must be careful, with Mr. Hardwicke away; and a boarding-house is so very promiscuous. Why, Mr. Mansfield, one man who left here, yesterday, actually used to open his eggs out on his plate and eat them with his knife. It really is a great responsibility to have a daughter in such surroundings."

Tony made brave struggle with his mirth and downed it in the end.

"I hardly think you'll find Alstrom so imprudent as all that, Mrs. Hardwicke," he assured her gravely.

"The man looks to me all right, only as if he had had the bad luck to go through some tragedy or other, and had half the life knocked out of him. Now and then his eyes have a trick of taking on the look of a dog who's been cuffed for something he didn't really do. Anyhow," Tony rose, as he spoke, set down his cup and looked about for his hat; "anyhow," he added, as he held out his hand to Gertrude; "I like your boy, and I mean to see more of him, lots more."

And, as usually happened, Tony Mansfield was as good as his word.

CHAPTER SIX

"IT'S a curious mingling of interests in that Allard family," Tony observed between his whiffs.

Alstrom lighted his cigarette, then bent forward to give the match a fling obliquely towards the grate. Tony eyed the operation with interest.

"'Varsity tennis?" he queried briefly, around the end of his own cigarette.

Alstrom nodded.

"But how did you know?"

"That left-hand cut. It's quite unmistakable. What was your university?"

"Yale. But you were saying?"

Tony suffered himself to be led back to his main theme.

"That it's a curious mingling of interests in the Allard establishment."

"Church and State," Alstrom commented. "What is more common than that?"

"If you measure by phrasing, nothing, unless we except the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, and that's not quite apropos. However, Church and State are a good deal more common in one phrase than in one family, especially when both are pushed to the limit. Henri Allard, young as he is, has already weighed the relative values of being provincial minister and federal

member. His oldest brother, François — you haven't seen him yet — is more than a dim light of the Church. He is something or other at the Basilica, and something or other else at Laval. Then that youngster, Pierre — he's a pretty boy and a bright one — is in training at Sainte Anne. They call him a postulant, I believe, though I don't know what the term implies, unless it's a blue linen pinafore over his soutane."

"Or carrying a cross at the head of a procession," Alstrom suggested. "That was the way I saw him first."

"Then he's advanced a peg. The last time I saw him at Sainte Anne, he had a pail of suds and a brush, and he was preparing to wash the miraculous statue. Most boys of his age would have looked like fools, pinafored and sloshing in soapsuds on top of a step ladder; but Pierre triumphed even over that. He's a fine boy, Alstrom, with no end of character underneath that girlish face of his."

Alstrom smoked in silence for a moment. Then, — "What of the sister?" he asked.

"Denise?" Tony laughed. "A blend of three strains: angel, imp and Paris doll. For the life of me, I've never been able to decide which strain suits her best."

The two men were smoking before the grate in Tony's den, for early October was turning the air crispy cold, and the wind was rising with the fall of twilight. The afternoon on the links had been full of enjoyment to them both. The Cove Fields lay glistening in the yellow sunshine, the river at their feet was dark, deep blue, fretted here and there into little white waves and crests of foam. From the square in front of the Drill

Hall, the officer's orders rang sharply out across the still air, followed by a random patter, as the latest awkward squad sought to ground arms with military precision; while now and again a bugle call came down from the Citadel above their heads. The golf links were practically deserted, that day, and Tony, fussing about by himself, had hailed with rapture the approaching figure of Alstrom. His rapture increased when it transpired that Alstrom, although still weak from his long illness, could yet press him hard in the score.

"You'll do for your first appearance on these links." Tony nodded approvingly, as they finished their eighteen holes. "Now come across for a cup of the mater's tea, and then a smoke in my den. It's not a half-bad sort of place up among the chimney pots, and I've some jolly cups I'd like to show you, if you care for that sort of thing."

Although it was barely two weeks since Alstrom and Tony had met in the Hardwickes' living-room, this was not the first time that Alstrom had been regaled upon Mrs. Mansfield's tea and jam sandwiches, upon Louisa Mansfield's conversation, both of which, it must be confessed, he had regarded as distressingly pallid pabulum. Nevertheless, in his less critical moods, that is, after the memory of both jam and talk had become a little faded, he admitted to himself that it was no slight privilege for a stranger like himself to have been accorded entrance to one of the social strongholds of Quebec. Tony had seen to that; and Tony had also seen to his introduction to the golf links on the Cove Fields and to sundry other places whither he himself was wont to resort. To Tony's room, however,

Alstrom had not been bidden until now. He had a half-formed appointment to meet Wood at five; but the lure of Tony's suggestion was irresistible. Deliberately he turned his back upon the thought of Wood; and, side by side with Tony, he went in under the Louis Gate and mounted the sloping street leading up to the house on the Cape.

Long afterward, thinking back to that gray twilight which was falling in upon the golden afternoon, Alstrom smiled to himself, as he recalled how precisely his mood, as he walked away at Tony's side, was akin to that of the school boy who runs away from the lifted rod. In both cases, the rod was bound to fall; it was only to be delayed for a little time. Alstrom's weeks in the unsought society of Wood had taught him that Wood was not a man to be evaded. Sooner or later, he was bound to have his say, and, all things considered, Alstrom had found it better to have the say said, and quickly.

And yet, all things still considered, the relations between the two men had been remarkably free from friction. Strained they were, of course, and would doubtless always be. However, since that one memorable afternoon in the Hôtel Dieu, Wood had had the supreme tact to avoid debatable ground. Watching Alstrom keenly, that day, he had been assured that they understood each other perfectly and once for all, that Alstrom realized the situation in its entirety and, realizing, accepted as necessary the keeping of the agreement which had been forced from him. That accomplished, there was no especial need to reopen the subject. Certain of its phases might need to be discussed; but the main theme was better left alone.

Within the limits of their boarding-house, speculations were rife regarding the relations between the two men. Every one from Mrs. Hardwicke to the Boots, who apparently won his title from having to polish the knives, every one in the house attempted to solve the problem, and ended by giving it up, unsolved. Wood himself, an unobtrusive and rather ill-bred stranger who had taken a third-floor back room and was vaguely understood to be in mercantile pursuits, had attracted comparatively little notice until his persistent haunting of the terrace had aroused the wag of the house to observe that he was plainly waiting for the mercantile connection to be pursuing him, and that at not too hot a pace. After that, the people of the house, meeting at table, were wont to compare notes as to the places where they had lately encountered Wood. Little by little, the fact revealed itself that the stranger was a species of Wandering Jew whose path turned oftenest to Palace Hill and the Hôtel Dieu. By that time, some one, more daring than the rest, put a few leading questions to Wood himself, eliciting the statement that in the Hôtel Dieu Wood had a friend seriously ill. By degrees, inquiries for the unknown friend came to fill the need for the occasional word to Wood demanded from his housemates; and, at length, one day in late September, Wood, replying, was able to announce at dinner that his friend, now convalescent, would join him there, next day. The household drew a breath of relief. A friend of Wood could scarcely be an addition to their circle. Nevertheless, granted a comrade of his own sort to talk to, Wood could be dismissed to the limbo of wholly negligible quantities. The most alert boarding-house conscience could not demand more

than a formal "good morning," when a new deal brought a companion to a solitary knave.

Nevertheless, at the end of dinner, next night, the house was gathered into two nuclei of gossip. The men, in twos and threes, strolled away to smoke on the terrace. The women, with one consent, betook themselves to the living-room of Mrs. Hardwicke, at whose elbow at the table the stranger had been shown a chair. The masculine caucus talked briefly and went its way. The feminine one prolonged its sitting until their liege lords were already snoring. The burden of their questionings, however, was the same. How could there be any connection whatsoever between the two men, the one so underbred, the other showing his innate breeding by every word and gesture? What was the nature of the connection which so manifestly existed? And what should be the authorized attitude towards the ill-assorted pair? Should Alstrom be cut on account of Wood; or should Wood be accepted for Alstrom's sake?

Gertrude Hardwicke at length sought to stem the tide of what would have been a debate, had not all the debaters persisted in talking at once.

"What is the use of making such a fuss about it all?" she queried, witb a yawn. "You don't expect to take either of the men for a confidant and chum; and a boarding-house acquaintance never counts for anything, anyway. We are here first, and we have the right to make it as much or as little as we choose. Besides, mother is the only one involved in the acquaintance, and she sits next to Mr. Alstrom, not to Mr. Wood. She can easily settle the matter of distinction by conversing fluently to

Mr. Alstrom and asking Mr. Wood to pass the salt."

"But what can be the connection between them, Gertrude dear?" Mrs. Hardwicke demanded for the fifth time.

Gertrude laughed.

"Once on a time, I heard a gamin say 'Search me!'" she answered. "If you only approved of slang, I should be moved to adopt the phrase."

"Perhaps he's his valet?" a voice suggested.

Then the chorus broke out again.

"Yes, or his keeper."

"His valet would have better manners."

"And nicer nails. This man has worked with his hands."

"He bites his fingernails, too."

"He doesn't seem at all afraid of Mr. Alstrom."

"They can't be relations, though."

"And, after all, do you know," something in the level, nerveless English voice caught the general attention and commanded silence; "once or twice it seemed to me that Mr. Alstrom was the one who was afraid. I can't understand it, can't really believe it, for he is so obviously the nobler type. And yet — "

"And yet," Gertrude rose, as she spoke; "we know nothing at all about it; moreover, beyond the fact of having had a glorious spree of gossip, I can't see that we've gained a thing from all this evening's talk. I move we drop the subject and wait for the situation to explain itself, for it's perfectly evident that we can't explain it."

Meanwhile, the subject of the discussion was unpacking his belongings in the front room which Wood

had chosen for him. Wood had chosen the house, too; and Alstrom, after dinner, had nodded his approval of the choice.

"It's both central and very quiet," he said, as he shook out his long-packed raiment and hung it in a walnut wardrobe, Gothic without and Puritan within. "It's comfortable enough, too. As for the people, they're the usual sort of unappropriated blessings that infest any boarding-house, all but the people on my right. They are rather attractive. Hardwicke you said the name was?" And he fell to arranging in the bottom of the wardrobe a wholly needless supply of foot gear, entirely unconscious that, in the Hardwickes' room beneath, he was the subject of the merciless discussion commonly accorded to an unsolved problem.

Three weeks later, the problem was still unsolved, and, in so far as the most of the inmates of the house were concerned, still insoluble. Some of them picked at it ceaselessly, as one picks at the broken clasp of a necklace too tight to come off over one's head, without undue contortions of the nose. Some of them laid little traps and pitfalls whereby they hoped to entrap one man or the other into an admission which would lead to explanation. And some, and they were but two, ignored the matter utterly. These two were the Hardwickes, Gertrude by reason of her breeding, Mrs. Hardwicke because of her tendency to accept all men as friends until they proved themselves foes, coupled with her previous absorption in other and woolly things.

Accordingly, in all that boarding-house, Thorne Alstrom, at the end of three weeks, had established cordial relations with but two of the inmates, Gertrude

and her mother. His attitude to them was largely mixed with gratitude. Being neither blind nor deaf, nor yet wholly unendowed with perceptions, he could not fail to be aware of the speculations rife about him, could not always ignore the lifted brows and sidelong glances which followed each of his public interviews with Wood. Strange to say, Alstrom quickly came to realize that Wood in his mood of good-fellowship was most to be dreaded. When he sought to become overbearing, masterful, he merely blustered a little before he gave in to Alstrom's quiet dominance. In his jocular hours, however, he remained unsuppressed, because wholly unsuppressible. Alstrom could not head off his jokes nor check his stories, for the simple reason that Wood's sense of humour lay along a line which Alstrom's mind, however alert to obviate a crisis, could never hope to travel. A certain brutal obviousness in Wood's point of view proved more elusive than a studied wit. Powerless to prevent, Alstrom could only wince and fall into silence, albeit with a savage longing to spear his comrade with his own dinner fork. And this, which at the end of two short months seemed to have lasted over all his life, was destined to last on and on, a pitiless dead weight of social incongruity which he was powerless to cast aside. On certain other phases of the matter, Thorne Alstrom never allowed himself to fix his mind.

It was only natural, then, that Alstrom, so plainly born to other associations and writhing from the friction of daily contact with a man like Wood, should turn with honest gratitude to accept the easy good-fellowship of Gertrude Hardwicke. Gertrude never smiled into her napkin, nor coughed, nor lifted her brows at her

neighbours, whatever Wood might do. She never asked Alstrom inconvenient questions, nor quoted back to him his words of eight and forty hours ago. She merely took his past as a matter of course, and chattered to him about his present and her future. Tony Mansfield and she were alike in this, with the sole difference that where, now and then, Gertrude gave in before an insistent pause, Tony asked a frank question, asked it with a blunt good will that robbed it of all curiosity and furnished a soothing balm to Alstrom's nerves, rasped by a universal atmosphere of careful reticence. At three weeks' end, in all that stranger city, Thorne Alstrom counted on two friends and two only, Tony Mansfield and Gertrude Hardwicke. Even Denise Allard, whom he met often and with increasing sense of charm, he still set down in the outer ranks of mere acquaintance.

And now, over the crackling fire in his cosy third-floor sanctum, Tony was just about to ask another of his blunt, kindly questions.

"You said you thought of going in for some sort of business, Alstrom?" he asserted, after a pause had decently buried his opinion of Denise.

"Yes," Alstrom admitted; "I did say so."

"For any especial reason?"

Alstrom made brief answer, —

"Necessity."

Tony nodded.

"Horrid word that; but one we're all of us bound to use, sooner or later, I fancy. Well, what are you going in for?"

"I —" Alstrom hesitated. Then, "Honestly, Mansfield, I don't know," he confessed frankly.

Tony cast away the end of his cigarette, and then lighted another.

" Now look here, Alstrom," he said, when that was done; " it's none of my business, I know; but — well, I've seen men and learned to form my own notion of them, and it's my notion that you haven't, as a rule, been placed where you've had to hunt for business. Wait a bit! I'm not asking any questions, man. I've got a pair of eyes, and they give me all the mental occupation I am asking for, just now. Moreover, I know something, just a little, about life in the States. Your 'three generations from shirtsleeves to shirt-sleeves' isn't always the joke it's quoted for. Now look here, let's talk this thing out. You've had some sort of a slump. You were born to money; somehow or other, the thing has changed, and now you need some sort of business. Is that it?"

Alstrom nodded.

" You're a good fellow, Mansfield, as well as a shrewd one," he said. " Go on."

Tony bent forward and rested a kindly hand upon the other's knee.

" Sure I'm not hurting you, old chap?" he queried.

It may have been that Alstrom's nerves were not yet steady from his illness. In any case, the firm, kindly pressure on his knee sent the hot blood rushing up across his cheeks and into the roots of the hair which gleamed like tawny metal in the ruddy firelight. He shut his teeth hard together for a moment, before he could make his voice quite level. Then he said slowly and very low, —

" You're not hurting, Mansfield. I've a notion that — you couldn't."

But Tony dodged from the touch of emotion as a puppy dodges from a motor car, lithely and as by instinct.

"Right, then. We'll proceed to business."

"I wish I could," Alstrom answered, with a nervous little laugh.

"Why not? You've the personality and the time; I've any amount of pull. I inherited it from the pater; he was director in crowds of things, and he had the good sense to see to it that I inherited his name. As consequence, I inherited some of the directorships, for the pater was a level-headed man, and the public likes to keep the old name on its lists. It's an honest fact that I could put you into any one of a dozen things, to-morrow. What do you want?"

"Why — I —" Alstrom stammered, obviously startled at the unexpected question.

Rising, Tony pushed about among the cups, pipes and portraits of pretty girls which adorned his mantel, made room there for his elbow, turned around and beamed down at Alstrom, still seated by the fire.

"What do you want?" he repeated. "Indoor things, or out? Finances, or executive?"

Once more the scarlet colour rolled up across Alstrom's cheeks.

"Executive, or something out of doors," he answered swiftly; "that is, if I'm to choose. I must say, Mansfield, you're a friend worth having."

"Why not? Else, what's the use of having me?" Tony made cheery question. "Well, granted the executive, what next? Pulp, electric plant, railway, bank — No; that's forbidden, if you don't care about finance. Myself, I think it's an awful bore; it's all I

can do to add up my check book — What's the matter, man? Is the room too hot?"

"Matter? Nothing," Alstrom reassured him hastily.

But Tony was already flinging open a window.

"You looked a bit queer, and this room does get infernally hot," he said as he returned to his former seat. "Well, as I was saying, we'll rule out the bank. Do you know anything of engineering?"

"I studied it."

"Never used it?"

"No. The fates willed otherwise." Alstrom laughed shortly. "My father had — at one time — too much money to make him willing to have me go in for anything so manly as an engineer's profession."

Tony sighed.

"I know; I'm in the same boat. Ergo, I'm about to take it out in politics. Money can be the deuce and all of a bore, when it's wielded by the paternal arm. Well, look here. What do you say to an engineering job, town eight months of the year and the howling wilderness the other four?"

Half an hour later, Alstrom rose to his feet. At the door, he turned back, obviously with something heavy on his mind.

"Mansfield, I hate like thunder to ask it, when you've just done everything in the world for me," he said slowly; "but — can you make room in the job for Wood?"

Tony whistled, and a quaint little smile puckered the corners of his lips.

"So that's it, Alstrom? I saw the question coming up from the back of your brain, and braced myself to meet it bravely. As for Wood, yes, I suppose so. I

hate your tame adder like sin; he's sleek and ugly and has a poison tooth in his jaw. He's not my sort, Alstrom; still, he's your friend, not mine; and, if you insist on having him included, I think I can manage to let him in."

Alstrom's brow cleared, and he started to speak his thanks; but Tony forestalled him.

"It's no thanks, old man; I do it simply at your asking. To my mind, the fellow is a beastly cad, and no help to you or any other man. If it were any of my business, I'd advise you to chuck him as soon as ever you could. As long as it isn't my affair, I'll limit my advice to begging you to keep your eye on him and never to trust him for one single minute. Going? Good-bye, and good luck go with you. I'll meet you in Lower Town at ten, to-morrow."

Left alone in his room, Tony closed the window and poked the fire with a thoughtful foot.

"He's plain, unmitigated serpent," he said then aloud. "Alstrom should scotch him soon, or he'll get bitten."

But, unknown to Tony, the biting was already done.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE next morning dawned into the dazzling autumn clearness which is at its most brilliant during the Quebec October. Something in the gray old city seems to bring out, by sheer force of contrast, all the sparkling lustre of the air. The sky, swept clean by the wind of the night before, was a cloudless arch of a deep and fathomless blue, and the river beneath lay like a stripe of this same blue, flowing swiftly away to join the bluer sea. The gray slopes of Levis took on a purplish light; but the Island and the distant Laurentides, spread out beneath the dazzling sun, shone back in myriad tones of bronze and red and gold which died softly away in the distance, to be lost in the round blue dome of Cap Tourmente, bounding the picture at its eastern edge.

Thorne Alstrom, walking briskly away to meet his appointment with Tony Mansfield, could not fail to feel somewhat of the crispness of the morning, somewhat of the stinging tonic of the light and air. For the moment, he lived but in the moment, forgetful of all but air and light and of the interview with Tony just before him. Tony was such a comfortable sort of fellow, doing his good deeds in such an off-hand way that one quite forgot to feel indebted. Two weeks only since they had met, and already Alstrom felt him-

self better friends with Tony than with many a man he had known for years, back in that other life beyond the mountains which bordered the southern view. Tony was English, he American; yet in their alien natures like had called to like, and like had answered to the call. Tony and he, Alstrom felt assured, were destined to be lifelong friends, although, before a week was ended, chance should remove him altogether beyond the arc of Tony's radius. Then, as at some hidden phase of his thought, Alstrom's gray eyes clouded, and the old, deep lines once more graved themselves around his boyish lips. Tony was very loyal; yet there were shocks conceivable such as even his loyalty would be powerless to withstand. Alstrom halted for a moment at the top of the steps leading down to Mountain Hill, and stood gazing with unseeing eyes after the Levis ferry which banded the river with a wake of foam. Then he withdrew his gaze, and slowly went down the steps. Yes, even a loyalty like that of Tony was finite. The day was bound to come, when he should find it so. And, meanwhile, for him, going on his way, the young day around him had parted with its lustre.

Nevertheless, two hours later, it had once more regained the lustre. He had found Tony in a mood of exceeding buoyancy, and, before they parted, he shared Tony's mood. As he had entered the grim old office down in Saint Peter Street, he had expected to find Tony's countenance and manner reflecting something of the dingy grayness of the walls outside. Tony, however, albeit confronted with a president and a brace of elderly stenographers, to say nothing of a presidential table heaped with letters and blue print maps, still

showed himself indomitable, poking aside the blue prints to make room for his elbows, and chaffing the president until one of the elderly stenographers drew down her lips and said, —

"Why-ee!"

He glanced up, as Alstrom entered.

"Here's the very chap I was talking about," he said, with an accent of bland surprise, as if the clock on the wall above them were not just chiming the first strokes of ten. "Come in, Alstrom, and join the conference. Mind if I smoke?" he queried. "All right, then. Now see here. Alstrom has a couple of degrees in engineering, one from Yale, one from a place he calls the Tech. He ought to know things, and, for my part, I'm willing to vouch for him. I fancy you will be able to use him on the work you were just talking about. As for the other chap — What does he know, Alstrom?"

"A good general utility man, without much technical training," Alstrom responded, with a glibness which aroused Tony's suspicions.

"Hm!" he said shrewdly. "Any training at all?"

"Not that I know of," Alstrom said frankly, and dismissing his glibness of the moment before.

"I thought as much. The adder has been coaching you just what to say," Tony muttered in a swift aside not aimed at the presidential ear. Then he went on aloud, "What are his good points, the points on which you would recommend him?"

Alstrom hesitated. Then, —

"A shrewd, clear head, and a wonderful degree of persistence," he answered, and Tony's keen ear caught a slight ring of bitterness in the tone.

When Tony spoke again, it was with the accent

of a man who has just swallowed a bitter pill, and who still feels its unwelcome weight against his palate. He spoke, this time, not to Alstrom, but to the president.

"You can make some sort of a place for the fellow, I suppose, as long as Mr. Alstrom wishes it. I will be responsible for him, of course. Even if he has no training, a hard-headed, hard-handed man can always be put to use." Then he turned back to Alstrom. "You'd like him put on the same job with you?" he queried.

Alstrom bowed assent.

"If possible," he said briefly. "On some accounts, it will be better so."

And Tony, listening, had a swift impression that his was not the only pill administered by Fate, that morning in the presidential office.

They sat there long, talking over the numberless details which concerned themselves with Alstrom's taking up his work, the following Monday morning. Until next May, he was to have an office to himself, somewhere in the upper regions of that dingy building. Then, when the late spring opened, he was to go to the northern woods, to turn his back on office walls and face a season of roughing it in the practical work of his profession.

Even the president, bowing Alstrom out, was ready to confess to a share of Tony's liking. The hour-long talk showed to them both that Tony had not been mistaken in his man. Alstrom's training had been good; his enthusiasm for that training had never waned. Rather than that, it flamed up again into new life at this first chance in years to talk the "shop" of his profession. It was as he had said to Tony, the night

before. The real love of his life was all for engineering; but his father's fortune and his mother's noisy woe at losing him from the narrow limits of the home had stood firmly in the way of his adopting the life he would have chosen. Now at last he faced his proper future. His step was alert, his face lighted with the gay content of a boy, as he left the office and turned up Mountain Hill once more.

Half way up Mountain Hill, his contentment deepened, for he met Denise Allard, and Denise was in one of her blithest moods.

"But I am very weary," she protested, with a gay shake of her pretty head. "All this morning long, I have been in the hands of my tailor, tiresome man! Imagine losing this beautiful sunshine! I think I — " There was the slightest possible emphasis upon the pronoun — "shall refresh myself by walking around the Ramparts."

"Delightful! I have an errand there, myself," Alstrom assured her gravely.

From under the shadow of her drooping feathers, she cocked her eyes up at him and shook her head.

"Yes; but I shall only saunter. You are in haste," she challenged him. "You have brought me up the hill at such a pace that I am breathless. As for poor Mouche — " She glanced with mock pity at the great black poodle who frisked along beside her.

Alstrom bent to pat the dog's broad back.

"You appear equally fagged, you and Mouche," he said, his gray eyes shining with a boyish mirth. "Permit me to make my penitential apologies to you both. As for the Ramparts, if only I may walk with you, I promise to creep at any pace you may choose."

She snapped her fingers at Mouche; but her smile was all for Alstrom, standing there, tall and gay and debonair in the strong noon sun, a new Alstrom whom she found it hard to recognize.

"Come," she said gayly then. "It is shady on the Ramparts; but the day is warm. As for the pace, I must take it as it comes." And she led the way down along the Battery with Alstrom at her side, the unfamiliar Alstrom, blithe and boyish and wholly forgetful of past or future, forgetful, even, of his bad half-hour with Wood, the night before.

He had found Wood restlessly pacing the cross walks in the Ring, when he had returned from Tony's sanctum; and, seen even from afar, Wood was plainly in a bad temper. The poise of Wood's head had shown this no more surely than did the impatience of his step and the frequency with which his hand sought his showy fob. Too late, Alstrom regretted the passing mood which had led him, for the sake of present pleasure, to disregard future retribution. However, Wood said nothing of his own obvious displeasure. He turned at Alstrom's hail, nodded in moody silence and, still in the same moody silence, crossed the Ring at Alstrom's side, entered the house and took his own place at table.

Later, in Alstrom's room, the storm broke.

"What do you suppose I am staying here for, here in this devilish stupid hole?" he demanded roughly, as he followed Alstrom across the room and halted, leaning against the angle of the deep casement.

For a moment, Alstrom permitted himself to yield to the last of the mood evoked by Tony.

"I really couldn't say," he made careless answer.

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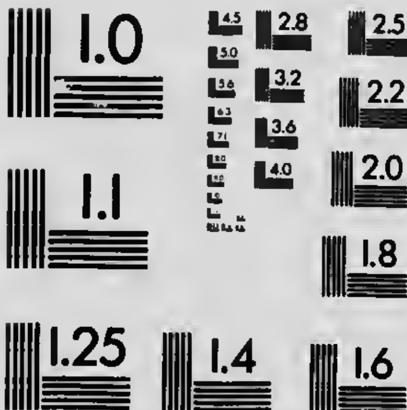

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"*Say!* I should think not," Wood sneered. "Some things are better left unsaid. However, you know the reason as well as I do. You also know that, unless you play fair by me, the reason stops mighty sudden."

"I have played fair," Alstrom replied quietly.

"Fair, yes! Fair, when you give me the slip and go off for half a day with your aristocratic friends you're ashamed to introduce me to! Fair, when you sit at the table and talk to that old fussy-bag beside you, talk so low I can't hear a word you are saying, and now and then chucking a remark to me as you'd chuck a bare bone at an alley cat!" Wood paused for breath.

Dropping down in a chair beside the table, Alstrom faced him.

"What in heaven's name do you want, Wood?" he queried.

The tone, dispassionate and level, grated on Wood's nerves, already rasped by a long brooding over his fancied wrongs.

"What do I want? A little decent consideration. I didn't throw up my New York job and come to this God-forsaken place, just to be treated like a nobody, a servant. You'd find I was somebody, was master, if I chose to say the word. We have gone all over that once for all, Pe — "

Alstrom raised his hand. His voice, albeit low, yet held a ring of authority.

"Stop!" he said curtly. "It is you now who violate our bargain. Another syllable of that sort from you and, whatever the consequences, I'll hand you over to the police for blackmail."

"I — I didn't mean — "

"It is no matter what you meant; it is merely a case

of what you did," Alstrom replied coldly. "Now, if you can keep your tongue in check, kindly tell me what your grievance is."

"You know it as well as I do," Wood said a little sullenly.

Alstrom smiled.

"That you lack the social graces to endear you to the people here? That you elected to come here in the first place? That you find me a less congenial companion than you expected?" he asked, with cutting scorn. "Well, I am not the one to blame for all this disillusion."

The sarcasm was like the touch of white-hot metal upon a bare and aching nerve. Wood flared with sudden fury at the touch.

"Before high heaven, you are to blame!" he burst out angrily.

Again Alstrom checked him.

"Stop, Wood! We may as well leave heaven out of this; it's a little aside from the subject. Now suppose we come to the point. Situated as we are, there is no especial sense in having a row. What's the trouble? Do you want to get back to New York?"

"My sister wants to have me." Wood twisted a letter in his hand.

"You told me, on one occasion, that you had no ties," Alstrom reminded him briefly.

"I haven't. My sister is married, and independent."

"You have heard from your sister, then?"

Wood turned on him suspiciously.

"Who told you I had?"

"You just mentioned it, yourself. May I ask how long you have been in communication with her?"

"Since I left New York."

"And what reason have you given her for your coming here?" The keen gray eyes were holding Wood's eyes steadily.

"I told her I'd got a better job."

"Did you do me the honour to mention my name in connection with this job?"

Wood raised his head sharply.

"No; I did not. What's more, when I make a promise, I keep it, sir." The last word slipped over his lips before he had time to check it. Spoken, however bitterly Wood regretted it, it could never be recalled.

Alstrom, sitting there beneath the electric light which threw a dazzling lustre across his yellow hair and brought out every line in his curiously old-young face, repressed a smile with difficulty. In spite of everything, the habit of a lifetime was bound to show itself now and then. Wood had touched his gold-buttoned cap too often ever to lose entirely the mental habit which accompanied the gesture. This was the first time that the old attitude had shown itself. It was for Alstrom to make sure that it should not be the last.

"Wood," he said quietly; "there is no especial sense in your acting like a brute, or even like a fool. We made a bargain, I know, a bargain that is hard on me. However, the bargain does not imply that we are to trudge about the streets, handcuffed together by a bond of your own forging. That would be the quickest way for you to lose the advantage you have gained. You try to make me out a criminal; you forget you can be tried for blackmail, or else for acting as accessory after the fact. Your own safety, then, is not too sure.

It depends solely upon me. Therefore I advise you to walk with some circumspection, yourself. Above all, don't try to push the game too hard. If you do, you will ruin yourself. If your sister wants you in New York, it is my notion you would better go, to-night. If you won't do that — and it would be a long way the best and safest thing for you — then be civil and sit down. Thanks to Mr. Mansfield, who asked me to his room, this afternoon, there is a business deal on foot which may be of some interest to you."

An hour later, when Wood left Alstrom's room and sought his own, his manner was jubilant, his brow serene. The jubilance endured the night and tinctured his words to Alstrom, as they left the breakfast-room together, the next morning.

"Well, good-bye," he said carelessly. "It's a fine morning, and my holiday is about over, so I think I'll spend it out of doors. I've never been to Levis yet, in all the time I've spent here. I think I will try it on, this morning. See you lunch. Good-bye." And, hat in hand, he left the house, without a backward glance.

Alstrom had smiled a little, as he went his way. After all, the untrained man was very like a boy, angry at one instant, peacefully forgetful of his anger at the next. And then, straightway and in spite of all his training, Alstrom showed his own boylikeness by forgetting Wood entirely in the mere intoxication of the clear, crisp noon, of Denise's pretty eyes and of Denise's cajoling laugh.

"Pierre and I were talking of you, only yesterday," Denise informed him, as they halted on the Ramparts to stare out upon the valley at their feet.

Deliberately Alstrom rested his elbow on one of the aged guns and turned to face her.

"And saying?" he queried lazily.

Denise studied the road across the Beauport Flats with diligent absorption.

"Oh, pardon; I was inattentive," she said at length. "We were saying that we could not see what keeps you here."

"Why should I go away from this?" Alstrom's gesture included all things from the distant blue mound of Cap Tourmente to Denise at his side.

"Why should you stay?" she asked him.

He laughed. For some reason he could not stop to analyze, the inherent boyishness of his mood refused to be downed. Besides, it was good to loiter there on the gray old bastion in company with a girl like Denise. His eyes sought hers, and merriment was in their clear, gray depths.

"Business," he answered her; "— and — pleasure."

Demurely she shook her dark little head.

"The business seems to be quite as imaginary as — the pleasure is," she told him.

He laughed again. It was months since he had felt so boyishly irresponsible, so ready to take the passing moment at its face value and nothing more.

"The one is coming soon. The other is already here," he assured her.

"Truly?" She raised her arching brows. "I see no signs of either, and you neglect to tell me which is which."

"Next Monday, thanks to Mr. Mansfield, I go into the B. T. office as assistant engineer."

Denise resumed her study of the distant bit of road-

way, outlined amid the trees by a double rank of roofs.

"Mr. Mansfield is always kind," she murmured. "However, you do not say whether his plan is that of business or of pleasure."

A cloud crept suddenly across the sun, blotting the vivid reds and yellows into a dingy brown, as Alstrom answered gravely, —

"Both, I hope."

The sun flashed out again, and with it the yellows and the reds; but Alstrom's mood had lost its lustre. Instead, frowning and with clouded eyes, he stood leaning on the gun, regretting his trivial words of a moment before. It had been good to loiter there, dallying with the gay little French girl beside him, good to fall again into the light banter he had been wont to use of old. And it was long, so long since he had done so. But, slightly and unseen by Denise, he shook his head. The girl was young and gay and very beautiful. She could choose her toys with care. What right had he, then, to offer her, even for her amusement, the shattered fragments of his broken life? He turned away to hide his sober face, and, as he turned, his eyes rested, half unseeing, upon the long straight slope across the river, the long, steep slope by which the Levis tram leaves the water level to mount into the upper town.

Full two hours earlier, Wood had stepped into a car at the foot of that same slope. Far up the grade, another car was dragging after it a stone-heaped trailer; and the grinding din of their wheels came down the slope, to mingle discordantly with the roar of the blast furnaces beside the track, and with the heavy hum of escaping steam from the locomotive on the rails near

by. It was still a moment or two before the hour for starting; and Wood, the sole inmate of the car, settled himself in a forward corner and attacked his thumb nail with a frowning impatience. Out on the platform, conductor and motorman were engaged in lively gossip, punctuating their voluble French with noisy laughs and glancing now and then, the while, at the stranger within the car. The glances irritated Wood, and the laughs increased the irritation. Understanding no word of French, he had a vague fear lest he was the subject of their mirth. His irritation increased, though he settled himself stolidly to wait, applying himself to his thumb nail more industriously than ever.

Then the bell sounded, the brake loosened and the car slid upward along the level slope. Wood, lounging in his corner, forgot his nail, forgot his passing irritation, as he gazed out at the scene before him, the loveliest, perhaps, that the western continent can show. Across the wide valley lay the gray-walled town, creeping up from the huddled roofs along the river, up across the red-brown surface of the Cape, up to the topmost line against the sky where Laval's spires dominated the gray roofs, where the copper turrets of the Château dominated the slender spires, where the great gray bulk of the Citadel frowned down, dominating turret and spire and roof and wall by the sole might of its fluttering square of vivid scarlet, barred across with blue and white, throwing its message of mastership down to the banded tri-colour which floated among the Laval spires, a good hundred feet below. Far in the northern foreground, the picture was striped by the long smoky banners rising from the funnels of an *Empress*, lying beside the dark red pier. And, out on

the broad azure sheet of the river, midway between the nearer shore and the distant cliff, one wee white sail caught the sunlight and flashed its dazzle into Wood's eyes, as he sat bending forward, his clumsy soul so lost in the beauty about him that he took no heed of the throbbing, grinding, thudding murmur which came ever nearer down the slope above.

"*Sautez!*"

"*Monsieur, sautez!*"

Two shrieks, high-pitched with fear, rang out above the thudding hum. The words took no message to Wood's uncomprehending ears; their tone said much. Half starting to his feet, he raised his eyes but just in time to see the two men leaping madly from the car, to see the great, stone-laden trailer, broken from its coupling, come thundering down the track towards them and but a score of feet away.

It took an instant for his brain to grasp the fact before him, another instant to brace himself to meet what must befall. Then the wild terror vanished from his face, he dropped back and folded his stubby, hairy hands.

"Good God, forgive us all!" was all he had time to say, before the crash came and silenced him.

His hands were still clasped when, after an hour of breathless toil, they pried the shattered car away and bore him, breathing but faintly, to the ambulance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THERE on the bastion beside Denise Allard, the news came to Alstrom. And, listening to the words of the uniformed man before him, words which seemed slowly to detach themselves from a whirling din of sound, strange to say Alstrom's first thought was not of himself, nor yet of Wood; but rather of the girl at his side whose slender, gray-gloved hands, it seemed to him, might even yet succeed in fitting together into one wellnigh perfect whole the pieces of his broken life. Else, why had he felt, even at their first meeting, the strong touch of her personality? In the grim economy of nature, it was no common thing, he told himself, to have such force exerted to no useful end. Alstrom was no fatalist; nevertheless, in this moment of supreme emotion, his thought dashed swiftly backward to that morning at Sainte Anne, and he felt assured that Denise Allard and he had traversed the years of their young lives in search of some such meeting. Wholly powerless though he was, indeed, had always been, to explain her charm for him, he yet was ready to admit that that charm had existed only for some definite end. And that definite end could mean one thing, one only. An hour before, he would have shrunk from such belief. Now he accepted it, and fell back, dazzled, before the light that shone around it. He pulled him-

self together with a strong effort, and lifted his eyes to see the shocked surprise and pity in Denise's face.

"At the Hôtel Dieu?" he asked the man mechanically. "You took him there at once? He will have good care; I was there, myself, less than a month ago. Oh, the one at Levis? Very well. Of course, I shall come."

"Is he badly hurt?" Denise faltered, for this was the first time that death had come even so near to her young life.

The man touched his cap. From his uniform, Alstrom judged him to be some substitute conductor, taken from his car and sent in search of aid.

"He's badly hurt," he said, with bald brevity which yet held its note of kindness. "The car was crushed in on top of him, and I'm afraid — "

Alstrom made an imperative gesture of warning. The girl's whitening cheeks showed that she had no courage for details. Instead, —

"How did you find me here?" Alstrom asked. "At least, what sent you to find me at all?"

The man's hand once more sought his cap, removed it and stood twirling it upon his other fist.

"The motorman of that car knew where he boarded, being friends, as you might say, with one of the housemaids. He sent me there; they sent me to a place on Peter Street, and there I met a man who saw you heading for the Ramparts. At least, it sounded like you," the man made hasty qualification of his statement. "They said I'd know you anywhere, you looked so much like one of them women they call a soda-blond."

The sudden nervous titter of Denise at his elbow was sufficient cause to send the hot blood into Alstrom's

cheeks. It had not ebbed entirely when he turned to her, to say, with a slight stiffness, —

"I fear I must leave you, Mademoiselle Allard. Our pleasant walk has ended in a tragedy." Then, as he strode away, "Most of my pleasures have had a trick of doing that," he added bitterly.

An hour later, he was called from the bed where Wood's broken body lay awaiting, in merciful unconsciousness, its one inevitable end, to the office of the hospital where an agent of the tram had asked for him. On the way, however, he was called aside by a message that some one wished him on the telephone.

"Alstrom, old man," rang in Tony's cheery voice; "I've just heard the news. Is it as bad as they say? Sorry, confoundedly sorry! Can I be of any use, if I come over? I've time, you know, and I may know the local ropes a bit better than you do. No? Well, then, I'll drop in on you, this evening. Call me up before, if I can be of any use. The maids at the house will know where I'm to be found. I'll make a point of leaving them word. Be sure you call me up, when I can be of any use." And the receiver clicked to place and Alstrom went his way, reflecting how exactly that last phrase stood for the text of Tony Mansfield's life.

The man in the office rose, as Alstrom entered the room.

"I represent the tram company," he said briefly and with no preface. "This is a shocking thing, and, of course, we can't deny our blame. It is too late, though, to go into that now. I came up to ask if I could be of any help."

"Nothing, I think." Alstrom's tone had regained the mechanical, metallic ring it had held at the first.

Since he had left Denise, standing alone upon the gray old bastion, her slim figure outlined against the golden noonday air, he had walked and talked like the merest automaton, going through certain conventional processes of mind and body, yet all the time dazed by the suddenness of this thing which had come upon him. And the daze lay on him, wrapping him about like a thick cloud which was cut at two points by shafts of dazzling light. And one point showed him Denise, and the other showed his freedom. Only for a moment had the bewilderment yielded, during his talk with Tony Mansfield. It came rushing back again at the click of the hung-up receiver.

The man before him seemed to find nothing unusual in his manner. Experience in similar accidents had taught him that nerve shock could show itself as much by perfect quiet as by hysteria that made the welkin ring with sobs; and there was ample occasion for nerve shock in the case. It is no light thing to have one's comrade meet his end by accident, alone and in an instant's time.

"I am sorry," he repeated; "sorry for him; but almost more sorry for you. Poor chap! His suffering is nearly done for." And the grave, kindly tone suggested that Alstrom's was but just begun.

With increasing difficulty, Alstrom tore his mind away from the increasingly insistent consciousness of his own newly-won freedom, and from all which that freedom implied.

"I wish I could be of use," the man was iterating. "They say you both are strangers here. Can't I at least help you in sending off the messages?"

"The messages?" Alstrom echoed dully.

"Yes, the telegrams to his people."

With a suddenness that astounded him and made him afraid, Alstrom's bewilderment rushed from him. It left his mind clear and working rapidly as never before in his whole life. Later on, in looking back upon that hour, it seemed to Alstrom that generations of training, of education and of the self-control that comes of cleanly living had forced his faculties to answer to the abrupt strain put upon them. Until that instant, he had been too much engrossed in the present place and time, too much absorbed in trying to realize its effect upon his life, to have any conception of the numberless details involved. And any single one of these details might bring to wreck the fabric which he had been constructing upon the basis of Wood's death. He looked up into the face of the man before him.

"There will be no telegrams, I fear," he said.

"Not to his people?"

"I have no idea where his people are."

The man's face showed his surprise.

"But you were here together?"

Calmly Alstrom stretched out his hand and drew up a chair, marking, as he did so, the perfect steadiness of his own extended fingers.

"Yes, and no. We reached here at the same time; chance threw us together. That is really all."

"He told you of his home, though, of his plans?" Even in his astonishment, the man betrayed incredulity.

Alstrom shook his head, as he seated himself where the light fell full upon his face, full upon the masses of his tawny hair.

"He was surprisingly reticent. I really know almost

nothing of the man," he said, and, as he spoke, he rejoiced that, in so far, at least, he was within the limits of the truth. "It has been a curious case, from start to finish. As long as he lived, it seemed hardly fair to talk too much about it. But now — "

"Now, you can dismiss that phase of the question," the man retorted gravely, and, as he spoke, his keen eyes searched Alstrom's face as if he were seeking to penetrate behind an opaque mask.

Alstrom met his look squarely.

"I know," he said. "And it seems rather beastly to rake it all up now. Why can't we leave it as it is; at least, until the poor fellow is really dead? I give you my word of honour that I know nothing about the man's people."

"Is he married?"

"I have no idea. He never spoke of having a wife."

With frowning intentness, the man fitted his hands together, thumb to thumb, finger to finger. When at length he spoke, it was with his eyes fastened on the hands.

"Mr. Alstrom, I have no wish to be curious; but this is an odd story. Do you mind telling me exactly what you know about this man?"

Alstrom hesitated for a carefully-measured interval, before he answered.

"I am willing, only it sounds a bit disloyal — now. In fact, I wish I had told about it sooner, while he was alive to stand for the truth of the story. And he would have stood for it, too. He was not a man to mince matters, when it came to a final issue. Of course, I knew people were wondering what had brought us together; Mr. Mansfield wondered, yesterday, when I

fairly crammed the man down his throat. But still —"
He fell silent, as though lost in reverie.

"I think, Mr. Alstrom, the time has come for you to speak."

Alstrom seemed to rouse himself at the words.

"Yes, perhaps it has," he assented. "After all, it was a good deal a case of sentiment. Wood was — not exactly cultivated. He was uneducated, untrained, blunt and a little rough in his speech and manners. But, in a case like ours, such things don't count for much. I saw him first, last summer, on a train coming into Montreal. He had been put in the berth over me, in the course of the night. Next morning early, he did me a good turn or two, the sort of things one can do on a journey, and we began to talk a little. It came out that we were bound for the same place, and had the same plan of spending a few days at Sainte Anne first. I couldn't get a seat in the parlour car, coming down here. He either couldn't or didn't try, so it happened that we sat together, all the way, and, at night, we both of us went to the Regina. After that — It seems so paltry to be telling it now," he broke off abruptly.

"Go on. I am interested." And the face gave accent to the words.

"It is only another case of what can develop from a travelling acquaintance. The fellow seemed to — to — well, if you must have it, to take to me." Alstrom laughed shamefacedly. "I — didn't especially reciprocate; but it would have been hard to shake him off for no real reason. In a sense, we were in the same boat, both strangers to Quebec and bound to make the place our home. He was in search of business. I am ordered up here by a brute of a doctor who wants

me to try it farther north. You may know how it was, that I was taken ill almost at once. That was Wood's chance, and he made the most of it. You never saw such abject devotion." Alstrom bent forward in his chair, and his gray eyes lighted, as at the memory. "He was with me when I went under, all at once and with no warning. He picked me up, took me back to the Regina, ordered a doctor and all the rest, and paid the bills out of a thinner pocket-book than you and I are used to carry, paid the bills, and they were heavy ones, when there was small chance that I would ever pull through to square up the account. And then in town — The nun at the Hôtel Dieu told me afterwards that there wasn't a day in all those weeks that he didn't go to see me, and sit beside my bed, and even try to quiet me when I was delirious and talked things and called out for an American voice to answer me. Do you wonder, man, that I've stuck to him since then? Do you wonder that, even if he hadn't had my chance, I've tried to get him friends and work? And now —" Alstrom stopped speaking and shut his teeth, while his face went deadly white.

"I understand," the man said kindly. "You've stuck to him loyally, and, now the end has come, you're all done up. In a way, it must have been hard for you both; it wasn't a usual sort of situation, a bit galling now and then. Thanks for telling me. And he never talked about his people?"

Alstrom shook his head.

"We never seemed to get into that phase of things. I fancy our lives had been too unlike to make it a pleasure to compare notes."

"It's likely. Still, I wish you knew. However,

he must have had some papers. Where was his room?"

Alstrom drew a long, slow breath. It was plain that his nervous force was ebbing.

"Must that be overhauled?" he asked wearily.

"It's the only way. Still, there's no reason that it should come on you."

Alstrom rose.

"I can, if it must be done," he answered steadily. "I've an idea that the poor fellow would rather have me the one to ransack his things. It — it's a bit hard, though."

"If I were with you, I might be able to save you something," the man offered, plainly uneasy at the still whiteness of the face before him, at the deep lines which had graven themselves about the boyish lips during the last half hour.

But Alstrom shook his head.

"No," he said. "I can do it. And it is about the last thing left for me to do for him."

The man also rose and held out his hand.

"Mr. Alstrom, we Englishmen are blunt. I hardly know how to say it; but I am rather inclined to admire you," he said kindly.

But Alstrom only nodded without speaking. Then he turned away.

Leaving the hospital behind him, he took a passing tram bound for the ferry, closing his eyes as it came to the spot where a gang of men were still working to remove the fragments of the shattered cars, crossed the ferry and mounted the slope towards home. Downstairs in the hall, he paused long enough to explain what was before him and to ask a key to Wood's room.

Then, key in hand, he climbed the familiar stairway and halted outside the door closed by an owner destined to open it no more. For a moment, standing there outside, he faltered, and a wave of physical sickness swept over him, sickness at that which he had already done, sickness at that which still remained for him to do. Then he drew his hand across his forehead, lifted his head, threw back his shoulders and went inside.

The room seemed curiously still to him, curiously charged with a sense of Wood's personality. He had almost never entered the place. Wood had been the one to seek him, not he Wood; and their conferences, for the most part, had taken place in Alstrom's larger, better-lighted room. Either the events of the morning, or the location of the room, looking down into a sunless, unlighted court, cast a chilly gloom over the place; and the chill, striking to Alstrom's bones, sent him across the floor to throw open the window to the warm afternoon air. For an instant he lingered there, waiting for the breeze to sweep in and remove the heavy perfume in which Wood had been wont to indulge profusely. The reek of it smothered Alstrom; it brought back a too vivid picture of the man himself, standing at bay and biting at his thumb nail. Alstrom glanced about the room. The personality was everywhere: in the scattered garments, in the plain black comb and yellow-backed brush on the dressing-table, in the absence of the little refinements which, to Alstrom, were mere needs of every day. On a corner of the dressing-table, propped up behind a bottle of cheap musk, was the photograph of a woman, bold, pretty and dressed in the fashion of a dozen years before. Alstrom took it up, glanced at the back, then laid it down. An amateur

print, the card on which it was mounted bore no name.

The room was bare of books, bare of knicknacks; there was not a letter to be seen. Alstrom glanced along the mantel, opened the table drawers; then, shutting his teeth and mastering his aversion as best he could, he fumbled in the pockets of the clothes about him. Everything was empty. Not a scrap of writing could be found. He remembered now that the first man had told him, out on the bastion hours before, that Wood's pockets had been empty of all things which would have helped to identify him. Only the trunk remained, and that, a touch assured him, was securely locked.

Fast and ever faster Alstrom felt his nerve leaving him. It was all a hideous nightmare. They had parted after breakfast. They had planned to meet at luncheon. And now, in mid-afternoon, here was he, alone, rifling the room of Wood, his comrade and, still worse, his enemy. Instinctively, before he bent to tear away the trunk lock, he glanced over his shoulder, as if expecting to see Wood standing there inside the close-locked door. Then the breeze flung one of the shutters out with a clatter of its leaves, and Alstrom started backward at the sudden sound.

However, it must be done, and done soon, before Tony Mansfield got wind of his being there in the house and came to help him in his grewsome task. He bent his strength to the lock, pried it away, dragged open the straps and lifted the lid of the trunk.

Inside, he had not far to seek. The upper tray held a little heap of papers. Letters were there, and memoranda, and packets of small account books. An address book lay on top of all, strangely incongruous in its

bright scarlet morocco cover, the sort of an address book that one buys to give away. Alstrom took it up, glanced at one or two of its lettered pages; then, turning abruptly, he crossed the room, tested the lock of the door and slid the bolt.

Returning, he gathered up all the papers in his hands, spread them on the table, drew up a chair and sat down to read. One by one, he took them up; one by one, he laid them back again. And, with each one laid aside, the lines upon his face grew deeper, the hair upon his forehead clung in more heavy locks. At last he reached the end. Then, resting his arms upon the table, he bowed his head on his clasped hands and sat there, motionless.

His brain was in a turmoil; his head was throbbing until his temples ached with the jar of the pounding blood; the ringing of his ears shut out all sounds of life that drifted in through the wide-open casement. Wood had been a silent man, for the most part, silent and strangely reticent. Why not? What need for him to speak, when there in his room, ready to his hand at any instant, lay all the written records which could bear upon the reason of his journey to Quebec? It was all complete: names, dates, amounts, addresses even, and here and there, affixed to some small detail which yet supported untold larger ones, an affidavit. It was all complete, indisputable, pitiless.

His head on his hands, Alstrom pondered deeply, swiftly. For all the throbbing pain across his temples, he faced the present crisis and looked beyond it towards the future. And the future stretched before him, parting in two divergent paths, the one a great white way, straight and full of sunshine, down which he

loitered with some one — was it Denise? — by his side; the other empty and steep and full of peril, up which he climbed alone. And, at the parting of the ways, marking the angle as a milestone marks the road one travels, there lay a little heap of papers: letters and memoranda and, on top of all, a small address book bound in gay morocco.

He sat there motionless, until it seemed to him that hours had passed away. His mind went leaping forward along the paths before him, testing now this one, now that, choosing the one and then the other, only to reject them in their turn. At length he rose, stood for a moment as one who scarcely sees the objects about him, and fumbled with the papers. Then his jaws shut hard and tight, digging two deeper creases in his wan, white cheeks, and, just as hard and tight, his fingers shut upon the heap of papers. He tore the papers into fragments, the fragments into shreds. Then, stooping down, he removed his shoes, packed the shreds into them and once more pulled the shoes on his feet. Then, stepping slowly and with pain, his shoulders bowed together, he turned about and left the room, upsetting, as he did so, the bottle of musk on the dressing-table just inside the door.

His choice was made. Thorne Alstrom's steps, forsaking the narrow path, were turning towards the great white way which he had seen stretched out before his mental gaze.

"No," he said to the people waiting in the halls below. "There's not a thing in his room to give a clue of any sort."

CHAPTER NINE

PERCHED on the very edge of Sillery cliff whose red-rock foundations are washed by the great blue river, the church of Saint Columba for the once had no need to regret the falling twilight. The church is well-named. Resting between the dark pine grove above and the shining river beneath, it seems brooding like a dove above the valley where the Saint Lawrence has cut its way down through the red-rock cliffs, down past the twin cities, down and down to the distant sea. As a rule, twilight is Saint Columba's golden hour. Then the light turns from yellow to rose, from rose to deep, deep violet. Then the clear air draws the eye away, past the busy timber coves, past the line of low white houses and on to the spot where the wooded banks are scarred by the jutting outlines of the mighty bridge which one day is to arch the stream. Now they stand out sharply, two arms of open lattice, vainly striving to join hands across the dappled sunset sky. Or, turning the other way, one looks down the stream, above the rotting piers of former coves which stretch out across the sand left naked by the falling tide, above the chill shade which already broods over the river banks, to where, upon the upper level, the level bars of sunshine catch the light of factory windows and are thrown back sharply to meet the eye, to where, yet

farther down the river, the twin cities on the cliffs, wrapped in one blanket of purple haze, seem meeting across the narrowed stream, the one capped with its gray convent walls, the other crowned with the Citadel bearing its blood-red flag.

Sunset is Saint Columba's golden hour. At no other time is she half so lovely as when she rests there, quiet and lonely, guarding the peaceful river while she awaits the fall of night. Nightfall, as a rule, blots out the picture entirely, reducing as it does river and cliff, pine wood and timber cove and distant city, all to one monotonous level of darkness spotted here and there with lines of electric lamps; and the monotony endures until Saint Columba's windows flash back a greeting to the morning sun, as it comes lazily up above the heights of Levis.

On this particular night, however, the unchanging rule of years was broken. For just fifty years, Saint Columba had brooded on her cliffs, and now she was celebrating this, her so-called golden wedding, with lights and songs and feasting. From spire-tip to eaves, from eaves to the ground, the whole building was wreathed in lines of tiny electric lamps. Other lines of electric lamps stretched down, arbour-wise, across the lawn to the very verge of the cliff where had gathered every parishioner who owned a voice, to help swell the song of welcome which should greet the boat as it neared the little pier.

Already a score of carriages had deposited their loads of guests from town at the wide-open presbytery door; and a trio of omnibuses had discharged their human freight outside the entrance to the lawn. A few thrifty souls promptly made good their chance to get

a seat in the schoolroom where the speeches were to be made. The greater number, however, scorning the opportunity for future edification for the sake of present excitement, joined the crowd on the edge of the cliff, singing and shouting by turns, as they watched for the low-moving lights of the steamer to show themselves around the jutting wall of Cape Diamond.

Quite of course, the Mansfields had been among the carriage people. For three generations of Quebec life, it had been a matter of accepted tradition that the Mansfields should have cards to everything that happened, from a Spencer Wood reception to a Saint Roch's millinery opening. They were universally acknowledged to be in the extreme van of the leaders of the city, and their place was well deserved, won as it was by neither wealth nor politics nor office-seeking. They were just The Mansfields. That was deemed all-sufficient.

Moreover, as a rule, they accepted all their invitations, accepted them in just the spirit they were given. They found their reward, for they usually succeeded in picking out some point of interest in even the most sterile functions. The golden wedding of Saint Columba, however, could scarcely be included in that category. Accordingly, directly after dinner, that night, the great, old-fashioned carriage had come around to the door to carry the Mansfields and their guests, the Hardwickes, to the scene of the festivity.

"You'll really find it worth your while, Miss Hardwicke," Tony had said, when he had gone to deliver his mother's invitation for that night. "Here in town, they do things with more pomp and ceremony; but it's not half so jolly as it will be out there, with the

country people singing on the cliff and letting off squibs and things by way of beating time."

And Gertrude, as she stepped out of the carriage and paused on the wide steps of the presbytery to look and listen, admitted that Tony was right. It certainly was jolly, very jolly.

Impulsively she turned back to face him as, his mother and Mrs. Hardwicke safely landed on the steps where Louisa had been already joined by the faithful Byng, he had halted at her side.

"What a spectacle!" she said, with the eager enthusiasm which Tony had learned to count as half her charm. "We Anglo-Saxon Protestants can't do anything to equal this."

Tony shook his head.

"No; it takes these Johnnies to do that; their blood is warmer. Ours has chilled, and it sends us to logic, not artistic emotion, in our religion. We doubtless are in the right; and yet I can't see why this shouldn't be just as good, as a saving principle. Anyway, it's much more vital to them than ours to us. Fancy our wardens going forth to sing songs and let off squibs in the cathedral close!"

"Fancy yourself counting off your prayers on a rosary!" Gertrude made retort. "Fancy any friend of yours doing it, for the matter of that!"

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, if you're going to balk at that, you'll have to cut the Allards; that's all," he told her.

"Do they?"

"Rather. I've often been at the Basilica with Henri."

"And doesn't it get on your nerves?"

"Why should it? I don't expect to get on his nerves, when I say the litany in the Cathedral. It's which and t'other, only I suspect T'other is a long way more devout than Which. Henri Allard's personality is what counts, Miss Hardwicke. It's nothing to me whether he achieves it by the Cathedral, or by a rosary, or even by joss sticks."

For a moment, she studied his face thoughtfully. Then her eyes fell to the group gathered on the edge of the lawn below.

"You are right, of course," she answered, and her reply held its note of regret. "However — I was born in Boston, and my middle name is Standish; and I can't quite understand."

"It will come in time," Tony reassured her. "Remember, I've been brought up in the midst of it all."

But Gertrude shook her head.

"I wasn't," she replied; "and that makes all the difference. I truly mean not to be narrow; but it is only a spectacle to me, something quite apart from my life."

"I suppose you are in the right of it," Tony assented gravely. "I wish you needn't feel so about it, though, for it makes you lose quite a lot." And Gertrude recognized in his voice a note of honest regret. "Come," he added, an instant later; "there comes the boat. See? Away down there below that pair of red lights. Shall we follow the maters, or go down to the landing and share the sensation of coming ashore?"

It was as Tony had said; far down the river the little steamer was ploughing slowly towards them against the falling tide and against the evening wind which came sweeping down the river, sharp and chill. It

cut across the surface of the water, fretting it into waves that leaped and hissed towards the steamer's lights. It cut across the crowded decks until the crowd parted and scattered, shivering, for shelter in the cabin or at the stern, leaving the forward deck deserted save for a trio who sat, huddled together for warmth, on a bench drawn up across the very point of the bow.

"Frozen, Denise?" Pierre was asking, as his sister pulled the rug higher across her shoulders, then lost her hold on it again, as she made a snatch at her wide black hat.

"Not at all. What matter if I am?" she demanded pluckily, although the wind caught her words and forced them backwards down her throat once more.

Pierre laughed, as he bent forward to hold in place a corner of the flapping rug.

"You are sure you would not rather go inside?"

"Inside!" Her laugh was wholly disdainful. "It would be foolish to go inside, and so lose half of that for which we came. The lights are so beautiful. And see! There is the first squib. And another! Look! And now the songs!" Her excitement mounted, as a squib fizzed up across the sky, to be answered by a shrill blast from the steamer's whistle, while down on the night wind came the lilt of the high, sweet voices of the waiting chorus.

Pierre checked her swift speech, lifting his hand for silence, as the song came clear and ever clearer to their ears. Then, as the boat turned to make her landing, Saint Columba lay in utter darkness for an instant. The next instant, high upon the summit of the spire, a fiery cross blazed out upon the night, poised there alone in all the majesty of its world-old symbolism, while the crowd

beneath stayed their songs and held their breath to gaze. And then, a moment after, the songs burst forth anew, clearer and more jubilant than they had been before, as down across the dark there flamed out once again the lines of light, linking the cross on high to the common ground beneath, the ground on which they stood.

Under cover of the bedlam of sound which had burst out about them, Pierre bent forward once more and spoke across his sister.

" Is it not worth your while, Mr. Alstrom ? " he asked of the man at Denise's other hand.

And Alstrom, gazing up at the church outlined in flame and topped with its flaming cross, listening to the shrill, sweet chorus which came down to them above the sounds of escaping steam, of short, hoarse orders, of the babble of the disembarking crowd, even as Gertrude Hardwicke had done before him, admitted that it was well worth the while. Unlike Gertrude Hardwicke, however, Alstrom found nothing at all incomprehensible in the sight. Rather than that, his brain was throbbing in full response to the mood of the throng about him, of the slender, blue-eyed boy at his side.

It was now just five days since, over in the Levis Hôtel Dieu, Wood had glided by imperceptible stages from the merciful unconsciousness of pain to the yet more merciful unending sleep of death. His poor, crushed body could have known but one sort of awakening; doctor and nurse and Thorne Alstrom had been only thankful when the danger of such a wakening was at an end.

Two men had been awaiting Thorne Alstrom, when

he came out through the door of the Hôtel Dieu into the clear midday sun. Tony Mansfield was loitering to and fro just outside the gate; but, seated on the bottom step, his hands in his pockets and his blue eyes fixed upon the clouds above him with a tranquillity which suggested that he had come prepared to wait indefinitely, there on the bottom step was Pierre Allard.

That day, one of Pierre's not infrequent holidays, had been set aside for a climb up Cap Tourmente with a party of his comrades at Sainte Anne. Instead, late the afternoon before, Pierre had changed his plans. In the course of showing the treasures of the shrine to a party of belated tourists, from their futile jokes regarding the dangers of their ride back to town, he had gathered the news of an accident at Levis. Even then, he had paid scant attention, till the name *Wood* had reached his ears, coupled, an instant later, with the more unusual name of *Alstrom*. After that, Pierre's questions came fast; and, as soon as he could dismiss the tourists and snap into place the bolts on the great yellow shutters of the treasure case, he went in search of his friends to say he could not be with them on the morrow. Instead of that, he applied for two-day leave of absence, took the first train for Quebec, and, later, crossed to Levis.

Strange to say, it was to Pierre that Alstrom turned most eagerly. Tony was bound to be a support and comfort; but, in a sense, he had counted on Tony from the start, counted upon him in more ways than he would have cared to analyze. Tony had detested Wood at sight, had made no bones at all of his full measure of detestation; and Alstrom felt assured that, in the weeks to come, Tony would be the last man to inquire for the

details of Wood's passing, to ask what broken ties he might have left behind. Tony had a trick of avoiding disagreeable subjects, except when they were forced upon him; and Alstrom was in a mood to give thanks for Tony's habit. For the rest, he had counted on Tony's coming to him as soon as he left the Hôtel Dieu. Tony had telephoned over, twice that morning, and his second message had made his intention plain. Pierre Allard, however, was a wholly unexpected person; and Alstrom could not fail to be touched by this unlooked-for proof of the boy's loyal liking. Moreover, lurking in the boy's dark blue eyes was an expression which betokened a minor chord somewhere within his nature; and, to Thorne Alstrom, worn out with the sleepless night which had followed the long weeks of strain, the long moments of mental agony alone in Wood's abandoned room, worn out with a sort of vague sorrow for his comrade's end and for something more tragic by far than any sorrow, to Thorne Alstrom this faint suggestion of a minor key was more acceptable, just then, than Tony Mansfield's buoyant cheer. And, while both men looked on life with eyes which saw only its better side, Tony's gaze was directed by his avowed distaste for facing the lower side of things, Pierre Allard's was the steady outlook of the pure-minded boy who recognized the existence of no other way. Liking Thorne Alstrom well, his liking could hold no reservations. His simple young creed demanded that all men should be as sinless as he hoped to keep himself. He knew there were others, of course; but they were not the sort with whom he came in contact. Moreover, a man with Alstrom's eyes must be his own best moral sponsor.

He rose, as Alstrom, worn and wan, came out into the pitilessly gay light of the October noon.

"I heard you were in trouble," he said simply; "and I came to see if I could be of any use."

And it was with his hand still resting on the boy's shoulder that Alstrom crossed the lawn and greeted Tony at the gate.

That noon, Pierre lunched with Alstrom, and again, next day. Late the next afternoon, the second afternoon that they had spent together in Alstrom's room, he took his leave; and it seemed to Alstrom that, taking his leave, he took the sunshine with him. Left alone, the room was as if haunted by Wood's presence. Wood's face seemed looking out at him from every corner; and though it was not yet dark, he rose and snapped on the electric lights, resolved to abolish the gloom at any cost. It was a distinct relief when the maid brought up a message from Mrs. Hardwicke, asking him to come down to have a cup of tea. Even Mrs. Hardwicke's purling was a wholesome break in the thoughts which rushed through his brain in the same unbroken sequence they had followed, full three score times before. They started from a twinge of pain in a blister on his heel; and they ended — But, after the first time, Thorne Alstrom took measures to forestall that end.

Before he had gone away, Pierre had arranged that Alstrom should join himself and Denise, four nights later, and go with them to Sillery. Pierre had suggested the plan to Denise, the evening before, and Denise had given quick assent to the plan. It had been late, that night, when the brother and sister had ended their talk, and the talk had mainly concerned itself with

Alstrom: with his patient endurance of Wood's peculiarities, with the shock and strain he must have suffered, all those last two days. Their talk ended in one common verdict, that it would be cruel to leave Alstrom quite alone in the days of adjustment which were bound to follow such a shock as that had been. Denise would once more urge Henri to call upon him often. In the meantime, she and Pierre would include him in the first plan that lay ready to their hand. That plan, it chanced, was Sillery.

It also chanced that Alstrom had had no glimpse of Gertrude Hardwicke, until he met her in the hall, dressed for the dinner at the Mansfields', that same night. On the afternoon of Mrs. Hardwicke's sending for him, Gertrude had been out at an afternoon reception. In the long, elastic meal hours of the house, it was no uncommon thing for him to miss the girl for days at a time. Now, as he came slowly up the stairs towards the room he had learned to dread so much, a rustle of silken skirts and a gay little laugh betokened Gertrude's presence on the upper landing. She turned at the sound of his footfall, and the gayety left her face, to be replaced by a gentle gravity which Alstrom, an instant before, could never have associated with her hearty, downright personality.

"Mr. Alstrom," she said directly; "it is late for me to say how sorry I have been for you, the past few awful days. Do please believe I have been sorry, though. Mother and I have so wished we might have been of some use." And her hand, large, firm, capable, shut over his fingers, as her eyes met his eyes frankly.

Late that night, alone in his room, her words came back to him, and, as he lay staring at the cracks of

light that forced their way between the wooden shutters, he contrasted their kindly, hearty ring with the sweet, elusive sympathy which had pervaded Denise's manner to him, all that evening. For, unknown even to himself, that evening had marked the beginning of a new epoch in his relations with Denise. It was not that he found her different, sweeter, more attractive. Rather, the difference lay in himself. Denise was the Denise he had known from the first, gentler, perhaps, as if in tacit deference to the sorrow he must be feeling at the loss of his constant comrade. Even in her gentleness, however, her gayety persisted in bubbling to the surface now and then, forming strange contrast to the obvious check she placed upon it, to the little cares she took to make sure of his enjoyment of the pretty scene. To say that he found her more attractive than ever in this new guise of tender womanhood would be distortion of the fact. From that first half-hour at Sainte Anne, now just three months before, he had admitted to himself that, were circumstances different, his swift attraction towards her should have one certain end. Now, of a sudden, circumstances had changed. The attraction was the same, neither greater nor lessened in any way; but now its end, though as remote as ever, yet seemed within his future grasp. From that hour alone in Wood's room, he had made himself free to move towards it steadily and with a firm determination that it should not elude his touch. And, meanwhile, he was free to enjoy the intervening steps to their utmost, to crowd into the intervening days every possible sensation which, the end once reached, should serve to increase its value and their united happiness.

But Pierre, boy fashion, saw nothing of all this. He

only revelled in his sister's dainty fascination, rejoicing, the while, to see the face of his chosen friend lose, bit by bit, its look of strain and suffering, and regain at least a hint of its old boyish charm. For Pierre, the slow yielding of those deep-graven lines meant the entire success of his evening's plan.

Denise, too, was inclined to view the matter in quite as impersonal a light, until Alstrom's voice, low and full of unspoken meaning, forced a hint of the truth upon her, as they loitered on the cliff to listen to the final song. Above them, the cross still blazed on high, witness to a faith wellnigh as aged as the round-topped Laurentides that ringed them round. At their feet, a slender line of humanity was moving down the steps over the face of the bluff on their way to the steamer waiting at the pier. In their ears was the shrill, sweet song of the country folk, sending out a blessing on their departing guests. Then, as their turn came to join the line, Alstrom took Denise's hand to steady her in the sudden change from the glare above to the darkness of the steps below.

"Mademoiselle Allard, I have much to thank you for," he said. "This has been a wonderful evening."

A final squib cut the air beside them, and, in its sudden glare, Alstrom could see her smile, see that it lacked its usual gay mockery.

"I am glad," she said simply. "It is good to know that you like my people and their ways."

"I do like them," he assented slowly; "like them so well that sometimes — "

"Sometimes?" she urged him, almost with timidity.

Even in the darkness, she could feel his steady gaze.

"Sometimes I almost wish," he answered; "that in time they might become my people too."

Her fingers tingled, as she drew them from his firm clasp. Then, of a sudden, the song above them died away. There was an instant of hush; but, before she could rally from his tone which said vastly more than his simple words had done, with a crash, the garrison band, assembled ready on the pier, swung into the opening measures of *God Save the King*.

The crash drowned all spoken words; but not all thoughts. And Denise Allard, her ears throbbing with the well-known refrain, within her girlish soul was fully conscious that, whether she acknowledged the allegiance soon or late, on that night her heart had met its king.

CHAPTER TEN

OVER the quiet of the next Sunday morning, the English Cathedral chime was sending forth its familiar peal. First came the descending scale, followed by a well-known hymn — *Lead, Kindly Light* it was, to-day. Now and then the notes faltered from the true rhythm, with an odd little question in their beat, followed by a slight acceleration, as if the ringer were annoyed at his own loss of time and sought to make amends by bringing the hymn to a close within the allotted number of seconds.

Tony and Byng were on the terrace, sauntering to and fro in the sun, alternately talking and listening to the clashing of the Levis bells. As a rule, Tony felt it a part of his filial duty to drive up to the Cathedral door at his mother's side. To-day, however, he had left to the grizzly-haired old footman the honour of handing his mother out of the carriage, and had made his escape with Byng. In planning his escape, moreover, Tony had had secret thoughts of absenting himself entirely from the morning sermon. His mood, that day, was akin to the sheepishness which had come upon him, hand in hand with his first long suit. Politically speaking, two days before, Tony Mansfield had cast off his knickerbockers. The Lorette election had come and gone, and Tony was the successful candidate.

"It's not that I want to funk the taking in of all the congratulations that are going," Tony explained to Byng, as they tramped away up the level stretch of boards. "I always did take kindly to having a fuss made over me. It's only that every man of them seems to feel it incumbent to come up smiling, his congratulations in one fist and a bit of good advice in the other. If they thought I was going to need so much good advice, why in thunder did they elect me, in the first place?"

"Their scheme seems to have been to elect you first and form you afterwards," Byng suggested placidly.

Tony stopped short and faced him, trying vainly, the while, to thrust his gloved hands into the side pockets of his pocketless Sunday coat-skirts.

"Good Lord, Byng! I'm not so plastic as all that comes to," he exploded in hot wrath.

"So much the more disappointing for them," Byng observed, with unabated placidity.

Tony abandoned his futile search for pockets and resumed his tramp.

"Then they can swallow their disappointment in a hurry, and digest it at their leisure," he retorted. "Now you look here, Byng; I'm no idealist. I thought I knew the real, practical meaning of going in for this sort of thing. I had a dim sort of notion it meant taking a hand in helping your country make itself a clean record. Well."

"Well?" Byng queried, as he swept off his hat before Denise Allard who was making a leisurely turn of the terrace on her way to high mass in the Basilica at ten.

"Well, it doesn't. Your country doesn't amount to a row of pins. Instead, since my calling and election were assured, I've been swamped with requests — only demands is a more correct name for them — with demands to give my attention to this and that, to the paving of a street somewhere near Saint Valier tollgate, to a new coat of gilding for the doorknob of a country post-office somewhere down in the Townships. Half the men I meet, remind me that their votes saved the election for me, and then follow up the reminder with the tidings that they have a friend who needs And So Forth. It's just two days since I was elected, Byng; and already, if you'll believe me, my enthusiasm is a good deal like the knob on the post-office door; the gilding is all worn off from it."

Byng laughed unfeelingly.

"Then apply at headquarters for a new coat. Meanwhile, Tony, I am speechless. I can't sympathize, and I won't say 'Oh, I told you so.'"

"You might as well," Tony responded philosophically. "I know the phrase is trembling on your tongue; spit it out and get rid of it once for all. In the meantime, I wonder if I really am a fool."

"Of course. We all told you that, first off," Byng made candid answer. "Being what you are, Tony, you had no business to go in for this sort of a game. Now you are in, though, you are bound to see it out. However, apart from showing up now and then, when the debate isn't too deadly dull, you don't need to do much about it, after all."

But Tony shook his head.

"Not fair play, Byng. Being in the game, I'm

bound to take a hand. It's not decent to pass out, every deal."

Byng eyed him with disfavour.

" For heaven's name, Tony, don't be an ass, and run to extremes like a sitting hen!" he adjured him.

Tony laughed.

" I'm no barnyard, Byng, any more than you are a master of rhetorical form," he objected.

" Confound the rhetoric! But I say, old man, what do you really mean to do? You don't mean you are going to spout from the rostrum, yourself?" Byng protested.

" Not on the subject of doorknobs for a country post-office, nor yet for a bill restricting the duty on American knitting needles," Tony reassured him. " When the time comes that they discuss something that stirs my soul, I shall probably mount my desk and spout. However, I'll give you warning and let you coach me for the event. By the way, did you hear Allard, last Friday? That fellow is a born orator."

" Born firebrand," Byng made adverse comment. " He will get himself into trouble, some fine day."

" Mayhap," Tony replied serenely. " However, he won't do it for the mere fun of kicking up a shindig. Allard is a fellow who measures every word he speaks by the tapeline of his conscience."

" Tapeline! Foot rule!" Byng said explosively.

" Allard isn't narrow," Tony defended him. " In fact, he is appallingly broad at times, too broad a long way for my measure. By the way, I found him in Alstrom's room, last night; and I'd be willing to bet that it was Denise who sent him."

" Denise?"

"Yes. She likes Alstrom, has always liked him, for the matter of that. On one point, you see, she shows her sense."

Byng reddened.

"But Allard isn't making calls at Denise's order," he objected.

Tony gave him a sidelong glance.

"Byng, there is just one living man whom Denise Allard can't persuade that black is white," he said.

Byng flushed again, for he was painfully conscious of certain events of the previous winter, events he was hoping that Tony had forgotten.

"One. Who's that?"

"Your humble servant."

Prudently Byng changed the subject.

"Strange thing about that fellow, Wood!"

Tony nodded.

"What a sweep he was! But the affair has taken it out of Alstrom to an astounding extent."

And, two hours later, Mrs. Hardwicke was making the selfsame remark to Mrs. Mansfield. Side by side, the two matrons were trundling out the Cap Rouge road in the Mansfield carriage. As a matter of pure theory, their pace was set by a decorous regard for the Sabbath tradition. The cold fact was that the Mansfield horses were so fat that they could scarcely waddle, and that Mrs. Mansfield's notions excluded all use of the whip. However, it was something to be out in the air and off the pavements; and, after the musty decorum of the Cathedral with its tattered flags and its mural tablets, even the Cap Rouge road taken at a walk appeared in the light of a dissipation. Side by side on the box, the coachman and footman were as

alike as two dried old peas, grizzle-haired, but erect as ever. Side by side in the victoria, the two mothers offered strange contrast, Mrs. Mansfield, serene and dainty in her unchanging black, lying back against the cushions, Mrs. Hardwicke, a bundle of nerves and garrulity, sitting bolt upright, partly as an outlet for her feelings, partly out of respect for the rear breadths of her new winter gown.

"Yes," she was assenting. "Poor Mr. Alstrom did take it very hard, all things considered."

"I think my son said that the two men had met by chance?" Mrs. Mansfield's tone was interrogative.

"So I heard. At least, Gertrude did. It seems quite likely, for poor Mr. Wood," in Mrs. Hardwicke's vocabulary, poverty invariably affixed itself to mention of the dead; "always bit his nails. I noticed them, one day, when he held my wool for me, and they were very stubby. And Mr. Alstrom is such a gentleman; he sounds all his final *t*s, and has all the other hallmarks. I really can't see why he should feel the matter so very much."

"It must have been a terrible shock," Mrs. Mansfield suggested, bending forward to bow to a carriage which swept past them with a great glitter of varnish and gold buckles.

"Yes, I suppose so, especially as the first report came that it was Mr. Alstrom himself who was killed. It must be a great shock to one to be reported dead. Gertrude felt it very much."

"Gertrude?"

"Yes. I don't mean she ever was reported dead," Mrs. Hardwicke corrected herself swiftly; "but for him. She likes Mr. Alstrom, and she detested Mr.

Wood; and of course it was a terrible strain on her nerves, the waiting to find out which one of the men had been snatched from our midst at table. Why, just think of it for yourself, Mrs. Mansfield! Only that very morning, the man had eaten at our table. His knife and fork hadn't been taken away, when I came down. He always did seem to me on the very verge of eating with his knife," Mrs. Hardwicke added reminiscently.

Rather ruthlessly, Mrs. Mansfield broke in upon the reminiscence.

"Tony assures me he is quite a gentleman," she observed, and even a less acute ear than that of Mrs. Hardwicke would have discovered that Tony's verdict was final.

"Mr. Wood?" Mrs. Hardwicke's tone bristled with objections.

"No; Mr. Alstrom. Tony called the other man a beastly sweep." Mrs. Mansfield's deprecating little laugh set off the epithet in quotes. "But he likes Mr. Alstrom. Louisa likes him, too."

Swiftly Mrs. Hardwicke assumed the defensive.

"So does Gertrude," she said a little tartly; "and Gertrude is so sensitive in all her tastes that I count a good deal on her opinion. Of course, she and Mr. Alstrom have seen a great deal of each other, this last month; and they have grown such good friends. In fact, it is a long, long time since I have seen Gertrude such good friends with any man."

But Mrs. Mansfield's mind flew to her Tony, to the inevitable disparagement implied in her companion's phrase. Deliberately she raised her bow and aimed her shaft.

"That is the great annoyance of life in a boarding-

house," she sighed, as she arranged the folds of her widow's veil. "One has to be courteous to all sorts of people, and, if one has a daughter — " She left the phrase hanging in suspension.

Mrs. Hardwicke rallied to the defence.

"I know," she assented with a meekness that yet held its spark of hostility; "and when a girl is as attractive as my Gertrude, it is hard to know what to do. If she were as steady and sedate as your Louisa, it would be different. Still, I am always there, I and my knitting, and I do my best. As for Mr. Alstrom, he and Gertrude are just congenial friends. There is nothing more between them — yet."

Mrs. Mansfield leaned forward.

"James, drive home," she said.

Meanwhile, the two congenial friends were loitering along the terrace, threading their way through the crowd which had sought the place as soon as the morning services were at an end. From the nature of things, latitude and weather included, days like that were almost over, as far as the present season was concerned. It was the manifest duty of all to make the most of this one. Accordingly, the congregations from the Cathedral and the Basilica alike had adjourned *en masse* to the terrace to enjoy the sunny, windless day, before the afternoon invasion from Saint Roch's should make the place intolerable.

Gertrude had offered the plea of letters, by way of escaping the unenviable post of playing third in a stroll with Louisa Mansfield and her attendant Byng, who had abandoned Tony in time to line up back of the church parade outside the Cathedral door. She had paused for a moment to chat with them both; then, as

the word of command was given, and the flaxen-haired drummer adjusted his leopard skin and swung up his sticks ready for the initial crash, she turned away and walked alone to the door of the *pension* close by.

Just outside the door, she met Alstrom, returning from the noon opening of the mail. He too was alone; and it seemed to Gertrude, watching his listless step, that his aloneness was especially isolated. All that morning in church, studying him above the morocco and gilt edges of her prayer book, she had carried the same impression, that the man was singularly alone and sad withal. He had followed the service with the same listlessness that marked his manner now. He had observed its forms with punctilious care, although it was plain that his mind was far away. With the curious sense of being safe from observation which comes to one now and then in the heart of a crowd, Alstrom's face lost the look of strained cheerfulness which he was wont to force upon it; the lines about his lips deepened and drooped, and his eyes, fixed absently upon the chancel rail, were clouded heavily. Then Gertrude, watching, saw the white teeth shut upon the lower lip, the head lift itself, the shoulders straighten as if to cast aside the burden. What the burden was, she neither knew nor cared to ask. It was plain, however, that its weight was heavy and cast aside only by a strong effort of the will. Involuntarily the girl sighed and fastened her eyes upon her book. In such surroundings and on such a day as this, it gave her a keen sense of hurt to watch the evident suffering of a man she liked as well as she liked Alstrom. The question came to her, unbidden, whether Wood were really worth it all.

She met Alstrom with the frank cordiality she showed

to all men not her foes; and, though he knew her cordial custom, her greeting cheered him wonderfully.

"I saw you in church," she said, as they halted outside the door of the *pension*. "It was a good sermon; but you spoiled it for me, you looked so worried and so lonesome."

He flushed at her words.

"I must learn to keep my face decorously expressionless," he answered, with a shame-faced laugh.

Her answering laugh was refreshingly direct.

"Better dismiss the cause, and let the effect take care of itself," she advised him.

"Perhaps. I wish I could," he said slowly. "Still, — "

"I know," she assented, with the same unwonted gentleness she had shown him, only a week before, the gentleness which became her well. "You have had a terrible shock, and it takes a while to get one's balance, after a thing like that. And, of course, I suppose you miss him, too, in a way. I only wish there were some way that we others could come in and be of some little use. My mother — "

"Your mother has been goodness itself," he interrupted her. "Ever since I came to the house, she has been most kind; and, all this last week, she has kept breaking in upon some of my blackest hours."

"I am so glad." The girl's voice had its wonted hearty ring. "Mother is such a dear, and so happy to be of use to people. I'm glad you understand her so well."

Alstrom smiled, and his smile brought a sudden lump into the girl's throat.

"Miss Hardwicke, you women never really know

all that you accomplish. Some day, I hope your mother will be able to understand just what it did for me, that first day after, when she sent for me to come down to tea."

"I'll tell her," she volunteered; but again he interrupted, —

"No; you can't, for you don't know. You probably will never know; but it was all there. One doesn't forget such things." Then his expression changed a little, as Gertrude's hand sought the door outside of which they had been talking. "You are going in?" he asked wishfully.

"I was."

The wishfulness still lingered in his voice, as he said, —

"And the sun is so warm on the terrace. Doesn't it tempt you at all?"

For a moment, Gertrude hesitated. Then something in his voice struck her ears as an echo of what might have been the voice of the big brother she had lost, so long ago. And he too, if he had lived, might have been alone in a foreign city, and in trouble. For the rest, what matter? Even if she did meet Byng and Louisa on the terrace, as she was bound to do, she could set the matter right with a word or two, next day. Turning, she crossed to the terrace at his side.

"Mr. Mansfield tells me you are going to begin work, in the morning," she said, to break the pause which had fallen between them, as they threaded their way through the gayly-dressed throng.

"Yes. I am a week later than we had planned," he answered while, as if in explanation, his eyes sought the long, level slope across the river.

She understood; but she ignored the subject.

"Engineering, isn't it?" she asked lightly, determined to win him from his brooding on the same old theme.

"Yes."

"Isn't that a new departure for you?"

"Yes, and no. I studied for it; but I have never used it. My father had other plans for me, and there was no especial use in my opposing them. I preferred the engineering, though, and I shall be glad to get into it."

"You were at Yale?"

"Mr. Mansfield told you?" he made abrupt counter question.

"Yes. He talked about you, half through dinner, the other night." Gertrude laughed a little. "Mr. Mansfield is very loyal to his likings."

"He is a friend worth the having." This time, Alstrom's voice had lost all its listlessness. "I've known men of all sorts, Miss Hardwicke; but not many like him. They're not too common in our larger cities."

She caught at the opening into the past.

"Dear old New York! Can't you fairly smell the downtown streets, when the east wind blows up across them?" she asked.

Alstrom glanced down at her with the laugh for which she was hoping.

"Homesick, Miss Hardwicke?" he queried.

"Not really, not for any reason. And yet I have days when it seems as if I must get back there. Don't you?"

"Not under existing conditions," he answered, as the laugh died out swiftly from his eyes.

"Under any," she responded firmly. "Still, it is

something to have lived there. I was born in Boston; but my ten best years were in New York."

"And my twenty." Then he roused himself. "It's a good place, Miss Hardwicke, and yet no place to spend a boyhood. My own best times, after all, were on my father's country place. A boy needs all out-doors to ramp about in. I took it, too."

Four times they turned, still side by side, under the frowning shadow of the gray old bastion above the southern end of the terrace, and, at the fourth turn, Alstrom was still telling over the old tales of his boyhood. In the course of them, too, he touched again and again on his home life, on his four years of university and on his year or two of foreign study. He talked simply and without reserve. Nevertheless, in thinking back to their talk, Gertrude suddenly bethought herself, that night, that not once had his record crossed the line which had bounded the ending of his foreign travel. Of his coming to Quebec and of the two or three years which must have preceded it, Thorne Alstrom had said never a word. The omission was curious and it puzzled her, as something incongruous with the frank, friendly manner of his conversation. However, by temper and by training, Gertrude Hardwicke lacked the egotism which would have led her to analyze the attitude of her acquaintances towards herself. She set down the omissions as pure chance, and merely carried away the memory of their pleasant comradeship. In common with many another woman who has lived much in the open air, Gertrude Hardwicke could gain her best enjoyment in the society of a man who treated her as an equal, a mere chum. She preferred being talked with to being talked to.

Half-way down the terrace for the fourth time, they were joined by Henri Allard. His step quickened, when he saw them coming, and his face lighted, as he met Gertrude's frank smile of greeting. To be sure, such frank pleasure was not like the maidenly alternations of reserve and coquetry which he was accustomed to meet among Denise's friends. However, it was Gertrude's way, and as such, commendable.

" And you, Mr. Alstrom," he added as, his greetings to Gertrude ended, he fell into step beside her; " you are enjoying our last touch of summer? And did you see Denise? "

Gertrude's eyes were busy telegraphing her apologies to Louisa Mansfield. Had she been watching, however, so impersonal was her liking for Alstrom that she would have gained only amusement from the sudden brightening of his face.

" Your sister? No. Is she here? " he asked eagerly.

" She came here, on her way from church. She told me, if I saw you, to say that Pierre is here and that my mother will gladly have you dine with us at two."

And as Alstrom, with a word of excuse, went hurrying down the terrace, Henri Allard slipped into the place he had so lately occupied. Apparently he filled it to his own satisfaction.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TWO months later, Alstrom was again upon the terrace and Pierre Allard was at his side. Around them, the old year was dying, warm and wet. The stars shone palely down through the watery air, as if to rest their rebuking eyes upon the white stripe of mist veiling the river below. Little pools of water dappled the bare boards of the terrace which, by rights, should have been heaped with snow. Under such conditions as these, the place had lost most of its frequenters and all of its charm. Nevertheless, together, boy and man, they were pacing to and fro and talking busily as they paced. Their subject was Denise.

During the past two months, Denise Allard had been taking an increasingly prominent place in Alstrom's thoughts. He saw her often, both in her own home and in company with Louisa Mansfield for whose society Denise had developed a sudden appetite. Now and then he even met her just outside his own door, for Denise always chanced to time her calls upon Gertrude Hardwicke in such a way as to take her departure just as Alstrom was returning from the office in Saint Peter Street. Under such conditions, Mrs. Hardwicke, looking out across the Ring, dropped an irate stitch or two, while she uttered observations concerning French coquetry.

And yet, Denise was not altogether a coquette. Her liking for Alstrom was quite as logical as, and far more deep-seated than, was the downright interest he had aroused in Gertrude Hardwicke. It was wholly a matter of temperament that the one girl, under its influence, became a maddening tangle of contradictions, of alternating cordiality and demure aloofness, while the other met him with a matter-of-fact friendliness which was unvarying. It was a matter of temperament, also, that Thorne Alstrom devoted sleepless nights to analyzing the one, while he accepted the other as a thing of small account. He liked Gertrude Hardwicke absolutely. He came to look forward to his leisurely meals with a certain eagerness. It was good to find her there beside him, strong and comely and intelligent, ready to be used as a species of psychological safety valve for his accumulated ponderings. Gertrude enjoyed it, too, enjoyed it without the slightest undernote of questioning whither this intercourse was bound to lead her. When they parted, her elastic mind flew off to golf and Tony and Madame Lavoie's tea, next day; but his was all upon Denise, whether she really had meant the little indifferent rebuke she had bestowed upon him, only the night before, whether he could make excuse to leave the office in season to meet her on her daily trip to market.

Two or three times a week, on one excuse or another, he had formed the habit of taking himself up the Allards' front steps. Now it was the chance of finding Pierre at home; now it was a flower or two which Madame Allard ought to enjoy; now it was a pressing need of asking the advice of Henri who was so rarely at home that Alstrom could count upon the need to call again.

More rarely, he presented himself, quite simply, to ask for a cup of tea. Still more rarely, he came to dine by formal invitation. Whatever the cause, the end was always the same. He met Denise, talked with her, and went away in the same condition of uncertainty regarding her opinions of his personality. He could never quite determine whether or not her little smile, the saucy, sidelong cocking of her dark eyes could outweigh the occasional hauteur of her tone; and he was alternately elated and crushed, as his indecision swayed him to and fro. Like most men in such predicament, Thorne Alstrom focussed his whole attention upon himself. Had he taken a little time to study Denise's attitude to other men, he might have gained light upon a cloudy subject.

Meanwhile, he made acquaintance with the Allard household and its ways. Its ways were wholly new to him, new, strange and not unattractive, albeit his past training made it wellnigh impossible for him to predict and avoid the devout gloom of its many fast days, to accustom himself to the blithe fashion in which, mass over, they accepted Sunday as a day of pleasure, pure and simple. He would not have had it otherwise, however. It was all in such perfect harmony, agreeing with the quaint broken English of Madame Allard, with the nervous fire of Henri, half-zealot that he was, and with the long black soutane and quiet, priestly manner of François, the older brother.

Of the three brothers, Pierre would always remain Thorne Alstrom's favourite. His loyal affection could account for that, coupled with his blithe boyishness, his simple creed that good was always good and that bad should be left out of all one's reckonings. Alstrom

was never so tired that a visit from Pierre did not rest him, never so worried that the boy could not rouse him from his absorption. Now and then, obeying some sudden impulse, he even took the train for Sainte Anne for the mere sake of a look into the boy's dark blue eyes. Looking, he seemed to understand himself more clearly, to make out a more direct relation between the past and the future that he hoped to win.

As time went on, however, Alstrom came to count on François as on a helpful friend. This, however, was a slower process than it had been in the case of Pierre, or even with the reluctant Henri. It passed by easy stages from a certain fear to a still more certain admiration, from admiration to a liking, then to love. Alstrom never wasted an instant's thought on the question of François' attitude towards himself; but, as the weeks went by, he came to care for the tall, taciturn Frenchman with a share of the selfsame affection he had long since given to Pierre. François was older by far than the others of his family, a man of middle years whose tonsured head was already sprinkled with gray. Less blithe by nature than either Pierre or his sister, he was, on the other hand, far more human in his sympathies than Henri. By rights, Henri Allard should have been the priest, the ascetic; François the one to work in the thickest tumult of the world, only that nature, now and then, reverses things and so restores its proper balance. François Allard's eyes were brown, not blue; but they looked out on life with as clear a gaze as Pierre's own. He was an optimist, because he quietly ignored the evil in the world about him, with the curious result that those with whom he came in contact forced themselves to meet his standards rather than disappoint him. His

own rule of life was so simple as to admit of no compromise, because it called for none. Long years before, he had made up his mind where the right lay. Since that time, he had moved steadily towards it. For the rest, his devotion to his church, his happiness in its labours, had only served to increase his love for his own people, his happiness when he had leisure to be among them in the home.

Meanwhile and wholly apart from Denise, Thorne Alstrom was enjoying his winter intensely. To this enjoyment, the dingy office in Saint Peter Street contributed not a little. Years before, Alstrom had given his boyish heart to engineering, and his father had let him have his way. For a rich man's son whose college course was merely so much social training, one line was as good as another. It mattered not at all whether the boy went in for the ministry or for metallurgy, so long as he was happy in his work. Accordingly, a full latitude of choice had been given to the boy who threw himself into his study with zest, sure that his training was the path to the actual work of his profession. The Tech had followed Yale, and Paris had followed the Tech, and already the boy was dreaming of a man's work done somewhere on the frontiers of civilization, done in the face of almost overpowering difficulties imposed by nature, when, all at once, the dream had snapped in two. Thorne Alstrom had been recalled from Paris to give up his engineering and adopt the gentlemanly dilettanteism of a rich young man down town. Now, at length, his dream had come to pass, and he was finding its delayed fulfilment better than he had ever dared to hope. Now and then, even, he forgot those wasted middle years. Instead, it seemed to him

that his life had gone on continuously from Paris into the dingy office in Peter Street, from the working out of theoretical formulæ to the study of blue-print maps and the surmounting of every obstacle known to nature. And the man before him had been incompetent, grossly incompetent. Between his teeth, shut hard on his steel compasses, Alstrom drew in long breaths of sheer pleasure, as he set himself to make good the errors of that other man. The consciousness of his renewed mental force filled him with a delight that bordered upon delirium, the delirium which comes from too much ozone. After all, it was worth the while to have had his brain lie fallow, all this time. Else, how would he have known the joy of its restored vigour? And, as soon as spring opened, he was to leave the office, to leave theories behind, and go into the wilds to grapple face to face with the problems that now were offered to him on the blue-print paper! His pulses quickened at the thought.

"They tell me I made a deucedly lucky hit, when I introduced you to the B. T., that morning," Tony observed contentedly, one day.

"For me, yes," Alstrom assented.

"For them all, myself included. I had no idea you would turn out so well, myself," Tony said candidly. "As a rule, a man has to be whittled down a bit to make him fit his hole. You popped in, without so much as a wasted chip. It's a great relief, too. To be sure, the man ahead of you was no end of a duffer, and I counted that you couldn't well help shining by comparison. And now —"

"Well?" Alstrom pushed him.

"And now you're a whole electric lighting plant on

your own account," Tony concluded, in one wild flight of oratory. "What's more, you seem to get on with the people above you. That's another relief. I say, isn't that a new coat?"

"New, yesterday."

"It's a good one, too." Tony bent forward in his chair to toss back a corner and inspect the lining. "Whew!" he whistled. "Man alive, you must be made of money!"

"Not so much as you think." Alstrom reddened a little, as at a suggestion of rebuke.

But Tony's hands were buried in the soft lining, his eyes gloating on the silvery lustre of the unplucked seal.

"That's the American of you," he answered. "You are a beastly extravagant race, and you may not call it much. However, I know what I paid for mine, and that it can't compare with yours. A good seven hundred wouldn't begin to do it."

Alstrom laughed; but the laugh sounded a bit uneasy.

"And a good seven hundred wouldn't begin to bury me," he retorted grimly. "All in all, at the same price, I'd rather escape pneumonia and keep alive. I'm not used to your winter climate, you know."

"Used! You've not seen it yet," Tony returned disdainfully. "This weather doesn't begin to count. As for pneumonia and that, a coon coat would keep your back warm and not cost one tenth as much as this. It's not protection to your lungs, man; it's sheer vanity. What's more," Tony wagged his head knowingly; "I suspect that a good share of your vanity has its eye on Denise Allard."

This time, Alstrom reddened in good earnest.

"What then?" he asked defensively.

"The old story, I suspect. Since Denise Allard left off wearing pigtails there hasn't heen a man in Quehec whose vanity hasn't led him to choose his neckties according to her taste in colours. You can always tell when the episode is waning by the way they flaunt themselves forth in all the recklessness of spotty red haberdashery, and neglect their scarf pins. We've all been through it, Alstrom, every man. You will, in time."

"Not if I can prevent it." The answering tone sounded a trifle curt.

"You can't; nohody can, not even Denise herself. Meanwhile, if you must take the epidemic, have it as lightly as you can."

"But I'm not sure I care to have it lightly. Moreover, Mansfield, forgive me if I say it's not a matter one really has any husiness to discuss."

Tony's laugh rang out with imperturhable good temper.

"Of course we all discuss it, when it's a case of Denise Allard. One might as well ignore mumps, when every hoy in the hlock is swollen up with them. Being here, you're hound to catch the local epidemic. Sooner or later, you'll be convalescent. Meanwhile, I'd warn you not to take it too hard, only for the fact that the choice in such matters isn't, as a rule, left to the victim. Going? Not cross, old fellow? Surely not? All right. Good-bye." And Tony returned to his interrupted evening paper.

And now, two days later, Alstrom was thinking over this conversation in the intervals of his talk with Pierre.

That evening, he had heen dining at the Allards',

and Denise had been in one of her most captious moods, until even his patience had exhausted itself and it had been in a frame of mind dangerously akin to wrath that he had betaken himself in search of his coat. Denise had watched his dignified exit with eyes half mocking, half terrified. She had driven many a man to start in search of his coat and hat. One and all, however, they had relented and turned back again to have one more last word, all but Alstrom. Denise's heart misgave her, as she saw him lay his hand upon the outer door without so much as one backward glance. Then, when the click of the closing door had certified her misgivings, she promptly despatched Pierre upon the heels of their irate guest.

"But, Denise, it is very wet; and, besides, it is your affair, not mine," poor Pierre had protested.

Impetuously she flung an arm across his shoulders, then turned his face to hers.

"Pierre dearest, what if it is raining?" she asked him then. "You have a good, warm coat. And I — You would not have me cry, all night?"

"No; but I would have you remember that Mr. Alstrom has some feelings," the boy grumbled, as he freed himself from her clasp and picked up his coat. "You treat all men as if they were your dolls, Denise. It is not my place to mend them for you, when you throw them down and break them. If it were anyone but Mr. Alstrom, I would not leave the house for you, to-night."

Denise hesitated; then she dropped her eyes to the rug at her feet, while her fingers stretched the corner of her handkerchief this way and that until the embroidered daisies seemed almost uprooted by the strain.

"Pierre," she confessed at last, while the hot blood rushed up across her cheeks; "if it were anyone but Mr. Alstrom, I — I should not ask you to go."

His coat dangling from one shoulder, and his boyish face alight with pleasure, Pierre whirled about and seized her hands.

"Little sister, is it really true?"

"Hush!" she bade him hastily. "Nothing is true, not yet."

But Pierre's steady gaze was not to be avoided, nor yet his steady words.

"You care for him?"

Again the scarlet colour swept across her face, and she dropped her head to hide it from Pierre's searching eyes.

"Don't you care for him, Denise?" he urged, and his tone was almost pleading.

Denise's head drooped lower still.

"Yes," she answered reluctantly. "Yes, Pierre, more than he — cares for me."

But Pierre shook his head.

"I know him better than you do, Denise, if you can say that," he told her.

"You think so, Pierre?" The words came breathlessly.

"I know it."

The next instant, Denise's face was buried in his shoulder and he felt her hot tears against his hand.

"Oh, Pierre! And yet, what good? He is Protestant, you know, and François — " Then suddenly she straightened up and cast aside her momentary emotion. "Go on, Pierre, and overtake him," she bade her brother. "Follow him back to his room, if

you must, and coax him out for a walk on the terrace. Men can always walk off their bad temper. But be sure," she gave her usual blithe little laugh; "be sure you bring him to the midnight mass. If he objects, tell him that I shall be there, and that it is my wish. Go now, and hurry." And she pushed her brother towards the door.

"Pierre," Alstrom broke out suddenly, as they were pacing to and fro along the soggy terrace; "for the life of me, I can't understand your sister."

"You mean?"

"That she treats me like a man, one minute, and like a broken-nosed rag doll, the next," Alstrom returned, with a sudden petulant adoption of the metaphor Pierre had used, a half-hour before.

"It's only Denise's way," Pierre interposed, seeking in vain for some extenuation of his sister.

"It's a mighty uncomfortable way for the victim," Alstrom made tempestuous answer. "Now see here, Pierre, you are in the family, and I have no business to slander your sister to you, nor yet to ask you her opinions. Besides, I don't want to slander her. I suppose her uncertainty is half her charm. And, if I asked you her opinions, it would only corner you into some specious fib or other. But — honestly, Pierre, I don't think I quite deserve it." And, as he spoke, his voice had a ring of absolute boyishness which might have come from Pierre, himself.

It touched Pierre.

"No," he admitted honestly; "no, you don't."

"Then what under heaven makes her do it?" Alstrom burst out again.

Pierre only shook his head, and Alstrom resumed

his tramp. When he spoke again, it was plain that he was speaking as much to his own mind as to the boy at his side.

"It's not as if I didn't know there were objections," he went on. "Being a man, and rational, I do know them. You are well-known here; I am a stranger and an American. Moreover, I am Protestant, of course; not that that should make much difference."

Pierre caught at the most obvious objection.

"I am afraid it makes great difference," he said slowly.

Turning, Alstrom eyed him in surprise.

"Not an insurmountable one, Pierre?" he queried, and the sudden sharpness of his tone betrayed his complete ignorance of the extent of the barrier which lay between them.

"Insurmountable to Denise; but not to you." As he spoke, Pierre slid his hand inside Alstrom's arm.

"How do you mean?" The boyishness had vanished, and it was a resolute man who spoke.

Pierre answered a little sadly. It seemed to him that Alstrom could not fail to be hurt by his reply, and he loved Alstrom absolutely, regardless of the barrier of his faith.

"That Denise could never care for a Protestant, nor as — you want her to care."

"Why not?"

"It is impossible. The Church does not sanction it; François would never give his consent."

As if the touch of the boy's hand irritated him, Alstrom shook it away.

"You mean," he asked slowly; "that your sister

would never marry a man she loved, sc long as he was Protestant?"

The phrasing of the last words was the result of chance. Pierre, however, mistook it for deliberate choicc.

"No," he repeated them; "not so long as he was Protestant. That is why I say it is insurmountable for Denise, not for you."

"Why not for me?" The words were asked in honest question; but, as they fcll from Alstrom's lips, his mind had leaped forward to supply the answer.

A sudden spatter of rain swept down across the terrace and, above tbe first rattlc of its falling drops, the bell in the Basilica close by boomed down its solemn call to the midnight mass to bless the dying year. At tbe sound, Pierre turned and held out his hand tɔ Alstrom.

"Come," be said; "shall we leave the question to decide itself, and go to meet Denise? Together, we must thank the old year for bringing us our friendship."

The boy's smile was winning; his blue eyes, lifted to Alstrom's, were eager witb bis frank expression of affection. For an instant, Alstrom studied him closely in the glare of tbe electric lamp above them. It was no mean gift the year had brought him, the love of this clean-minded boy. For the rest, he would forget the year, shut his memory away from all its details. It was over now, over and done, bc believed, in all its consequences. If it had beld mistakcs, be was doing his best to wipe them out. The future was before him, to be met as sturdily as he could. His face, clouding for an instant, cleared again, as be laid his band on that of Pierre.

"I do thank it for so much," he said heartily. "It is by far the best thing that the year has given me."

But, in his secret heart, he thought of one thing better, as, arm in arm with Pierre, he turned away to meet Denise and, with her, the coming year.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THERE was consternation in the Allard family, next morning, when it became known that Denise had bestowed even a provisional attention upon the suit of Thorne Alstrom.

" He is an American," Henri observed, as he broke his egg into a glass and showered it liberally with salt.

Denise chipped her own egg with delicate precision. Deploring the methods of her brother, she was yet powerless to change them. Nevertheless, her rigid adherence to English decorum held its own hint of rebuke.

" You are a Liberal of the Liberals," she said quietly. " It amounts to nearly the same thing in the long run."

Henri dropped a lump of butter on top of the salt, then fell to stirring the combination into an even mixture.

" Don't be foolish, Denise, and quote campaign talk of which you really know nothing," he admonished his sister gravely.

Denise pouted and shook her pretty head.

" But I do know. I hear the things you say in your speeches, and then I read just the very same things in the papers from the States."

Henri tasted his mixture judicially. His frowning disapproval was not for it, but for Denise.

"Where do you see the papers from the States?" he asked.

"Oh, in all sorts of places. Besides, Gertrude Hardwicke always takes one," Denise replied, with airy inconsequence.

"And then, what do you really know of the man?" Henri continued a little aggressively.

Denise's laugh came back to her lips, for now she felt that the advantage was on her side.

"I know what Tony Mansfield has told me," she responded. "Tony likes him, and you have always told me, you yourself, Henri, that Tony's judgment was to be trusted."

Henri hedged.

"So it is. However, Tony's liking him does not touch the case in point. It is one thing for a man to like a stranger; it is quite another for a woman to consent to marry him."

Denise abandoned her egg and rested both elbows on the table.

"You sound horribly legal and argumentative, Henri," she observed discursively, from above her elasped hands.

But Madame Allard interposed, gently as was her wont, yet firmly.

"Is he not Protestant, Denise?" she asked, and her simple, low voiced question had all the force of a priestly ban.

Denise turned and, as she faced her mother, her voice lost its little note of hard antagonism and vibrated with a strange new happiness.

"Yes," she assented softly; "now; but not, I hope, for always."

"Denise, dear child — "

Denise rose and stood by her mother's side.

"Yes, mamma," she said submissively. "But come away to my room, and I shall tell you all about it."

All about it! The phrase held in its narrow limits all the questions which were facing Thorne Alstrom, as he watched the dawn of that new year forcing its gray way between the cracks of the shutters of his room. In one sense only had it been a white night for him. Sleep had never once touched his eyes; but the thoughts which had driven sleep away had been black, all black. What was this thing which he was about to do?

Thorne Alstrom's religion was as vital to him as it was to most men of his age and class and race. That is to say, he had been duly baptized, duly confirmed. His habit had been to go to church, when there was nothing else he preferred to do. For the rest, his religion counted nothing, unless possibly for something to lay away in a convenient pocket, to be pulled out again for use in the hour of death. Quite as a matter of course, he had inherited it from his ancestors, just as he had inherited his gray eyes and his long, slim hands. He had thought almost as little about the one as about the other. And now all at once and solely for the sake of an overmastering love of woman, he was about to cast this inheritance away. Denise was worth it, worth any sacrifice whatsoever. And yet — did he really grasp the significance of what it was that he had half-pledged himself to do?

More than once, while the gray dawn grew into the perfect day, he sat up in bed, as if the mere physical act could lift him out of the confused turmoil of his thoughts, and deliberately reviewed the events of the

previous night. It had all come about quite simply, quite unexpectedly; yet now, in looking back, Alstrom could see that events, setting in like a rising tide, calm and absolutely resistless, had been preparing the way for this one consummation ever since that far-off day at Sainte Anne's shrine. Perhaps ever since long weeks before that day. And, only the evening before, it had all seemed so remote, a part of an elusive future which he hoped some day to grasp.

Deliberately he took the night to pieces, and studied every several piece. There had been the evening at the Allards', when Denise had been more torturingly capricious than ever, so that he had left the house in anger, half vowing never to return. There had been the long pacing to and fro on the wet terrace with Pierre, when their physical steps had seemed to set the pace for their mental ones, going back and forth and up and down over the same old ground, with constant evasions of small impassable spots which they both avoided as by instinct. Then, with what had seemed to Alstrom a terrific suddenness, there had come Pierre's words, phrasing aloud a thought quite new to him, yet seeming, once it was spoken, strangely old and familiar to his mind. Coming upon him without preparation, he had yielded it a place within his brain where it had lain passive until aroused to life by the impressive ritual of the midnight mass. Side by side, beneath the great white arches they had bowed in prayer, he and Denise; her fluffy head had almost touched his fingers resting on the rail to shield his face from the glaring lights. And after?

Bit by bit, there came back to him their broken words of question and reply.

"Denise — ?"

"— never —"

"Not even if —"

"Perhaps."

He dropped back again with a little sigh. Denise was surely worth it. Not any sacrifice would be too great, so long as it gave him the right to take her in his arms, to know that she was his, all his own. And he had held his religion as a thing of such small account. However, the casting it aside would not be easy, would not achieve itself without a battle.

The battle raged for days, and the days dragged themselves out into weeks, while Alstrom weighed as in a balance his love for Denise, his loyalty to his inherited creed. Side by side, they could not exist. She herself had assured him of that; he was convinced that one or the other of the two things must yield, that nothing could ever bring them into compatibility. Up to that night upon the terrace, he would have been the first one to affirm that he believed nothing very much, that, granted one or two main facts, the facts which all creeds hold in common, it mattered not in the least in what path a man trod on his way to salvation, that there were cross-paths innumerable. Now, all at once, he discovered that these main facts were by no means all; that his whole self shrank from details of one sort, clutched at details of another sort, insisting upon their great importance. And yet, he loved Denise too well to give her up. Of so much he was profoundly certain.

By day, working over his blue prints and estimates, smoking at the club with Tony and the other men, exchanging bits of American prejudice with the Hardwickes over their cheese and coffee, Alstrom felt the

grip of his ancestral faith as never before. At evening in the Allard drawing-room beside Denise, he was ready to regard papal supremacy, incense and priestly absolution as things of small account. And, after all, the new church was the acknowledged mother of the old. Most likely they had more things in common than he knew enough yet to realize.

One day, he bought a Manual of Prayer, bought it surreptitiously between glances over his shoulder to assure himself that Tony was not in sight, nor Gertrude Hardwicke. Strange to say, he shrank more, in those days, from Gertrude Hardwicke's pitiless, cold logic than from all her mother's voluble expressions of anti-Roman prejudice. He bought the prayer book and stowed it away inside an inner pocket, buttoning his coat above it, before he ventured into the street. Even then, however, he felt shame-faced and self-conscious when he met Tony Mansfield, just outside his own door. It seemed to him that Tony's random conversation betrayed clairvoyant knowledge of the hidden book.

Alone in his room, that night, he opened the book and turned its pages, curiously at first and with an impersonal sort of interest, then with a gathering attention as he passed from mass to sacrament, lingering a little upon the instructions concerning the marriage rites. Then, still turning the thin, translucent pages, he came upon another section whose title held him fast. *The Reception of Converts* it read; and, farther down the page, he saw the word *heretic*. Could that refer to such as he?

After a little, he aroused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, and brought back his eyes from their focusless staring beyond the printed page.

Before him, the words of the Profession stood out sharply, clear and uncompromising in their meaning, —

I now, with grief and contrition for my past errors, —

And again, —

With unfeigned faith, I detest and abjure every error, heresy, and sect opposed.

Once more his eyes lost focus and gazed beyond the printed page. He seemed to see, in the far distance, a tiny boy seated upon his mother's knee, while she chid him for the lie which he had used to gain himself some extra sweets, seemed to hear the childish voice saying, —

"Yes'm, I'll 'member now. It's beastly mean to fib; but it's beastliest of all to fib just to get another pound of chocolate creams. Yes, honest, mummy, I'll be good and try to 'member."

Abruptly he rose, locked the book in his trunk and started to prepare for bed. The cases were analogous, man and child. He tossed restlessly to and fro till dawn once more grayed the room, and, tossing, he reversed his decisions as swiftly as he made them. However, the next day was Sunday, and, on Sundays, he always dined with the Allards.

Nevertheless, siege can win where direct attack must fail. By late February, Alstrom had drifted by insensible degrees up to the point where it seemed to him that the step before him was irrevocable and far less distasteful than he had been inclined to regard it at the first. Denise, seen almost daily and in the greater intimacy allowed by their provisional affiancing, had become one of the main needs of his being. His old-time creed, drifting slowly into the past, was slowly releasing its claim upon his loyalty and love. At length, one snowy morning, he rose to face the fact that he

could live without his faith, that he must die without Denise. That night, he sat up late, talking with Madame Allard and Henri, while Denise was banished to her room where she spent the hours in alternate dreaming and composing a letter to Pierre, absent in snow-bound Sainte Anne. The next day, she destroyed the letter; but the dreams remained. The next week, it was agreed, the formal announcement should be made of their engagement.

Then, all at once, they met a sudden check. François, since Christmas, had been in Europe, sent there to represent Laval at some great academic gathering. During his absence, no one had written him of the possible engagement of his sister, Denise from a shy, girlish reticence, Henri and his mother because they were loath to put into words so vague a situation. For the rest, François had always seemed to like Alstrom. His sole unfitness would lie in the Protestantism which he was slowly bringing himself to renounce. For full six months, the man had lived among them; they could not fail to respect the habits of his life, and even Henri, critical and sometimes a bit callous, declared that Alstrom's eyes alone were sufficient testimony to his past. What reason, then, to discuss the matter with François until there was something tangible to discuss?

François came home, early one morning of the first of March. That evening he spent, the first in many weeks, in his mother's house. He found Alstrom there to meet him, and he wondered at the change in the man's position in the home, at the tacit recognition of his place among them all on this first night of his own return. However, there was no chance for him to probe the

subject, since Alstrom remained there later than he, tired with his voyage, cared to do. The next morning, as early as he could free himself from his priestly duties, he went in search of his mother and demanded the explanations he had hoped to get, the night before. They talked together long and plainly and with the perfect understanding which had always marked their intercourse. Nevertheless, when they separated, Madame Allard's eyes were red, and François walked away from the house so absorbed in his own thoughts that he missed entirely Tony Mansfield's greeting. To judge from his expression, his thoughts were far from pleasant.

That night, Thorne Alstrom found a note awaiting him in his room. It had been brought, that afternoon, the maid told him, by a private messenger who made a great point of his receiving it promptly, so she had laid it on top of his soap dish where it could not fail to meet his eye. And Alstrom smiled and nodded, as he picked up the note to glance at the unfamiliar writing. His lips stiffened and his jaws shut tightly together, as he read, for the note might mean much or little. It was from François Allard, and brief. Could he call at the Seminary, that night at eight? There were things they would better discuss as soon as possible.

Eight o'clock, that night, found Alstrom passing under the archway which leads to the Seminary court. On his right, the great gray Basilica loomed up, a vast, dark bulk pierced with squares of dim light, for Vespers was just ending, and the congregation filled the street. The organ was still sounding under the master's touch, the random touch which preluded the closing of the keyboard. Alstrom made out a bit of the *Twelfth*

Mass followed by the main theme of Händel's *Largo* which lost itself in a curious jumble of phrases from *The Messiah*, and then fell to silence, as the last light died from the chancel windows. Under the full white moon, the gray spire turned to silver, and the great tree in the middle of the court beyond cast its sharp black shadows across the snow, hard-packed as a bit of pavement beneath the countless boyish feet. A dozen boys were playing there now, watched by a young priest or two who alternately tramped to and fro, and joined in the games. Their shadows, too, lay on the ground, the boys in their odd, long coats turning to the semblance of diminutive old men, the priestly soutanes taking on the lines of a woman's skirts. Even with the clear boy voices shouting in their play, the court seemed curiously still to Alstrom, curiously steeped in an atmosphere unlike the one in which his own boyhood had been spent. He tried to imagine himself playing prisoner's base, in a long-skirted coat roped with a green woollen sash, playing beneath the eyes of a black-robed priest, and he signally failed in the attempt. His mind shot off towards the question whether a priest never tripped himself up in his skirts. Then it leaped back again to the main point, a point which, however, held no suggestion of foreboding. What was it for which François Allard wished to see him?

An hour later, the question had answered itself, and Thorne Alstrom rose to his feet to take his leave.

"Then, is this your final decision?" he asked drearily.

François bowed his head.

"It is," he replied.

"But why?"

The answer was kindly, but uncompromising.

"As head of my family, I can never consent to allow my sister to marry a Protestant. As priest of my church, I can never consent to recognize a convert whose choice is entirely swayed by his wish to win a Catholic woman for his wife."

Alstrom attempted a feeble urging.

"But it is done, every day."

"That is as may be. Custom never settles a point of right and wrong."

"But would you keep me out of your church?"

The answer came unfalteringly.

"I would, until you believe its teaching."

"I — " Alstrom faltered. Then, with an effort, he steadied his voice. "I — do."

For a moment, François watched him keenly, as if taking his mental measure. Then his face softened and, advancing a step, he rested his hand on Alstrom's shoulder.

"No," he said then. "You do not. Down in your secret heart, you know you are trying to persuade yourself against your will. The church has loyalty enough which comes of itself, unforced. It has no place for such men as you, men who would use her name as a guarantee to obtain worldly blessings. You of the world of commerce have a name for such a use, a name which is the name of a crime. Is the crime any less, because it deals with heavenly things?"

Alstrom stared back at him, wide-eyed and with a whitening face, while, for an instant, his hands shut upon a chair-back, as if to gain support. He rallied almost at once; but not, however, before his momen-

tary pallor had caught the eye of the priest before him.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Alstrom," François went on, after a little pause. "I know that you love Denise. My mother says that Denise has given her heart into your hands. It is a sweet, girlish little heart, a gift well worth the having. I am willing to say in all frankness that, were it not for your Protestantism, I should be glad to leave my sister in your keeping. As it is — " He left the phrase unfinished.

"You refuse?"

"Yes. I refuse."

"For ever?"

"Until such time as I feel you are ready, in all sincerity and with no thought of present gain, to join the mother church."

His teeth shut hard upon his disappointment, Thorne Alstrom accepted his decree, and turned away. Halfway to the door, however, François called him back. The sternness had once more vanished from his face, and his voice was very gentle and held a cadence like Denise's own.

"My brother, forgive me," he said. "I know I have seemed harsh in my decision; but my conscience would not permit me to decide otherwise. Much as I love my sister, I love my church better still. I could not allow her to receive a convert whose love was not for her, but rather for what she could give him. The time may come when you will choose her for herself. Known, she deserves your loyalty. Study her history, study the work she has done in every age and country. Most of all, study her magnificent truths. Then, if the time ever does come when, simply as a little boy at his

mother's feet, you can come forward and confess your love, then no one will be happier than I to see you come into her keeping. Forget yourself, forget Denise, and try to learn the honest truth. Then, perhaps, all will come out right for you and her."

Little by little, as he spoke, his voice had grown fuller and more resonant. Then it dropped again and, almost as a caress, he gently uttered the priestly blessing, —

"*Et Dominus tecum.*"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HIS legs planted far apart on the rug, Tony Mansfield was haranguing the mantel clock. Behind him, Louisa, Byng and Gertrude Hardwicke awaited a pause.

"Oh, it was a jolly row!" Tony concluded in one grand, final outburst of satisfaction.

"Exactly." Byng's tone was dry. "The question is, what about you?"

"Me? I was the whole blooming show," Tony replied vaingloriously.

"Tony!"

At the remonstrant voice, Tony wheeled about.

"What's the matter, Louisa? My conceit, or my phraseology?"

"Both are deplorable," she assured him.

"As also your politics," Byng struck in. "You ought to have a conservator appointed, or a guardian, or some such thing, Tony. Do you mean you actually gave tongue to your emotions on such a paltry point as that?"

Tony nodded, with obvious contentment in the memory.

"Ye gods, how I did bay!" he said, with a chuckle. "There wasn't much doubt as to what I thought."

Byng shook his head.

" There never is, worse luck! I wish you would ever get to appreciate the fine gold of silence."

Tony chuckled again.

" Thanks. I prefer the apples of gold in a picture of silver."

" Apples of discord, rather. But, after maintaining your decorous silence up to now, what ever possessed you to go off at score on a point of no consequence at all?"

" It was of consequence, though." Tony sobered at the thought. " It's just in ways such as this that that poor devil of a Wood got himself killed."

" Mr. Mansfield!" Gertrude Hardwicke protested suddenly. " I can't see what the printing of Intercolonial time tables in French has to do with an accident at Levis."

" Nor what either one has to do with your political opinions," Louisa added a little tartly, for Byng had already impressed upon her his own fear lest Tony imperil the family reputation for conservative good sense.

Tony drew up a chair and slowly let himself down into its depths.

" Forgive my sprawling; but I must be comfortable, if I'm to explain politics to a pair of women," he observed. " No disrespect, you know, only you women run to theories, and it's necessary to knock them — not you — down with facts. Sometimes, that takes a good while. Where was I? Oh, yes. Well. You see, it was no end late, and everybody's nerves were on edge. They had discussed the tariff until they were up on their ears. Then they had drifted into the question of forestry sales till they were ready to fly at each other's throats. Then finally some fool — "

"He was on your side of the house; wasn't he?" Byng queried.

The query, critical and dispassionate, set Tony up on his legs again.

"What if he was? That doesn't prevent his being a fool; does it? Perhaps it makes him more so. Well, some fool, and I'd like to italicize the words, if I only knew how, started up and gave the old war whoop about equal rights for the two languages. He was portentously dry. Men in earnest always are, especially when it gets along towards midnight." Tony cast an apprehensive glance at the clock; then, reassured, continued his narrative. "When he finally did stop, I really couldn't resist the temptation to check him a bit, so, before I thought, I hopped up on my feet, caught the Speaker's eye and — Eh, Byng?"

"I merely said 'Oh, Lord!'" Byng groaned.

"Rather!" Tony assented promptly. "That's about the gist of the whole matter. I backed him up by demanding absolute equality for both languages, spoken as well as written, demanded, you know, that the railway fellows should be glib in both. Then, as a case in point, I brought up the way Wood was smashed, because he didn't know enough to understand the fellows when they yelled *Sautez!* I thought they'd take it all as the merest chaff, and discover I was really arguing for English rights against a French majority; but I'll be hanged if all our Liberal fellows didn't begin to thump their desks with rapture before I'd had a chance to sit down. That was bad enough; but, before we had adjourned, they proceeded to make up a committee of the extreme Liberals to draft some resolutions to place the matter before the people. And I," Tony

ended with a positive crow of rapture; "and I am the chairman."

"Tony!" This time, his sister's expostulation was solely for the matter of his words. "What have you done?"

"Made my reputation once for all as an ultra-Liberal," Tony assured her tranquilly. "As for the committee, greatness has been forced upon me, unbeknownst. It remains to see what I'll do with it, now I've achieved it."

"You don't mean you accepted the thing?" Byng's tone was incredulous.

"Of course I accepted it. It's all mine."

"But you don't believe in any such crazy notion?"

Of a sudden, Tony turned grave.

"For a fact, Byng, I don't know what I do believe," he said, as once more he dropped down into the chair in the midst of the group. "Of course, I leaped into the fray for the sake of having a little fun with a crack-brained Johnnie with a bee in his bonnet. They took my fun in earnest, and now it's for me to decide just where I mean to stand. There are two sides to the question, of course. The other fellow was an enthusiast, a worse one than Henri Allard. He'd put us all under the tri-colour, if he had his way. Still, there's a principle at stake. We made our blunder, if blunder it was, over an hundred years ago, when we granted them their language. We've no business to abrogate it now. All we can do is to pull a straight course between Scylla and Cha-What's-Its-Name."

Gertrude leaned forward abruptly.

"And you propose to be the pilot?" she asked.

"Exactly."

She nodded in swift appreciation of his point. Nevertheless, she objected.

"But in such a little boat?"

"It's big enough to show where the channel lies. Bigger ones can follow it as soon as they are ready."

"Would you mind speaking English, please?" Louisa requested languidly. "All this sounds very interesting; but I have no idea what it means."

"It means —" Tony was beginning; but Gertrude interposed.

"Wait," she begged. "I want to see if I understand what you are about. Of course, it all came up by accident; but it is the old, old question that is bound to crop out, every time it has a chance. You think, sooner or later, this committee of yours is hound to be; you know that its chairman can do a good deal to decide its policy. As long as tbat is so, you'd rather be the chairman, yourself, instead of leaving it in the hands of people who will do more harm. Is that it, Mr. Mansfield?"

"Rather," Tony gave concise assent. "I'd rather have matches in the hands of an old smoker than in the clutches of tbe cbild who wants to play with fire."

Tben, before Louisa's yawn could demand a change of subject, Tony and Gertrude had exchanged a glance of perfect understanding.

When the subject did change, it followed the trail opened by the recent mention of Wood's name, a trail whicb speedily led around to Alstrom.

"What has become of your pet protégé, Tony?" Louisa asked. "I've not seen him for a long, long time. Where does he keep himself, nowadays?"

It was Byng who answered, —

"At the Allards', mostly."

Tony cast a swift and apprehensive glance at Gertrude, to see how she received the information. To his infinite relief, she apparently received it as a thing of no account.

"Denise left for Montreal, yesterday," she said. "She's to be gone for a month."

Louisa looked up in surprise.

"Strange she didn't say anything about it, when she was here, last week!"

"I fancy it was rather sudden. I met her, shopping, a few days ago. She seemed in a great hurry, and didn't look too well."

"How strange!" Louisa repeated reflectively. "I wonder why she went."

Again it was Byng who answered, —

"To get her away from Alstrom, probably."

Again Tony cast a furtive glance at Gertrude. Quite oblivious of his scrutiny, she responded with a calm grasp of the situation which left him gasping.

"Oh, I think not. Everything seemed to be going on swimmingly between them. There was a while, early in January, when I was afraid it might fall through; but, this last week or so, Mr. Alstrom has seemed to be walking on his toes, all the time."

Byng laughed.

"Surely. You must have superior advantages for watching the situation evolve, Miss Hardwicke."

And Gertrude's answering laugh was as carefree and unreserved as his own, as she replied, —

"Indeed we do. It has been a most thrilling occupation, all winter long."

"What's the matter? Does he babble?" Tony queried, with disfavour.

"No; he is as reticent as any Englishman," Gertrude reassured him demurely. "It is in his manners that we read signs of the times. If he breaks his bread very small and slaps the butter on, we know that there is trouble. If he stirs his coffee for a long time before he tastes it, we know that everything is going well. And, if he forgets to talk and lets the maid snatch away his plate before he has finished, we know — "

But Louisa broke in, with a fervent protest.

"Oh, Gertrude! How hideously unromantic! I am so glad Billy and I never came under your eyes during the probationary period. You'd have declared that he forgot to salt his baked potato, every time mother re-decided that she really couldn't give me up."

"Have you seen Alstrom, to-day?" Tony asked Gertrude as, abandoning the rug, he slid into a chair drawn up at her elbow.

"No. Why?"

"I'm putting this and that together. I met him out the Grande Allée, this afternoon, and he seemed worried and as glum as it is in him to be. Perhaps — "

"Perhaps there may be some reason in Denise's going? And yet, what reason could there be?"

"He's a Protestant, of course," Tony suggested dubiously.

Gertrude glanced up in surprise.

"But that wouldn't make any difference with her," she affirmed, and there was a strong accent on the final word.

"It would up here, a long way more than it would for him. Any one would object, you see; and the Allards

are very strict. I can imagine that François would almost forbid the banns."

"Why?"

"Because Alstrom — in fact, we all — are heretics, and marriage with us is forbidden. You show you're no Quebecker yet, Miss Hardwicke; else you would know how we all regard mixed marriages."

"I'm not at all sure I want to be a Quebecker, if that is the way you look at things," she retorted. "What utter nonsense!"

"Not such nonsense, after all. There's a good deal involved, you see. When they get married, they have a notion that there'll be sentiment enough to grease the cogs of the situation; but it generally ends in a grand, continuous row. However, in the case of Denise and Alstrom, I don't see what they are fussing about at this late day. They must have known at the start that he is Protestant."

"Tony," Louisa faced about abruptly from the other end of the rug where she had been holding *tête-à-tête* with Byng; "don't you want Mr. Alstrom to marry Denise Allard?"

Tony clasped his hands by way of screen to keep the dazzle of the fire from his face.

"It's rather a toss-up," he answered unconcernedly. "I'd like it for him, on some accounts. For her, I'm not so sure."

"But, Tony! And you admire Mr. Alstrom so much! What can you mean?"

"What I say," Tony iterated sturdily. "Of course, I am fond of Alstrom, and all that. Who isn't, for the matter of that? I'd like him to get a dainty little mortal like Denise, like it mighty well. He needs somebody

to tease him and flirt with him and coddle him; it would take away some of that queer, half-sad streak in him that we none of us have been able to account for. A wife like Denise would be the best thing in the world for him."

"And he would steady her," Louisa urged, with the match-making zeal common to all newly-engaged women.

"Perhaps. Still, there's a risk."

"I don't see what." Gertrude spoke reflectively.

"In a good many ways. Their lives have been foreign to each other."

"But that works both ways."

Tony shook his head. His eyes, fixed on the fire, were strangely sombre.

"Not to the same extent," he argued. "Alstrom is more adaptable than she is. For one thing, he has lived abroad. For another, he expects to make his home in her own country — now."

Louisa caught at the almost imperceptible pause which emphasized the final word. Knowing her brother absolutely, she was quicker than the others to note any variation from his usual careless speech.

"Why do you emphasize the *now* so viciously, Tony?" she questioned him.

He laughed; but the gravity never left his eyes.

"Why not, when *now* includes the fact of his having come to know Denise?" he retorted.

"Then you think he wouldn't make her happy?" Gertrude seemed pondering the question in all its bearings.

"Knowing Denise, I do think so. She is a charming child. I've been through the mill, myself, took it early

and very hard, and I can speak with feeling. She is wholly charming; but she needs her own stage setting, and that is what Alstrom could never really give her. He'd mean to; but he would only get at the merest imitation; and Denise would be the first to realize the difference. It would go on her nerves and — " this time, his laugh held all its wonted mirth; "and Denise isn't pretty-mannered, when she's on her nerves."

"For shame, Tony!" his sister rebuked him. "What woman is?"

"The mater," Tony responded unexpectedly and quite unabashed. "The more things rile her — if I may use your American phrase, Miss Hardwicke — the lower she speaks and the more she hangs on to her little smile. Denise, on the other hand, gets strident, and that never makes for righteousness in any man, let alone a sensitive sort of chap like Alstrom."

This time, Gertrude administered rebuke.

"Mr. Mansfield, you are crossing your own trail," she said severely.

"What if I am? It only makes the better hunting." Then once more he rose and took his old station on the rug. "Now look here," he said; "I hate to gossip like this: it's not in my line. What's more, I am afraid I have left you all misunderstanding me, thinking I'm not loyal to Alstrom. It's not that a bit. I am loyal to him, for I love the fellow. He makes a queer sort of appeal to me; it's the sort of feeling I can't seem to down. I also love Denise. It's a remnant of my callow youth, I suppose, and, like all old things, rather tender. But it doesn't make me like the combination. If anything did come up to part them, Alstrom would

shut his teeth and go his way; but Denise would grieve herself to death."

"But what could part them?" Gertrude asked, while Louisa sat silent, staring up at her brother's face, more grave now than was its wont.

Tony roused himself.

"Any one of a dozen things," he answered, with sudden carelessness. "When the Pope lies between married people, they are quite capable of getting into a row over pickled pears or pet poodles. And it's the row that counts in the end; not the *casus belli*. Going, Miss Hardwicke? I hope my theories have not routed you utterly."

As a matter of course, he took Gertrude home. When he had once more let himself in at his own front door and paused to pocket his latchkey, he was astounded to discover Louisa still sitting before the fire.

"Hullo! Byng not gone yet?" he queried cheerily.

At his step and voice, Louisa faced about.

"Tony," she challenged him; "it is no use for you to fib. Something has happened to change your opinion of Mr. Alstrom."

Deliberately, as he still stood on the threshold, he drew off one glove, then the other.

"Honour bright?" he inquired, with every showing of pleased interest. "How do you know?"

"Because I know you."

"Sure. You always did," Tony made amicable assent. "Sometimes, you know more about me than anybody else — no; don't smirk, I've not finished — including myself."

"But you have," she asserted, her gravity yielding not one whit to his unimpaired jollity.

"Have what? Finished?"

Louisa frowned.

"No; have found out something you don't like. There's no use your denying it, Tony. I haven't given up all my spare time to watching my own and only brother for the sake of being deceived in — "

Tony sank down on the arm of her chair and slid his hand along her shoulders till he held her within the curve of his elbow.

"Been taking lessons of Denise?" he inquired placidly.

She nestled to his touch. Nevertheless, —

"You might as well tell me, Tony," she said, with a faint showing of asperity.

"Tell you what, child?"

"About Mr. Alstrom."

"What about him?"

"What it is that you don't like," she persisted.

"Louisa," Tony's voice lost all its mockery; "I like Thorne Alstrom better than I have ever liked any man before, like him with what you women, when it's a case of each other, call love. I don't know why it began, nor when; but I do know that it can never end while we both live. Remember that, dear girl; and, whatever comes up, don't ever make the mistake of thinking that I like him less, or am less loyal than I have ever been."

"But, Tony," her voice was full of question; "you have found out something new about the man."

"Yes," he assented, a smile breaking through his gravity. "I find out new things, every day."

"But something especial, something since you went down to New York at Christmas," she urged.

Tony rose and stood on the rug, looking down at his sister with the obvious amusement a man is prone to bestow upon the intuitions of his feminine household.

"You'd best write a detective story, Louisa," he advised her dispassionately; "you're showing off no end of constructive talent. No; you needn't try to come it over me. In the first place, you have a Byng; that one fact alone renders you an unfit person to receive confidences. And, in the next place, I shall tell you nothing, because — " Pausing in his speech, he picked up the tongs and fell to wrestling with the fire.

"Because what, Tony? Really you are quite too bad," his sister protested.

But Tony's head was almost up the chimney, and his answering voice, in consequence, took on a hollow tone.

"Because," he assured her calmly; "I've not one single, solitary thing to tell."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"BUT, Pierre — "

"Yes, I know; only — "

Back and forth and to and fro rolled the waves of argument, yet the tide of talk flowed in one direction, just as the water at their feet, tossed into waves by the fresh spring breeze, yet yielded to the current and the falling tide and rolled steadily onwards to the Gulf, where it was bound to lose its identity and become one with the huge ocean. In the pauses of the talk, Alstrom watched it with a curious fascination, it seemed so like an outward symbol of his own mind. The froth and foam were tossing backwards; but the motion was always forward, always towards the unseen, distant sea. It had come to the point where neither mind nor river could resist the flowing.

Shoulder to shoulder, Pierre and Alstrom were pacing the long pier which juts out far to the middle of the northern channel opposite Sainte Anne de Beaupré. Around them, the river danced and glittered in the May sunshine; the Island, just across the channel, lay, a long, slim band of tender green, for, in that late spring, the trees were but just bursting into leaf. Moored at the end of the pier, a shabby little steamer was awaiting the return of the pilgrimage it had brought down the river, that morning. Beyond the pier and the railway lay

the court where Alstrom and Denise first had met, filled now with brown-frocked Franciscans of the pilgrimage. And beyond again, a rounded bulk against the sky, Sainte Anne's Mountain capped its dark green sides with a thin gray veil of mist. Far down the river, too, the sunshine lost itself in another mist-veil, darker and full of promise of a coming storm.

"And I am not yet sure — "

"Your logic halts; but your heart — "

"I know, Pierre; but I need a little logic, too. One can't go altogether on the strength of a gorgeous ritual."

Swiftly the boy shook his head.

"The ritual is the same for this shrine and for the humblest mountain church, so where is your gorgeousness? It is, however, our sacraments — "

"Yes; but ours are about the same thing: baptism, confirmation, marriage."

"And the confession?" Pierre queried, his eyes on the distant mist-wreaths creeping down the mountain side.

Alstrom shook his head.

"Not often. That is where I still stick fast, Pierre."

"But why?"

"The old reason, *cui bono*."

"To wash away our sins and start clean," the boy said simply. "It is always such a joy, when we come out from the confessional."

Alstrom started, and looked keenly down at the boy at his side. What could Pierre, clean-minded, simple-hearted, know about the eating canker of hidden sin, know of the joy of laying the knowledge of such sin upon the shoulders of some one else? Besides, even granted the existence of such a sin, was it always a

relief to drop its burden upon others? The very act of dropping it was bound to cause a ripple which would spread and spread in ever-widening arcs. Better to hold the burden steady upon shoulders fitted to its weight.

Instinctively, as we all do at such times, Alstrom turned to his own experience for confirmation of his belief, turned there and found it, ready to his hand. Only a few short months before, Wood had laid his clumsy fingers upon one of the hiding-places of Alstrom's own life, had kept Alstrom living in momentary fear lest he pull out the contents and spread them to the light of day. Now, six months later, Alstrom could still feel that sickening fear which kept him in strained uncertainty as to what each day might bring forth. In comparison with its crushing weight, its mortal terror, the weight of the sin itself shrank almost into insignificance, the terror of its consequences seemed a matter of small account. Beside it, too, the shock of Wood's death dwindled; regret lost itself in the consciousness that, at last, he himself was once more free from the daily, hourly strain which had wellnigh unmanned him. And, if one could suffer so from knowledge gained by chance, what could be the terror which would follow a voluntary self-betrayal even to a priest bound to silence by his holy vows? Impetuously, and regretting his impetuousness the next moment, he cast the question at Pierre. The boy's blue eyes met his eyes in answer; his smile was happy and unreserved.

"What a strange question! The seal of the confessional binds our priests to silence."

"Yes," Alstrom urged; "but there can always be some accidental betrayal."

Pierre shook his head.

"Not even in death. Nothing is more sacred. If you were in mortal sin, a fugitive from the law of your country, and confessed to me, a priest, it could make no difference even in our own outside relations."

Alstrom laughed a little harshly.

"You suggest an extreme case, Pierre," he said.

Again Pierre's eyes sought the mist-veil, now rolling swiftly up the river towards them. Then, with a smile whose tenderness was irresistible, he turned to Alstrom.

"And an impossible case, as far as you are concerned, Mr. Alstrom," he answered. "Still, the extreme case covers the lesser ones, so we may let it stand."

Alstrom nodded, and then attacked a side issue.

"And then, what right has a human man to grant absolution?" he demanded, as they left the pier and crossed the station platform towards the church.

"Why not?"

"Because it's not in human power to do such things."

Pierre smiled.

"You call the Divine One the Great Physician," he said. "On that account, you do not hesitate to call a human doctor to your sick body, and to tell him where the sickness lies. Instead, you call him and ask him to make the cure. It is so for your confessor. By means of constant prayer and holy living, he studies secrets that we others do not know. He can help to cure your soul by finding where the sickness lies and advising you how to drive it away. Confession alone should never bring you absolution; there should be penitence and restitution before the full pardon is received." He paused, and once again his face lighted with the

look of absolute affection and trust which Alstrom had met before, at which he never ceased to marvel and rejoice. Then, for they had reached the steps of the Basilica, he turned and held out his hand. "What a sermon it is!" he said, with a swift return to his old, boyish manner. "I shall have to tell my own confessor how I have been boring your ears. And now I must go to my duty. You would better wait here for a moment, though. The pilgrims are coming for their procession, and you always like the hymn."

Even as he spoke, they came filing slowly out through the great doorway of the church; and Alstrom, watching their slow advance, forgot even to send a parting glance after the boy he loved so well. Three aged friars led the procession, Franciscans with bare sandaled feet and bare tonsured heads, with brown robes of coarsest wool girdled with knotted cords. Each of the three bore in his hands a cross of plainest unstained wood, to which his eyes were raised as with a holy awe. Behind them came the long line of Franciscan monks, brown-robed, cowled and tonsured, and girdled with cords which flapped softly to and fro as they advanced. Behind these again came the lay brothers, Franciscans too, hatted and shod, but clad in the same coarse brown robes. Steadily, slowly, solemnly the line crept down the steps and turned into the accustomed path about the court; but, instead of the well-known hymn to Sainte Anne, they were chanting the words for the Corpus Christi, —

Tantum ergo Sacramentum
Veneremur cernui:
Et antiquum documentum
Novo cedat ritui.

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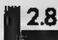

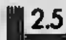

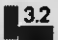

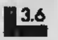

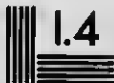

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Already the mist, creeping ever upward from the distant valley, ever downward from the dark green mountain side, lay heavy about the shrine, cutting away the spring sunshine and enveloping all things in a veil of sombre gray. Against it, the brown-frocked procession moved sombrely along, and their chant was sombre, too, weighted with the gravity which springs from life-long belief, life-long devotion.

Praestat fides supplementum
Sensuum defectui.

"Faith, our outward sense befriending,
Makes our inward vision clear."

Not a syllable was lost of the sonorous Latin hymn. Clear and absolutely intelligible, it seemed sweeping across Alstrom's doubts and blotting them from sight, even as the mist swept up the river, blotting from sight all things but those brown-frocked, stern-faced men who were giving public ratification of the Faith which had made them what they were.

Alstrom looked after them with a certain envy. These were not babes to be pleased with the toy of a senseless ritual; but rather men like himself, men who had lived, and thought, and suffered, mayhap, and who were finding their peace in the fellowship of a church whose shelter he was distrusting, as not sufficiently logical to suit the workings of his own mind. And what was his own mind, that he should measure against it these others, and hold it so far superior; that he should measure against it the mind of Henri Allard and Denise? Denise! Yes, there was the rub. How much was Denise; how much the church?

Then he dismissed Denise from his mind, dismissed her to make room for the sheer majesty of the resonant syllables,

> *Ad firmandum cor sincerum*
> *Sola fides sufficit.*

If only his faith alone would, could suffice! The very longing to find rest somewhere, to win through to the end of the battle he had been waging ever since the dawn of the new year, gave a pitiful droop to his lips, even to his wide shoulders, as he stood there, his gray eyes straining to follow the retreating, chanting line of pilgrims as they wound slowly away, out of the court, across the long platform of the railway station and out along the pier towards the spot where the shabby little steamer lay hidden in the haze. On they went, a long, brown line of sombre, chanting men, to vanish in the sombre haze. And then, of a sudden, just as the mist seemed ready to shut down behind them, the gray veil parted and the noonday sun shot down upon them, turning the plain wood crosses to the likeness of gleaming gold. And at the instant, the sombre chant fell into silence, to be followed, an instant after, by the rhythmic theme of the Sainte Anne processional that Alstrom loved, that now was so indissolubly linked in his mind with the thought of Denise,

> *Montrons-nous sans crainte, ses dignes enfants;*
> *Sous sa garde sainte, marchons triomphants.*

The mist dropped down again and cut away the sun; but still, from out its heart, the song came ringing back again to those who yet lingered at the shrine. To one lingerer, at least, before he turned away, it brought

its own message of faith and fearlessness, its own promise that the long battle was nearly at an end and that peace was almost assured.

On his journey back to the city, the assurance remained with him, strong, unbroken and curiously dissociated with all thought of Denise. Like the mist which now wellnigh shut from his physical eyes the flowing of the river, so the echo of those earnest voices, now chanting sombrely of their mighty faith, now ringing out in rhythmic courage, seemed closing his mental outlook to all the side issues of expediency, all the blind alleys of doubt, and fixing it upon the one central fact of the majesty of a creed which could inspire such loyalty in its followers. Instinctively he knew that now but one end was before him, that he was hastening to it at such speed that he could take no more note of the intervening steps. Unknown to himself, he had crossed the arc into the circle of attraction where centrifugal force must yield entirely to centripetal. The final step would now be short.

It was to delay, to seek to realize that step, not to prevent it, that he left the train at Beauport Eglise and, after clambering up the interminable flight of steps which leads to the level of the street, he halted for a moment just inside the church door. Even now, the interior of the place moved him far less than did the outside. The gorgeous altar, rising tier on tier to the arches of the roof, seemed to him less tribute to the might of the faith for which it stood than did the huge twin towers, lifting themselves grandly above the little village, keeping watch and ward over the human life which flowed about it, enduring as the river which flowed down and ever down, along the base of the cliff. And

the human life was quite content to be so simply housed, as long as this gray Gothic pile, itself a symbol, could cover the symbols of their faith.

Leaving the church behind him, he loitered on along the country roads, now golden green with the new-born spring. Above him and in the distance upon either hand arched the pearl-white mist; and the air blew down upon him, warm and damp and sweet with the countless odours of the spring. Vaguely he seemed to realize that some great change awaited him, hidden in the immediate future, just beyond his sight; but, to his surprise, his mind lay stagnant. For the time being, he had ceased to think. His perceptions worked acutely, however. Long afterwards, he could recall each tiny detail of his walk: the knots of children by the roadside and the sound of their shrill patois; the little wayside shrine whose cross bore on its outstretched arms the implements of crucifixion: hammer and nails and crown of thorns, the [illegible]der and, above, the cock; the spire of Charlesbourg church seen grayly through the mist; the din of many bells from Saint Roch's and the Gray Nunnery, as he crossed the long Dorchester Bridge. It was late afternoon when at length he climbed the well-known hill and turned into Famille Street whose head is guarded by the side wall of the Seminary court.

At the archway of the Seminary gate, he paused, irresolute. Then, still without conscious thought to guide his steps, he turned aside, entered the narrow passage and came into the rich half-light of the Seminary Chapel.

"Father Allard?" he said interrogatively to a woman, scrubbing the paved floor of the vestibule; and,

afterwards, he caught himself wondering what had prompted the question.

She glanced up from her pail of suds, and pointed vaguely towards the inner door.

"He is hearing confessions now," she answered. "His name is on the outside of the box." And the next instant, her dripping cloth swashed down again upon the tiles.

Was it chance or Fate which ordained that, just as Alstrom entered the church, a man should rise and leave the confessional box which bore the name *Allard?* Alstrom caught one glimpse of his face, slightly flushed and lighted with a look not of this world. The next instant, he found himself entering the box and, as he knelt within, there came unbidden to his tongue, as if by instinct, the words he had so often read, seeking to know their meaning and to share their mood.

"*Quia peccavi — mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

An instant later, he felt the hand of François Allard rest upon his head bowed on his own wet fingers, and in the touch was something of the soothing healing one gives to a little child.

When they came out from the confessional, a half-hour later, they went their separate ways, but with this difference. François Allard's face was white and stern; but Thorne Alstrom's strength was spent. His mind was dulled by its own reaction from the months-long strain; but in his ears was still the echo of his voice, —

"*Mea maxima culpa.*"

And then the buried, resurrected story of his life.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"ONCE for all, Denise," François Allard demanded sternly; "why do you wish to marry this man?"

"Because I love him," she answered simply.

"But he can never make you happy."

"Why not?"

"Because — " Abruptly he checked himself, rose and walked away to a window across the room.

Denise looked after him in wonder, a wonder which had recurred to her again and again of late. Was François ill; or worried? Or had he tired himself and drunk bad water in that horrid Europe? He had not seemed like his old self since his return. And just now it was so provoking of him to be ill and dull, when her own present was so full of sunshine and fresh air and fresher hope. She sought to rebuke him, totally unaware that his illness was real and of the worst sort, heartsickness, and weariness of brain and nerve. Quite as unaware was she, too, that of his illness she was the innocent cause. It is no light matter for a man like François Allard, when he finds himself all at once confronted with the absolute antagonism between his family ties and the keeping of his priestly vows. The six weeks since Thorne Alstrom had entered the confessional had told upon

François Allard acutely. Nevertheless, Denise, though seeing his worn face and heavy eyes, yet felt herself justified in administering rebuke.

"Have you stopped loving me, François?" she demanded, with a little pout.

"Why should you ask such a foolish question, Denise?" His tone betrayed his weary desire to escape from such futile discussions.

"Because you don't act as if you cared at all. One would suppose that you, even if you are so holy, would have a little interest in my happiness," she answered a bit sharply.

"It is only to make sure that it is your happiness," he told her.

She turned on him abruptly, and, even in the midst of her displeasure with him, her smile was full of contentment in another man, albeit absent. Dropping her girlish coquetry, she spoke with the earnest dignity of a full-grown woman

"How can you doubt?" she asked. "For months, you have known that Thorne Alstrom and I love each other. Now, since his conversion, the last hindrance to that love has vanished."

"What proof have you that it is the last?" he inquired, with sombre gravity.

Proudly she faced him, her little head erect.

"Your word," she answered. "Three months ago, you told us, François, told us in the presence of my mother that, were he only Catholic, you would give me to no one more readily than to him."

For a moment, he watched her silently. Then he bowed his head and turned to leave the room.

Half-way to the door, he was caught and held by

Denise's clinging arms, his tonsured head hugged down among the laces which lay in fluffy rows about her shoulders.

"François, dear old brother, don't leave me so," she begged him, and her voice betrayed the fact that she was halting midway between laughter and tears. "You know I love you; you know how I need your approval, how I need to have you love my Thorne. He is good, François, good and so generous and loving. Wait till you know him as I do. Then you will find out, just as I have found, that my silly little life has gained a double value now — " her voice dropped over the final words — " now that it has earned his love."

Five months later, Denise Alstrom, just returned from her bridal trip to Europe, was ready to aver that her estimate to François had been only too conservative. The value of her life, wrapped around by Thorne Alstrom's love and care, had not only doubled, but quadrupled. Not even to herself, still less to Pierre, who had retained his old place in all her plans and thoughts, could she analyze the full measure of her new-found happiness. Only her mother, gentle Madame Allard, seemed to understand, because she was a woman and had gone through a like experience.

By Mrs. Mansfield and by Mrs. Hardwicke, meanwhile, the news of Thorne Alstrom's engagement had been received with quite unlike emotions. Mrs. Hardwicke had accepted the tidings with a resignation which held its own hint of chastening, by reason of the implied disparagement of her own daughter. Mrs. Mansfield, on the other hand, welcomed it, as the removal of a stumbling block from the path of her Tony. Side by side on the veranda of the Mansfield cottage

at the Island, they sat discussing the matter for the dozenth time, while the river before them blazed and twinkled in the hot noon sun. It was August, and the wedding day was almost at hand.

"Yes, that is what we all were saying, this morning," Mrs. Hardwicke assented, punctuating her words, the while, with an emphatic nod. "It is always the unexpected that happens."

"But I did expect this," Mrs. Mansfield objected. "So did we all, in fact."

Swiftly Mrs. Hardwicke mounted to her own defence for, like most people, she hated to be balked in her appropriation of a well-worn phrase.

"I never thought it would come to this," she said, and her accent supplied the missing words "with the poor misguided man."

"But it is a most excellent thing on both sides," Mrs. Mansfield said placidly.

This time, Mrs. Hardwicke's words supplemented her accent.

"But how can any man be so misguided?" she inquired of the flagpole at the farther end of the lawn.

The flagpole remained discreetly silent, and Mrs. Mansfield showed a similar disposition to avoid an answer, so once more Mrs. Hardwicke took up the theme.

"It is quite terrible to me, a man of his neat habits, going over to Rome and mumbling up his prayers with incense," she continued. "Really, the air in that Basilica is quite insupportable at times, and I don't understand how he can accept the damnation of unbaptized babies, either. Of course, our orthodox churches hold to that point, too; but they don't em-

phasize it with rows on rows of candles just for all the world like a birthday cake. Besides that, those two young people don't half know each other."

"They have had a year to learn," Mrs. Mansfield suggested mildly. "I am sure Tony told me that they met at Sainte Anne, last July."

"August," Mrs. Hardwicke corrected firmly. "Besides, what are a few casual meetings? It is only in watching the daily life of each other that a safe marriage can be consummated."

Mrs. Mansfield smiled.

"I am afraid, then, that there can't be many safe marriages," was her not unnatural comment.

But Mrs. Hardwicke appeared to feel that she had ventured too far and upon unsound ice. Scorning a direct retreat as cowardly, she yet aimed a devious course to shore.

"This has been a most interesting experience for my dear Gertrude," she observed tentatively.

"And a great pleasure also," Mrs. Mansfield added. "Louisa, too, is delighted. Indeed, we all are, for we are fond of them both, and it is a delight to see two young people so completely happy."

"If only it lasts!" Mrs. Hardwicke sighed, abandoning the theme of her dear Gertrude's pleasure in favour of her former attitude of scepticism.

"Why shouldn't it last? They seem wonderfully well fitted to each other."

"A doll and a dogmatist?" Mrs. Hardwicke queried, more for the sake of the antithesis than for the accuracy of either characterization.

"Tony says that he fully believes in the sincerity of Mr. Alstrom's conversion," Mrs. Mansfield suggested,

as she inspected the ruffles in her sleeves, then clasped her dainty hands.

"Any man is ready to be converted to any thing, so long as he is bewitched by a pretty face," Mrs. Hardwicke retorted, with a sudden lapse into the bad temper caused by her losses at bridge, that morning. "Besides, I don't call Denise Allard pretty, myself. I never did care for that doll-baby type of girl."

"Really?" Mrs. Mansfield glanced up in well-feigned surprise. "Do you know, I find them rather restful and feminine, after the raw-boned, athletic sort of girl one meets so often, nowadays."

The pause which followed was so short as to be wellnigh imperceptible. Then Mrs. Hardwicke bent forward and sniffed.

"I think your cook is allowing the jam to burn," she said tartly.

Leaning back once more, she stared tranquilly after the retreating back of her hostess.

"Raw-boned, athletic type!" she remarked to herself. "Tony! British Miss Nancy! Bah!" And, opening her bag, she drew out her knitting work.

The short northern summer had reached its zenith and already was sinking to a close. Here and there in the woodlands, a single scarlet branch bore witness to the approach of autumn; the evening air was crispy cool and the wind, sweeping up the river, brought daily fresher greetings from the northern seas.

To Thorne Alstrom, the summer had flown by him in one delirium of happiness. His past was done with, his present was full of enjoyment, his future stretched away before him in one unending dream of rapture. His confession to François Allard had faded from his

mind, and even his new religion seemed to him as vague as a part of any dream could be. Less than a week after his entering the confessional, only a day after he had been reinstated in his old place in the Allard home, he had been sent out into the northern woods, there to come face to face, for the first time, with the practical needs of his profession. There, in the shadow of the age-old forests, beside the mountain streams which plunged headlong over precipices hundreds of feet in height, or tore their way through gorges so narrow that the trees on either bank interlaced their branches to form one unbroken shade, there in the midst of a nature grander and more wild than he had ever known till then, Thorne Alstrom felt the purely human world losing its grip upon him, slipping away into the neglected corners of his being. Details vanished. Only one all-pervading thought remained. That thought concerned itself with the best means of making his coming manhood worthy of the gift Denise had at length conferred upon him. For the present, the means lay in his profession. He did the work of ten men, all day long and day after day. All night long and night after night, he lay awake to dream of one woman. That woman was Denise. It was no mean gift she had bestowed upon him, the gift of her whole loving, cajoling little self, full of whimsies and coquetry, but fuller still of loyal love. Now and then it seemed to Thorne Alstrom, lying wide-eyed in the darkness, listening to the distant call of some night bird, to the plash of water close at hand, that he had never appreciated Denise until now. Measured by city standards, she was conventional, a dainty little society girl who danced and chattered and flirted, too, sometimes.

Viewed in the light that came softly down through the dim arches of the trees above him, conventions dropped aside, leaving her image clothed only in the sweetness of her love for him, her trust in him. Day by day, he shut his teeth hard upon his resolution to deserve her trust.

For Denise, even in Alstrom's absence, the summer was passing upon swift wings. The formal affiancing had not occurred until mid-May; the wedding was set for the first week in September. There was much to do. The Allard family had its own strict traditions as to what a trousseau should contain, traditions which had come down, unbroken, from the first mistress of the *seigneurie* far down the river. They included all things in dozens, and the dozens must always be in the plural number. They counted linen as well as lace, flannels as well as frills. Moreover, Denise was the only daughter. Accordingly, Madame Allard bought many things, hired many women to sit and sew in the great room above the dining-room where Madame Allard, after her thrifty, practical fashion, saw to all the cutting. Denise, meanwhile, alternately unpacked gifts and visited her tailor with an industry which would have worn out even her young strength, had it not been for the happiness which turned even the drudgery of deciding between tucks and pleats into the merest joy.

In those warm days, it seemed as if the golden, glorious summer were adding a final touch of ripening to the girl's nature. Her captiousness vanished; her coquetry dropped aside. In their places, the warm young heart throbbed into its perfect womanhood. Like Thorne Alstrom, she too felt that her future held

but one ideal. Night after night, her simple little prayer ended with the petition that she might be worthy of his love. Then, her wavy dark head once on the pillow, she fell asleep to dream of him, lying in his tent beneath the spreading trees.

And then came the first week in August, an idyllic week whose tender, happy memory was destined to remain always undimmed in Alstrom's mind. Denise was tired with her many preparations; he himself, he averred, was ill for a sight of her, yet unable to leave his work, just then, in the hands of his subordinates. Could not Madame Allard bring her and Mouche to spend a week with him in camp? They had a capital cook, and there was such a good little extra tent and a couple of cots which had never yet been used.

Madame Allard could, and did. And to Thorne Alstrom and Denise Allard, sitting at her feet in the open door of the tent, watching the lace-like falls gleaming white in the moonlight, it seemed that the plash of the dropping water held in its liquid note a goodly share of the same joy as came clashing down from the Basilica bells one morning a month later.

After all their plans, it was not François Allard who married them. Only two days before the wedding, he was called to Montreal. His errand, one which required some diplomacy, had been assigned to him quite suddenly. The Archbishop felt that he understood its details more clearly than any one else. He was sorry; it was quite inevitable. And Thorne Alstrom, who alone could have supplied the key to this inevitableness, was totally oblivious of all things else, just then, save his own happiness. Fond as he had always been of François Allard, glad as he would have been to have him

perform the holy rite, nevertheless, it was the fact of his marriage that counted then, not the wholly subordinate question of what priest it was who married them. He drew a long breath of perfect happiness, that noon, when, the wedding breakfast over, the healths drunk and the good-byes said, the great engines of the *Empress* slowly started into life, and the huge steamer forged down the river into a future which, so far as his pleasure was concerned, should be peopled only by himself and his wife, Denise.

Side by side, Tony Mansfield and Gertrude Hardwicke came out of the long red-covered wharf and crossed the stretch of tracks beside the immigration sheds. As he opened the carriage door, Tony heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Well," he said; "it's over and done, and I neither upset the wedding cake nor trod on the tail of the wedding gown. *Nunc dimittis!* Anyhow, it was a pretty wedding, and I only hope they will be as happy as they deserve."

Gertrude tucked up her gown to make room for Tony on the seat beside her.

"You'll ride up with me?" she said. "You know Louisa — "

"Doesn't want me, when she has her Byng," Tony assented cheerily. "No; plainly not, though she means to be very decent about it. I suppose it won't be long before we go through the same agony again."

"Worse for you," Gertrude reminded him unkindly. "As head of your house, you'll have to give the bride away, and you know you never will be able to remember which is M. or N., and whose hand you must put into whose."

Tony laughed.

"If Byng is any way like Alstrom, he won't await the putting. Did you ever see a man in such a fuss to get himself wedded?"

"I never saw a man so happy," Gertrude assented, with a smile. "Really, Mr. Mansfield, aren't you ready now to cancel your misgivings?"

Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm ready to shunt them off on the shoulders of François Allard," he answered.

"Why François?"

As she asked the idle question, her glance was following a knot of immigrants, Silicians in their sheepskin coats and gaudy headshawls, who had strayed from the immigration sheds below. Tony watched her profile intently, as he made careless answer, —

"François? Because, like me, he is head of the house, and, moreover, he has been Alstrom's confessor."

His words brought no change in her expression. Her own coming question, however, did so, as, forgetting the sheepskin coats, she turned back to Tony once more.

"How do you suppose it feels to a Protestant to make his first confession?" she demanded suddenly.

Tony blinked, as much at the suddenness as at the nature of the question. Then he rallied.

"I should think it might depend a little upon the sort of thing he had to confess," he returned specious answer.

"Naturally. And yet, now I think of it, no," the girl said thoughtfully. "It might affect the amount of his feeling, but not the sort of it. I don't believe that any person of Protestant ancestry and training would

ever feel quite comfortable, once he had confided his sins to any priest."

She spoke with energy, conviction. Tony merely laughed.

"Miss Puritan!" he dubbed her. "It is in your blood, I fancy; and you can't live it down. But do you realize that, of all that the Roman Church holds holy, nothing is so sacred as the secrets her priests receive in the confessional?"

"Yes," she assented slowly; "I know the law. But the priests are human, subject to accidents and mistakes. Sooner or later, we Protestants are bound to think of that. To-day and to-morrow and the day after, Thorne Alstrom will be as sincere a Catholic as Denise, and as trusting. The germ of Protestantism was born in him, though, and it dies hard. The day will surely come, I believe, when in his inmost soul he will regret that he gave to another man's keeping the secrets of his own life."

Tony laid a trio of folds in the skirt of his best black coat. Then he spoke slowly.

"Perhaps — he had nothing to confess."

But she opposed him sharply.

"Of course he had. We all have: I, you, any man we meet. That is no reason we should confess it, though. We'd much better keep it to ourselves, ponder on it and make what restitution we can. Who is it says the world holds more repentance than confessions? For my part, I see no use in adding to the sum total of misery by heaping our confessions on the next man's shoulders. We'd much better shut our teeth and work our own salvation out of the consequences of our sins."

She fell silent for a moment as the Basilica bells, now just above their heads, clashed out the noontide peal. Then, when the bell was silenced, she spoke again, reiterating her former theme.

" However, as I say, I doubt if any man, converted from Protestantism, ever ends his days without a lingering question and regret for the safety of the confessed sin that he has been keeping shut up inside his own conscience."

But, even as she spoke, she had no notion how soon her words would echo the dominant theme of Thorne Alstrom's life.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IN the high noontide of his wedding day, Thorne Alstrom looked forward into a future which, so far as his pleasure was concerned, should be peopled only by himself and his wife, Denise. In the fullness of time, he was destined to learn that that same future, to be perfect, must needs have place in it for three: himself, his wife, Denise, and yet one other.

The knowledge came to him quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly, one afternoon in the February which followed their wedding. It was the eve of Saint Valentine's day, the thirteenth, as he realized long afterwards; and, leaving the office at noon, he had joined Tony for a long tramp on snowshoes far out along the Sainte Foy Road. The day and the sport and the blithe society of Tony had proved equally intoxicating; and it had been with the blood in his veins like wine, with a tread like a boy, that at last, his snowshoes on his back, he had gone running up his own front steps and, with a word to Mouche, sitting in the sun outside, had unlocked his own front door.

"Denise!" he called from the very threshold. "Oh, Denise!"

For a moment, the silence of the empty rooms settled down behind his cry. Then, from the front room up-stairs, the room reserved for guests, he heard a

voice, Denise's, yet with an accent which in some vague way struck him as unfamiliar.

"Here I am, Thorne."

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, just — some things."

"Come down and see what I have brought you."

"No. You come up here."

"What for?" The accent was that of his own merry, irresponsible schooldays.

"I — 'm busy."

"And I'm cold. Come down here, Denise. I want to get warm, and I want to see my wife, while I am doing it."

"Silly boy!" Denise's head came into sight above the banisters. "Haven't you had enough of your wife before now?"

"Never!" Thorne Alstrom replied, with a conviction which came back to him later on. "What's more, I never shall."

The head vanished; but the voice remained, remained and took on a new tremulousness and something closely akin to awe.

"Thorne dear, I truly wish you would come up here. I — I — I've something I want to show you."

This time his instinct warned him that Denise was in earnest, and he took the stairs at a bound.

"Where are you, child?" he queried from the stair-top.

"Here. In the front room. Come in here."

Following her voice, he went inside the room. Denise was sitting by the bureau, her hands clasped lightly in her lap, her eyes fixed on something within the open bureau drawer, something as yet invisible to Alstrom.

Crossing the room, he threw one arm across her shoulder as he bent down to look. Within the drawer lay a trio of wee garments, sheerest linen and large enough to fit a good-sized doll.

Up to that instant, Thorne Alstrom's life had seemed to him complete. Then and then only, in the same moment of its realization, he recognized the fact of his own unspoken prayer.

When, an hour later, they gently shut the drawer and turned away, the whole colour of Thorne Alstrom's life had changed. His aims and hopes, too, had changed and broadened. It was not enough, now, to live so that Denise could honour him; he must leave behind him a name that his child could bear with pride. Meanwhile, his care was all for Denise. Up to that day, she had been the centre of his world. Now, all at once, she had become the very pivot around which his universe revolved. And, in the intervals of his thought for her, he sought to realize at least the edge of his own happiness.

In the weeks which followed, weeks of raw winds and melting snows and slow coming of a tardy springtime, Alstrom vibrated like a shuttle between his office and his home. At the office, he cast himself upon his work with a fervour which accomplished the allowance of a dozen men and won for his jovial efficiency the smiles of the entire executive staff, smiles which bore in their cordiality more than a hint that at no distant day he would be promoted to a place high on that staff, chief engineer, perhaps, or even a vice-president. At home, his hours rushed by him at full speed, although they varied little, one from another. All he asked of them was the right to sit by the fire, with Mouche at

his feet, and watch Denise at the other end of the rug, her pretty head bent over the scrap of linen on which she stitched, stitched, stitched with the daintiness known only to the girl bred in the ways of nuns. Sometimes he made a feeble pretext of reading aloud to her, the evening paper, or a chapter of some new novel. The pretext always vanished speedily, however. Instead, his arms crossed behind his head and his eyes alternating between the fire and Denise, he loved best to sit and talk about the new happiness which was before them.

It would be a boy, of course, and he must have Denise's hair and dimples; but his eyes would be blue, and he must be named Pierre. No; no other name would be half so good, and Pierre would stand his sponsor. And they would have one of those new, artistic carriages up from New York; he would send for a catalogue, next day. And wouldn't he be a great boy in his long-skirted Seminary coat and green sash? What sort of a puppy would he better have? Mouche was growing old, and every boy needed the companionship of a great, healthy puppy. There were some thoroughbred collie pups in a Saint Roch's window now. Why not engage one of those, and have it settled? And, later, what did Denise think, if they possibly could spare him, of sending him across to Eton and Oxford?

And Denise answered and agreed, and then interrupted her agreement to ask whether Alstrom would like this little petticoat better embroidered in rosebuds or in daisies, all white, of course, and with ever so many leaves among the blossoms. Merely the question sent Alstrom across the rug to lean upon her chair and

discuss the matter with quite judicial gravity. And then the chair slipped, and the needle stuck into Denise's thumb, bringing out a tiny drop of blood which absolutely had to be kissed away. And, as his yellow head bent to her hand, her other hand slid around his neck and drew his cheek to hers. And then, the next they knew, the evening was done, and it was time for bed.

Spring came with lagging steps, that year, as if loath to interrupt the idyl. When the season really opened, Alstrom's work would call him back into the woods again. Accordingly, they frowned upon each day of warm south winds; they mourned at each report of floating ice in the river, since that betokened that the Cap Rouge ice-bridge was yielding, and that the break-up was at hand. And the first green leaves followed hard on the heels of the break-up, and Alstrom's leaving home must follow the coming of the first green leaves.

The day came at last, however, when Alstrom could no longer trump up a plausible excuse to delay his starting for the field. The spring had been late about its appearing; now it was coming with a rush, and Alstrom was forced to yield to the inevitable, pack up his camp kit and be off. His last evening beside the fire was late in coming to an end. Loyal to his profession, as he would ever be, he yet resented acutely its claims just now. It did seem a bit cruel that he must lose a single one of these precious days with Denise. His heart was heavy, next morning, when he rose from the table to take her in his arms for her good-bye kiss; yet no forebodings mingled themselves with its heaviness.

A month later, a letter from the doctor followed him

into camp. Denise was very well, everything was going on as well as it possibly could. Nevertheless, Denise was mourning for him, drooped a bit now and then. Moreover, the city was hot and crammed with tourists at every turn. There was no pleasure in driving; all her old walks were infested with strangers who pointed fingers and aimed cameras from dawn to dusk. So much preamble; then the real purpose of the letter. Camp was only four miles from a good-sized town, and would stay as near to it as that for some weeks? The doctor knew the town. The water was good, and so was the hotel. Denise and her maid would be up, the next night, to see what country air would do by way of tonic.

The little hotel sitting-room was no equivalent for their own fireside. Nevertheless, Alstrom, through all his long day afield, through the long ride back town, found his thoughts rushing forward eagerly to the short summer evening beside Denise. The sewing was nearly done now; but the plans went on unceasingly, and widened as they went. Now they discussed all sorts of details, details which lay a good score of years in the future, with a portentous gravity of which they both were equally unconscious. Now they chaffed each other for taking the situation ridiculously in earnest. Now they laughed like the veriest pair of children, as they plotted and planned how they should eke out their own insufficient dignity to meet the new needs laid upon it. And gravity and chaff and mirth all came to one inevitable end; for, before the talk was done, Alstrom always gathered his wife into his arms and held her close, close.

"Thorne," Denise made abrupt [illegible], one day;

"do you ever remember that morning at Sainte Anne?"

"Do I ever forget it?" he queried.

She slid her hand into his, then, with her other hand, twisted their fingers into a tight knot.

"What if we hadn't been there?" she asked a little wishfully.

He laughed.

"Then we might not have been here," he answered. But, as her face showed how the thought was hurting her, he added, "Still, it all would have come about, some other way."

She shook her head.

"You can never tell. It might have been me; it might have been some other woman. Thorne dear, you may not understand me; but I like to feel there has been a great deal of Me in your life."

"There always will be," he assured her gently.

She laughed a little, and with a touch of her old coquetry.

"I have meant to make sure of that," she told him. "Listen, Thorne. It was I who suggested your remaining for a novena, and then you fell ill and had to stay, whether you wished or not. It was I who dragged poor Pierre to the Hôtel Dieu, that day we found you; I who — oh, so many things. And at last it was I who —" still laughing, she buried her dark little head against his shoulder; "I who married you. Thorne, are you ever sorry?" she asked, with sudden gravity.

Gently he lifted her head until he could look straight down into her dark eyes.

"Denise, my darling, you have made my life worth

while," he told her, and, looking up into his clear gray eyes, she knew that he spoke the truth.

Around them lay the silence of the Canadian forest, a silence stupendous and full of awe, notwithstanding the ceaseless cry of nature's children which breaks the stillness into a faint clamour, a silence born of the wilderness as yet untrodden by the foot of man. Two days later, the moving of the camp would send Denise back to the city once more. Alstrom, then, had resolved to have one perfect day alone with Denise in the woods they both had learned to love so well. And now the day was waning to a close which bade fair to be as perfect as all the hours which had gone before. Side by side, they were sitting on Denise's rug, spread out on the soft mossy bank of a chattering mountain stream, watching the July sunlight sift down through the arching trees above them, watching the trout lazily sliding to and fro in the dark pool just at their feet, watching the moments pass away, each one bringing nearer the fruition of their hopes.

At length Alstrom raised his head and pointed to the thickening shadows.

"Come," he said; and, in the stillness with which nature's children greet the coming night, his voice took on a tone of reverent regret. "Our perfect day is ending. It is time we were going on."

Stooping, he held out his hands to steady Denise to her feet. She took his hands, half rose, then fell back with a little cry, partly of surprise, in part of pain.

"Denise!"

She smiled up at him bravely, although the colour had left her cheeks.

"It is nothing," she reassured him. "The moss

broke away under my foot and let me down. That's all."

"All, really?" In his anxiety, his voice was stern.

Her smile broke into a laugh which brought out all her dimples and chased the anxiety from his face.

"Really all," she told him. "What a clumsy wife you have, Thorne! I should think you would have chosen better. Where did we leave the carriage? No, silly boy; I can walk, and you don't need to hold me up like that. I promise not to fall again."

All the long way back to town, she kept up a ceaseless, unbroken tide of chatter. Afterwards, Thorne Alstrom remembered that she never once spoke of the future, but only of the days when they were slowly finding out the secret of each other's love. He could not see that, under the fluffy ends of her scarf, her hands were shut together until the nails bit into the soft flesh. He did see, however, that her cheeks, instead of their usual bloom, wore a mask of ashy gray, and the sight filled him with a vague uneasiness. Nevertheless, at the door of the hotel, he could only put her into the hands of her maid and rush away. For more than an hour, a message had awaited his return. His transitman had fallen and injured his arm and back. Would he come at once? Alstrom waited only long enough to telegraph to Quebec for a doctor and a nurse for the injured man. Later on, he blessed the Providence which rules such things.

He was kept long in camp, and the evening was nearly over when once more he reined in his horse at the familiar steps. The maid was waiting at the door, her arched fingers beside her face to shield her peering

eyes from the glare of the lamp she held in her other hand.

"Thank God it is you!" she exclaimed, as Alstrom came striding from the darkness into the narrow arc of light. "Madame is very ill."

Then the lamp shook in her hand, as Alstrom pushed his way past her and hurried up the stairs.

Doctor and nurse arrived at midnight, but not to go to the camp. Instead, the doctor never paused upon the station platform, but pulled off cuffs and coat, as he hastened across the road to the hotel. One sight of Alstrom's face, one sound from the room above the open hotel door, these were enough to make him forget the errand on which he had really come.

On the way to the hotel, he spoke but once, and that briefly.

"Courage, man!" he said. "We'll do our level best."

Dawn found Alstrom, haggard and unkempt, pacing, pacing the veranda floor. His bright hair seemed to have lost its lustre, his eyes were sunken and, ever and anon, he lifted his hand to wipe away the beads of sweat which broke out on his forehead at every moan from that room above his head. It was so that the nurse found him, and to Alstrom, watching her face as she came out to meet the morning sun, it seemed that she was a new and starchy sort of angel.

"Keep up your courage, Mr. Alstrom," she bade him cheerily. "She has come through the night better than seemed possible, and the doctor says that the worst is nearly over. I think we all can begin to hope."

And as the dazzling sun shot up into the new day,

Alstrom lifted his haggard face to salute its splendour and confront it with the equal splendour of his hope.

The morning dragged perceptibly, however, and, as it dragged, the hope waned. The bulletins from the room above were less reassuring, the sounds more ominous. Something, too, seemed wrong about the action of Denise's heart. For the result, time alone could tell.

Time did tell. Just at the stroke of mid-day, just at the zenith of a day so golden as to be rare even in the clear Canadian northland, the air of the room above was cut by a sharp, querulous little cry. Denise's hand shut hard upon that of her husband to whom the doctor had sent an imperious summons, not ten minutes before.

"Thorne dearest — our Pierre!" she said faintly. And then, an instant later, "You've been — the heart of — my — whole — life," she added.

And then, her hand still shut hard on his, she fell asleep even while, over the quiet room, dropped the final words of the last sacrament.

An hour later, to Thorne Alstrom who sat, his dry, hot eyes buried in his hands, came the nurse. She carried a little bundle of white flannels and, gently drawing down Alstrom's inert hands, she laid the bundle into his arms. To her relief, the arms tightened their hold about the little roll of flannel.

"See," she said, with a brightness she was far from feeling. "It is your little son, Mr. Alstrom. He's a tiny thing, but as pretty a baby as I have ever seen."

Drawing down one corner of the blanket, she exposed the red and wrinkled little face, lifted one red and wrinkled little fist and laid it against Alstrom's great brown hand. Then she tiptoed away, out of the

room, leaving Alstrom with his baby boy, tearless still, but gaining a certain strength and courage with every breath that came from the baby lips, every throbbing of the baby heart.

The afternoon dragged by, as the morning had done. The doctor had departed, galloping, to the invalid in camp; but the nurse remained. Now and then she tiptoed back into the room, now and then she took the baby into her arms; but, for the most part, she left it to Alstrom's gentle holding.

"It is just as well off with you as with me," she said, with a meaning he did not grasp until later. "Besides, he is your very own baby boy."

However, as dusk sank over the room, she bent down and took the child into her womanly arms, gave it a drop or two of something, then another drop. This time, she did not replace it in the father's lap.

An hour later, darkness was quite fallen on the world. In the up-stairs room, with lighted tapers at her head and feet, Denise Allard lay sleeping. On her arm was a tiny baby, and he too was asleep. But to the man, crouching on the floor beside the bed and moaning low from time to time, it seemed that sleep would never come again.

And outside, [illegible]ing at reckless pace through the fallen darkness, the nurse was rushing to the doctor's aid.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TO all concerned, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that to Tony Mansfield and Henri Allard should fall the duty of clearing and closing the house where Thorne Alstrom had lived with his young bride. The idyl was ended; the dream broken. It would have been cruel either to expect Alstrom to return to the deserted shell of his life's happiness, or to go through the strain of taking away the furnishings which were so much a part of the dream. Even to Tony and Henri, each chair, each cushion, each bit of pottery held a curiously personal association with Denise. They had been chosen by her, placed by her; they had received her thousand and one little domestic cares. And if they, casual guests in the house, could feel such strong association, to Alstrom, living in their midst, the associations would be overpowering, crushing. They talked together of the matter, talked with Madame Allard. The next day, Alstrom accepted their offer to take charge of all things, accepted it with a gratitude of which they were but half aware.

Before they entered the house, however, Alstrom spent one day and night there alone. Only the darkness and the clocks told him it was night. Hour after hour, he wandered through the deserted rooms, now brooding idly on the past, now gathering up little heaps

of belongings, these for Madame Allard, these for Pierre; and these, a little fan, a bit of lace she had worn almost constantly, all that spring, a picture or two for himself. The other things they might divide as they would. He would leave all that to the care of Madame Allard who was grateful for any occupation in the long days of bleak loneliness, bleak disappointment. The next morning early, he left the house for ever, and went back to his old room in the boarding-house upon the Place d'Armes. His trunks would follow, later in the day; but, clasped in his arm, he carried with him a little box, tightly wrapped and tied with a bit of string.

That same night, Tony excused himself early from a dinner and went to look him up. As he crossed the Ring, he glanced up at the familiar room. Its windows were brightly lighted; one of them stood open to the soft October air. Alstrom was evidently at home, doubtless busy settling his belongings into their former nooks and corners. Possibly the return to the old abiding place might bring with it a return to the old frame of mind. Alstrom would never forget Denise; their love, their life together had been too perfect for that. But, as time went on, as Alstrom sank back more and more into the old routine of his unmarried life, of necessity the memory of his sorrow would grow a little dim. Denise herself would choose to have it so. Her gay, blithe nature could never be selfish enough to wish to condemn Alstrom to a lifelong mourning for her absence. And, in spite of loyalty, time is bound to do its work. Tony's face was serene, as he went tramping up the familiar stairs.

Just too late to stay his hand from knocking at the

door, he caught a little, low sound which sent a great lump to his throat and blurred his eyes. For the once, his warm human kindliness turned him impetuous, broke down for him the wall of conventions which heretofore he never once had violated. Laying his hand on the knob without awaiting an answer to his knock, he opened the door, walked in, crossed the floor to Alstrom's side and laid his hand, heavy with unspoken sympathy, on Alstrom's shoulder.

"Old man, don't take it too infernally hard," he said, brokenly, while, with the other hand, he rubbed the hot tears out of his honest eyes.

On the table before him lay the little box which Alstrom had brought with him, clasped in the hollow of his arm. The box was open and empty; its contents were spread out on the table: tiny slips and shirts and petticoats, rows of tucks and ruffles and wee hemstitched hems, garments fit for an empress in their daintiness, fit for a doll in their size, and dotted everywhere with the work of Denise's fingers. They were by no means as she had left them, however. Here and there a hem or a ruffle was crushed by a man's strong hands, here and there a bit of ribbon was all stained and spotted with a man's great, hard-shed tears. Nevertheless, Alstrom sat beside them now, gaunt, pale and absolutely dry-eyed. Both face and voice were piteous, as he turned to Tony.

"I thought you'd be around, to-night," he said. "I got these things out, though; I knew you wouldn't mind. You see, they stand for all those last months together, and I wanted to look at them again. We were so happy, while she sat and worked at them."

For a moment, Tony faltered. Then he drew up a

chair, threw one hand across Alstrom's shoulder, and, with the other, picked up one by one the little garments, handling them with a curious reverence as if he were laying his clumsy bachelor hands upon a secret he was never intended to touch. While he handled them, he drew Alstrom into reluctant talk, of the little clothes, of Denise, of their united plans for the boy, and of that last night of agony for them both. The talk was interrupted by a violent scratching at the door, followed by a low whine. Alstrom looked up.

"It sounds like Mouche," he said.

"It is Mouche." By an effort of his will, Tony regained his normal tone. "The poor little beast has been mourning so at the Allards' that I brought her around to see you. In case you'd like to have her stop here for the present, Miss Hardwicke would be glad to keep an eye upon her, when you have to leave her here at the house. Yes, Mouchette. Patience, till I can get to the door!"

The next instant, Alstrom shrank before the frenzied onslaught of a burly body and four frilly, curly paws. Tony had opened the door, and with a cry, half-bark, half-sob of sheer pleasure, Mouche had cast herself upon the master she had not seen for four long months, cast herself upon him with wriggling body and digging nails and softly slapping tongue. Over his knees and under his chair and against his shoulders, she leaped and twisted her ecstatic way, pausing now and then to lick his face, then leaping and twisting more vehemently than ever. At length, however, breathless, she halted on his knee, the soft pink tongue lolling out between the milk-white teeth, the eyes, shining and full of mirth, cocked sidewise to show a slim white

crescent beside either iris. For an instant, she stood there, a very incarnation of merriment and good cheer. The next instant, the eager dark eyes had caught sight of the little garments spread out over the table; the blunt black muzzle bent down to sniff at them once and yet again. Then the mirth left the eyes, the lolling tongue vanished and, with a long sigh which was akin to human tears, the curly black head sank down on the rose-embroidered bit of flannel which lay nearest to Alstrom's hand. A moment later, Alstrom had gathered the dog into his arms and buried his hot, aching eyes, dry no longer, in the black and curly head.

It was so that Tony left him, well-pleased with his experiment.

In the long days to come, Gertrude Hardwicke proved herself as good as her word; and Mouche became an inseparable adjunct of the Hardwicke tray at tea-time. In so far as she could accomplish it, however, Mouche spent her entire time at Alstrom's side. By some curious trick of canine logic, she had decided that, Denise gone, Alstrom stood next, that not even Madame Allard and the comforts of her own old puppy home could bring her as near the vanished mistress as she could come at Alstrom's side and in his simpler quarters at the *pension*. So long as Alstrom was accessible, Mouche never budged from his side. Within a week, however, she learned that when, from time to time, her master was forced to desert her, she had only to trudge down-stairs, give one imperious scratch on the door below, and be admitted to a luxury which was new even to her pampered soul. There were cakes and lumps of sugar at tea-time; there were laps

and cuddlings galore; there was a gorgeous knitted ball which she made a bored pretext of mouthing and, best of all, there was a soft scarlet pillow set apart for Mouche's very own, and greatly preferred by her to a lap where she caught her toes in the meshes of a knitted shawl. To be sure, Mrs. Hardwicke would talk baby-talk to her until her silky ears ached with the task of trying to comprehend the new jargon; but Mouche was a wily little lady, and soon learned the trick of snoring gently on her pillow, while she kept the crack of one eye upon the door at which her master was bound to put in an appearance. And then what walks they had together! What tender, wordless confidences they used to exchange as, night after night, they sat together and watched the little box of tucks and ruffles! In those days, it seemed to Alstrom that no one, not even Tony Mansfield, could enter into his loneliness as far as Mouche.

The dog furnished a curious link between himself and Gertrude Hardwicke. During the year of his married life, they had met but rarely, for Alstrom had been totally absorbed within his own four walls. Now, on his return to his old place at table, Gertrude met him with a certain constraint. So much had happened to him in the year, so much that she knew, so much of which she only guessed. And none of it was fit subject for the breakfast table, yet none of it, in common humanity, could be ignored. Mrs. Hardwicke's customary garrulity rose triumphant over the situation; but Gertrude, who now sat next to him, was wellnigh dumb, until the advent of Mouche furnished a subject of conversation, safe, impersonal and strictly without points of hidden danger.

It had been only at the urgent request of Tony Mansfield that Gertrude had consented to the quasi adoption of Mouche. Her taste in dogs was for the more active sorts; this fat bunch of flesh and curls was scarcely to her liking. Nevertheless, she was glad of the chance to gratify Tony who had done her many and many a good turn, more good turns, even, than she cared to count. Moreover, she was equally glad of some way to show her sympathy for Alstrom whom she had always liked, for whom, now, she was so genuinely sorry. To be sure, it was not an especially romantic way of betokening her pity, this ministering to a black poodle who snored aloud when she was betrayed into the indiscretion of walking up-stairs too fast. Nevertheless, it was the only thing she could do, and she did it with the whole-hearted kindliness which marked her nature. It was she who bought the cider cushion and covered it with scarlet, she who kept the paper of sweet biscuits in a corner, ready to solace Mouche's periodic fits of depression. Now and then, she even took Mouche for a walk upon the terrace and on to the shops in Buade Street, adapting her strong, quick step to the pace of the poodle who rolled along behind her, wheezing with the unwonted haste. This devotion on Gertrude's part, on more than one occasion, furnished an extra bond with Alstrom, when they met. The frantic uncertainty of Mouche as to which of her guardians she should follow, gave rise to such apoplectic symptoms that, in sheer mercy to the dog, Alstrom changed his direction and dropped into step at Gertrude's side. With this last detail, Tony expressed his disapprobation.

"Hang it!" he said, after the third occasion when he

had met them thus. "It was Mouche I told you to look out for, Miss Hardwicke, not Mouche's master."

Gertrude laughed at his tone. Then, a moment later, she fixed her eyes on the distant heights of Levis, and spoke with gravity.

"I'm not sure that the master isn't the one who needs it most, Mr. Mansfield," she answered thoughtfully. "I never saw a homeless dog more pitifully lonely than he is. And he seems anxious, too, as if he had some secret worry that none of us know anything about."

Strange to say, neither to Gertrude, speaking, nor to Tony Mansfield, listening, came the slightest recollection of Gertrude's own words to Tony, spoken on Alstrom's wedding morning, now fifteen months before. And yet, those words held in themselves the very truth and kernel of the whole situation. Alstrom, removed from his daily and hourly association with Catholic life and ritual, although acknowledging a wholly honest allegiance to his adopted mother Church, was nevertheless imperceptibly sliding back again towards the viewpoint of his hereditary creed. He still attended mass, although with less regularity, now that Denise had left him to go alone; he still, if questioned, would have uttered strenuous denial of any faltering in his faith. Nor was there any faltering. Once for all, kneeling at the foot of the high altar, he had acknowledged the tremendous truth and majesty of the Church of Rome; the day had long gone by when he would hold its fabric to the light, searching for pinholes where a doubt could enter, searching, by means of such pinholes found, to tear the fabric into shreds. But there are other things than doubt which stand

between adoption and inherent ownership. The point of sight differs, and different shadows are cast upon the horizon. For a year, Thorne Alstrom had viewed his adopted church by means of Denise's simple, loyal gaze, the gaze of the devout Catholic whose world is coextensive with his church. Now, all at once cast out from Denise's daily influence, cast back into the circle where Tony's staunch Protestantism and Gertrude Hardwicke's puritanic attitude reflected the traditions in which his own boyhood had been spent, his own viewpoint almost necessarily shifted a little. Albeit a Catholic still, destined to be Catholic to the uttermost day of his life, he yet viewed the rites of the church through the lens of his own hereditary Protestantism and, all unconscious to himself, called in his sense of loyalty to reinforce his halting logic. When *ifs* and *therefores* failed, there was always the long, triumphant past, the majestic present of the Church which admits no peer. As time went on, Alstrom was destined to content himself with certain central facts and leave the fringe of details to dangle, unnoticed, where it would. For the present, however, he was conscious of no change, save one. Regardless of his kinship, regardless of the past liking he had felt, he now had one supreme desire, to avoid the presence of François Allard.

It was not that his fear, expressed in so many words, was lest François would betray his secret. To even an adopted Catholic, such doubt would be an impossible thing. However, there are all sorts of shades of accident which can stand in between a perfect, un-self-conscious silence and betrayal; and over the whole list of such accidents, Thorne Alstrom's mind coursed and coursed

again, lingering, dismissing and admitting now one and now the other of them, according to the dictates of his mood. Any one of a thousand chances might arise to destroy the shelter he had built himself against the consequences of his own sin; but worse by far than the consciousness of any chance was the sure knowledge that he himself by his own voluntary act had placed within another's hands the chief instrument of his own destruction. One word, one look from François Allard, and the end would be in sight.

Apart from that, moreover, far more galling to him than the knowledge that his safety lay in other hands than his, was the surety that never again could he win back his old place in François' respect. When they met, Alstrom felt assured that François' clear eyes were searching his face for outward symbols of a secret sin; that, whatever might be the subject of their talk, François' mind was fixed upon one theme, that theme the story heard in the confessional. With a man he liked and honoured less, it would have been less galling. François Allard, however, was a man whose respect Alstrom had craved most keenly; it was a bitter thing to know that that respect was lost for ever. And yet, by a curious contradiction of mood, whenever Alstrom set himself down to reason out the matter at his leisure, he acknowledged to himself that François Allard was the one man on earth to whom he would have chosen to make his confession. It was bitter enough to have lost François' respect; it would have been yet more bitter to have allowed François Allard to go on respecting him undeservedly. And for Denise's sake as well, Alstrom took comfort in his unpremeditated action. Denise knew all about it

now, had sent down her forgiveness for it all. But, even in her new, happy life, she would be glad that her husband's secret had been entrusted to some one so near to her as François had always been.

And so Alstrom's mind fought, now on this side, now on that, sometimes reinforced by sentiment, sometimes by fear. His logic told him he was safe; nevertheless, as days rolled into weeks, his uneasiness increased. He dreaded the meeting François' glance, dreaded what might happen while they were going on their separate ways, dreaded most of all the meeting after a separation of unusual length lest, in the first glance, he should surprise some swift expression which should confirm his fears. Under the strain, his face took on a hunted, harried look, his eyes had hours of furtive restlessness, as if searching for a sight he dreaded. His manner to François became as unsteady as his glance. Seeking and avoiding him by turns, he had become so self-conscious in his presence that he completely failed to note the new look in François' watching eyes. For François Allard was watching him acutely and, from the knowledge gained from knowing many other men, he read him like an open book, and pitied him while he read.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this, perhaps even because of it, it was still to François Allard that Alstrom made confession. A certain inherent honour in the man, a certain ingrained integrity of his viewpoint made him unwilling to receive for later, minor faults the absolution given by any priest unfamiliar with his life's whole history. It was fairer to have his slighter errors weighed and condemned in the light of the great sin which had gone before. Else, how measure the growth or lessening

of his spiritual life? How offer advice bound to help on that growth? Thorne Alstrom's one point of perfect understanding with François Allard lay within the sacrament of penance. Even so, it was not until long, long afterward that he realized to the full the tact and patience with which his brother-in-law and father confessor had preached to him the need for final restitution. Penitence was not enough, nor yet penance, however bitter. Beyond them both, ordained by God and man, lay the plain path of simple justice. That done, then would come full absolution, and then only.

And Thorne Alstrom, kneeling, listening to the grave, kindly voice in his ears, feeling the kindly touch of the hand upon his head, heard, and heeded, and half promised. The next moment, the confessional left behind, he grasped the thought of all which justice was bound to bring in its train, grasped it, and once more wavered.

Next day, he crossed the street, rather than meet François Allard and face his questioning eyes.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"OF course, it was a thankless sort of thing to do," Tony said, his thoughtful eyes fixed upon the end of the wisp of white smoke curling up from his hand. "It really was awful, this breaking up a man's home for him. My one consolation lay in the fact that it would have been worse, if he'd had to do it for himself. However, I was glad of the chance it brought me to get back into closer touch with Henri."

"What's the matter with Henri?" Byng queried.

Tony's honest eyes clouded.

"Nothing, really; and yet, a lot."

"A Frenchman getting on his national nerves, eh?"

"No; no more than I have," Tony answered.

Byng laughed.

"Englishmen don't get on their nerves, man; they haven't any."

"No," Tony assented, with refreshing candour. "We take ours out in sulks, and call it dignity."

"Perhaps. Still, that's better than dancing a war dance, every time the fates look another way. But, really, what is the row with Henri?"

Once again Tony's candour was refreshing.

"I think he's getting a bit disappointed in me."

"So that's it. He's clothed you in a halo of his own making, and set you on a pedestal, and now you're

sticking out a cloven hoof and wagging the cleft in his face. That it?"

"That's about the size of it," Tony admitted.

Byng attacked a side issue.

"What beastly Americanisms you are getting to use, Tony!" he remonstrated.

"Why not? Americans are not half bad; and, whatever our politics, we must admit they have the gift of tongues," Tony defended himself.

"Gift of tongues! They inherited a language from us, and they've helped themselves to the slang of every known nation and grafted it on the parent English stock. Result: not a gift of tongues, but a jargon chiefly stolen and totally inelegant."

"And mighty expressive," Tony assured him. "I like the Americans, myself; and, as for language, one might as well *guess* as *fancy*. There's the element of uncertainty in either case. But it was Henri Allard we were discussing. Do you know, Byng, I suspect I am a dire disappointment to poor old Henri."

"About this forestry business?"

Tony nodded, vainly striving, the while, to light a fresh pipe.

"That — and a few other things. The trouble began, just a year ago. You remember; the committee on the two languages, and all that. I didn't care for the subject under discussion; it was nothing but a blanket to cover the real case in hand. Still, I was determined that, if I could help it, those fellows shouldn't write themselves down permanently as asinine. I did prevent it, knocked out the worst clauses of the resolutions, and incidentally made the firebrand element show its hand and get itself a snub-

bing; but I can't say it did my personal cause any good."

Byng struck his hands into his pockets and gazed at the ceiling through his own clouds of smoke.

"Nor any harm," he said at length. "So far as I can see, you're *in statu quo.*"

"*Quo* it hath pleased the Lord to call us? Possibly," Tony agreed. "However, it certainly has not pleased man. I'm not important enough to do much figuring in the papers; but I'm getting a pile of abuse, just the same."

"Shows you are emerging from the ranks of the nonentities," Byng made laconic answer. "D' you mind, Tony?"

Tony cast his ash into the fire. The gesture showed the petulance of a school boy.

"Infernally," he answered.

"Why?"

"Because it shows I've missed my reckoning."

"What rot! It merely shows you're getting known."

"Hang it!" And the fervour of his own protest brought Tony to his feet, where he stood cramming a fresh fistful of tobacco into his pipe. "I'm not in this thing for notoriety, Byng. I meant to steer a straight course, according to my conscience and my What-do-you-call-'em — electorate. Instead, I've messed things badly with my conscience, and my electorate is vowing vengeance at my disloyalty. Byng, this has been an awful year. Who ever supposed those Liberal fellows were about to run amok?"

"All of us who watched them," Byng retorted, with the unfailing human satisfaction of him who says "I told you so."

"Then you knew a long way more than the actors themselves," Tony retorted. "I went up to represent the moderate Liberals, went to vote on a few non-party measures of federal importance. Instead of minding their business and putting through the issues that were before them, the house went out into the highways and byways, and kicked up such a dust that nobody could see just what they were about till, all at once, the ultra-Liberal crowd came bolting down the field with the ball in their arms, and kicked a goal before anybody could stop them."

Byng nodded gravely.

"Tony, your metaphors are grand," he offered comment. "But, meanwhile, where were you?"

"Kicking the shins of the fellow with the ball, in hopes of making him drop it."

"And incidentally getting kicked by everybody else? I must say, Tony, you deserve it. You've no business to block your own side."

"Depends on the fairness," Tony retorted. "I won't stand by and see even my own side mess the game. However, I am sorry for poor old Henri. I was his pet chicken, and I've grown up into a turkey buzzard that pecks his shins. It is hard lines on him, and he is the sort to take it hard, too."

"He takes even his pleasures hard," Byng suggested.

"It's his nature. He can't help it. He hasn't an atom of Pierre's *savoir vivre*. In fact, it's a dead shame that the Allard family can't change about and get where they belong. A game of professional stage-coach, you know, would just set things right. Henri would make a ripping priest, a regular Jesuit father;

and dear old François has the tact and the perseverance which would land him in the Cabinet. He knows men as Henri never will do, and his conscience is just as good, even if it does seem a bit more elastic. And yet, I am fond of Henri."

"The present question is: is Henri fond of you?" Byng suggested.

"Not on your life! My voting against that last pet clause of his in the Immigration Bill was too much for him. He met me in the street, next day, and told me I was no Liberal. In fact," Tony added reminiscently; "I think he told me that the party was calling me a traitor to the cause, and he used large capitals, THE CAUSE, into the bargain. Of course, such language was bound to bring about a strained relation; it has been going on, all summer long. You can imagine, then, that I was glad enough when the time came to fall on his neck and help him clear out Alstrom's house. That was bad enough; but a row between friends like us is a long way worse than death. I —" Tony stuck his hands into his pockets and spoke reflectively. "I hate rows," he said.

"Judging from all accounts, you are in for your fill of them, this session."

"May be! We have opened peaceably enough; but we've plenty of time, for we started late, and it is bound to be a long session, this year. For my part, I hope they'll stop their fighting and get to work."

"If they do fight, though?" Byng's tone was interrogative.

"Let 'em."

"And you?"

"I'll fight, too."

"Let fighting alone, Tony. You'll only get yourself into trouble."

"Hang trouble! I've got a rudimentary sort of conscience, and I like to watch it grow. Come along, Byng. Things are happening at the Snowshoe Club, to-night. Stop your infernal croaking, and come and happen, too. Louisa is there, and Miss Hardwicke, I suppose."

However, as it chanced, Miss Hardwicke was not there.

Dinner over, that night, she had gone down-stairs again to telephone for a carter to take her out to the club house on the Cap Rouge Road. There was to be a ladies' tramp, that night, and a supper and dance to end the evening; and Gertrude's veins were already tingling in joyous anticipation of the white moonlight on the Plains and of the stinging cold. To her vigorous nature and perfect health, there was something well-nigh intoxicating in the dazzling winter of the North. It quickened her pulse, and fired her brain and even, now and then, rendered her heart a bit unreliable. For the most part, like any well-bred modern girl, Gertrude Hardwicke steadfastly ignored the existence of that organ. There were times, however, when it asserted itself and insisted upon recognition. She held the memory of a round dozen of such times, and the memory was not always pleasant to review.

Still wearing the long, clinging dress which she had donned for dinner, she came softly down the staircase on her way to the telephone. As she rounded the angle of the narrow hallway, she came upon Alstrom standing there, listless and alone.

"You here?" she questioned lightly. "I supposed you were dining out."

He started at her voice, for her step had been too quiet to break in upon his reverie.

"No; I was late in coming in."

"And had to eat alone? Next time you'd best be more prompt."

"It wasn't my fault," he answered listlessly. "I was hindered at the office."

His listlessness touched her; it was new to him of late, and held in it all the story of his broken home.

"You've had your dinner? No? I advise you to go in at once, then; the soup is extra good." And, since they were halting just outside the door, she raised the heavy curtain with a little gesture of invitation.

Instinctively he stepped aside, as if to allow her to pass in before him. Instinctively she obeyed the familiar gesture. Once inside the room, however, she glanced about the deserted tables with a little laugh.

"But what am I to do in here?" she queried. "I have had one dinner, you know; I can't well eat another."

Alstrom nodded assent to the maid at his elbow.

"Then stay and keep me company," he suggested then. "It's dreary work to eat alone."

For a moment she paused there, hesitating; then, with another laugh which was not quite free from embarrassment, she dropped down into the place across from his.

"Really," she said; "I feel quite honoured, Mr. Alstrom; it is as if I were promoted to the level of the evening paper. Can you read me in silence?"

With absent deliberation, he lifted his eyes and fixed them on her face.

"Perhaps I could, if I were to try," he said slowly, while his mind went rushing back to the dear old days when another woman had faced him across a narrow stretch of table.

Gertrude Hardwicke had eyes and memory, and she was never dense. Now she pushed back her chair and, choosing another farther down the table, settled herself anew, with her white elbows resting on the cloth.

"There was such a horrid draught there, Mr. Alstrom," she explained carelessly. "No; you needn't think I'll sit here dumb and let you con the pages of my nose and mouth. You ought to know us American women better than to imagine we could endure such treatment as that. Is it very cold outside?" Purposely, as she spoke, she avoided meeting his eyes; the settled pain in their gray depths hurt her more than she liked to admit, even to herself.

"Very. It is a night to hug the fire," he assured her.

"Or else to go out and run and run, and let the wind blow your hair about," she objected. "Mr. Alstrom, you are taking less exercise, this winter."

He glanced up, at her words.

"I hadn't noticed," he said then, with a swift drop back into his old listlessness.

"I had. Mother and I were talking of it, only yesterday. You really shouldn't waste this glorious winter," she urged fearlessly. "For all the good it's doing you, you might as well be in Jamaica, or Ceylon. You haven't been on snowshoes, this year."

"No," he assented briefly. "No; I haven't."

"Why don't you go out to the Club, now and then?"

He looked up once more, this time with sudden recollection.

"You were going out there, yourself, to-night, Miss Hardwicke. Isn't it time you were starting?"

She settled her elbows afresh on the white cloth, and rested her chin in her hands.

"How inhospitable of you!" she mocked him. "Don't you know you invited me to come to supper with you?"

The waitress giggled, in appreciation of her own forthcoming joke.

"Will Mademoiselle have the roast veal?" she queried.

"Oh, no: I'm quite an orchid," Gertrude answered gravely. "What were you asking, Mr. Alstrom?"

"Nothing. I said that you were going out to the Club, to-night, and that you really should be starting."

She glanced down at her soft gown and at her round, bare arms.

"Do I look it? But I really am not going."

"Why not?"

She met his eyes with merry defiance.

"Being a woman, I changed my mind."

"But I hope — really, it sounds horribly egotistic, Miss Hardwicke, but I do hope I've had nothing to do with the change."

She laughed carelessly.

"You? Dear me, no. I have merely had an attack of belated filial conscience. Mother is all alone in our room, and it seems too bad to leave her. Besides, it really is very cold. I think, instead, as soon as you are ready for some coffee, we'll go up-stairs and have it

there. It is much more cosy, and you know you are spoiling for a gossip."

She rose, as she spoke, and left the room, her soft, pale gown trailing behind her in clinging, creeping folds. And Alstrom, following her, watching the creeping folds, listening to the soft *frou-frou* of silk beneath, felt a sudden warm realization that once more it would be good to sit and dally with his coffee and his talk in such purely feminine surroundings. Night and day, his heart ached for Denise; but Denise was irrevocably gone away, quite out of his life. No woman could ever fill her place; yet in a sense it would be good, be restful to his aching nerves to reproduce in some sort at least the outward setting of their happiness.

Gertrude, however, was far too wise a woman to fall in with his mood. Halting there on the threshold of the dining-room door, she had been quick to see that Alstrom was in one of those black hours which, coming to all men, choose their time when nerve strength and resistance are at their lowest ebb. In such mood, a careless word would have driven Alstrom to tears, a word of sentimental pity would have moved him to pour out upon her the concentrated essence of his broodings during all the past lonely weeks, to overpower her with his misery and leave himself only so much the worse for his own temporary collapse. Instead of that, she brewed him a cup of extra strong coffee, asked him about his work, demanding technical details and phrasing her demands in purely technical terms that left him gasping at her knowledge of his own profession. Then she called out Mouche, and put that lazy lady through her tricks, all the old ones that Denise had taught her, then all the new ones she herself had

pounded into the canine brain by means of sweet biscuit and *laitier* galore. And Mouche, waking at last to Alstrom's applause, entered into the game with an enthusiasm which kept them all busy until bedtime was past.

And Alstrom, mounting to his room to begin the sleepiest night he had spent in many months, made not the slightest effort to review the evening and discover where its charm had lain. Instead of that, his last waking thought was one of exceeding thankfulness that the house held a merry, sensible woman such as Gertrude Hardwicke, a woman as free from sentiment and coquetry, as frank as any boy.

And Gertrude? Her night was a white one, very white.

Next morning, they met again over a belated breakfast, the one for very sleepiness, the other by reason of a wholly sleepless night. Mrs. Hardwicke had already left the table, when Gertrude came into the room to find Alstrom dawdling over his second cup of coffee. He looked up with a smile of greeting, nodded and straightway took up the thread of their talk at the precise knot at which they had dropped it, only the night before.

Man-like, he spoke with utter nonchalance; but Gertrude answered gayly, because she was the one to realize that the little barrier of strangeness and convention, the barrier lifted partly by his marriage and in part by reason of his adoption of an alien faith, had yielded to her friendliness of the preceding night, yielded and fallen. In one sense, she was glad for what she had accomplished; in another sense, she drew aside in fright lest, in some unknown fashion,

her woman's modesty had been at fault. And, by very reason of her drawing back, her gayety rose up to mask her fright. It lent a brilliancy to all her talk, such as even Alstrom had not known until that morning. He listened, half-dazzled, wholly wondering, wholly unable to account for what, to another woman, would have been quite plain.

But as he rose to leave the table, he grew grave once more. Man-like, again, he pushed her gayety aside.

"Miss Hardwicke," he asked abruptly; "have you ever watched a homesick, lonely dog, when it was admitted to the fire of some good Samaritan?"

Her eyes answered his eyes understandingly. Nevertheless, she parried.

"Like Mouche?"

For an instant, he stood, his hands still resting on his chair-back, and looked down at her with gray eyes which, for the time, were neither sad, nor boyish, only very kindly. Then his voice dropped down an octave, as he said, —

"No; only Mouche's master."

Then he turned away.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WINE-LIKE, intoxicating, well-nigh delirious, the spirit of the springtime was in Gertrude Hardwicke's veins, was mounting to her head, as she walked out to the Parliament Buildings on the afternoon of the prorogation, three months later. As she came out from under the Louis Gate, the trees above her head seemed bursting into a foam of tender green bubbles dancing upon the end of every twig and stem. The close-cut lawns, too, were green, a green so dark and rich and velvety as to deny all kinship with the gray-brown turf which had come up, dank and sodden, through the melting snows. The winter had passed by, and May had come, May with its military manœuvrings, its children white-badged for their first communions, its fresh toilettes of women, and, fresher still, its brand-new dress of nature's green. Bands blared in the streets and uniforms glittered; tiny boys, more self-important even than the soldiers, strutted on their way, their little prayer-books clutched in their white-gloved hands; proud mammas marshalled knots of white-robed, white-veiled little girls to and fro in search of the congratulations, gifts and merry-makings which are the inevitable aftermath of the main sacrament of the month of Mary, mother of us all. Never is the old city so gay, never one half

so spectacular as in May, when the very sunshine is dazzled by the bravery of the sights on which it falls.

And Gertrude, her head erect, her eyes shining, was coming up Louis Street, coming through the sunshine and the human festivals, in much the mood of *Pippa* seeking holiday. Indeed, *Pippa's* own words had been on her lips, that very morning, as she stood in her window looking out upon the Ring where Alstrom and Mouche were frolicking together in veriest abandonment of spring-made joy.

> *But let the sun shine! Wherefore repine?*
> *— With thee to lead me, O Day of mine.*

The words had left her by now; but the mood remained, as she walked on beneath the meeting treetops, beside the springing grass and flowers, as happy as *Pippa* and, for the time, as irresponsibly powerless to account for her own happiness.

Quebec said that Gertrude Hardwicke had been growing beautiful, all that spring. She had always been comely, but rather cold, as if she were holding herself in check. Now, to the comeliness of perfect health was being added the softer, gentler beauty that comes with happiness, a happiness of which the owner herself is scarcely aware. Quebec, looking on, saw the fact and was either at a loss to account for the cause, or accounted for it quite wrongly. Quebec had seen three distinct phases of Gertrude Hardwicke's growing womanhood. She had come to it, a healthy, hearty young animal, full of strength and spirits and of liking for all men who promptly liked her in return. Then, of a sudden, something in her spirits had extinguished itself; the fires of her being burned more coldly, as

if she herself had laid a check upon them. She was as healthy and hearty as before, but less exuberant, holding herself in better control, weighing her speech with better care. And now, during the past few months, had come the final phase, as if a gentler, softer flame were slowly kindling into life, to mellow and illumine her strong nature with its heat and light. There was a new elasticity in the girl's step, heretofore so strong and determined. There were new curves about her lips, new lustre in her eyes.

The change in the girl had come so gradually that not even her mother, ever vigilant where Gertrude was concerned, had been able to descry its beginnings. It had really started in those autumn days when Gertrude had been fussing over Mouche, buying the scarlet cover for the pillow and choosing the sweet biscuits. And Mouche, homesick and bored, was in no mood to notice any change. Noticing it, even, her canine soul would have regarded it as of small account. As far as she was concerned, Gertrude Hardwicke had had no pre-Mouche existence. She had no idea how alien it was to Gertrude's past habits to spend a long half-hour in combing the bread-and-milk out of a tangle of black and sloppy curls.

All winter long, the change had been going on; and yet, to both Gertrude and Mrs. Hardwicke, it seemed rather that they had drifted backward into an almost forgotten chapter of their lives. There were the same loitering meals, the same lingering for one more word or two in the hall outside, the same gay greetings on the stairs, the same off-hand biddings to come in and have a cup of tea. It was all the same, they would have averred, unchanged in every slight detail, as far

as Gertrude was concerned. Of the change in Alstrom, however, they both were acutely, happily conscious. The man who, six months before, lent an apathetic attention to their efforts to win him from his absorption in his sorrow, now met them in his old way, still so boyish, still so curiously full of charm. In some indefinable fashion, they all realized that his sorrow was always there, would always linger upon his life; but that he had braced himself to bear it, silently, bravely and with a smiling face. His love for Denise had been the perfect flower of his young life; because the stalk was broken and the bruised petals laid away within his holy of holies, there was no need that he should blind himself to other blossoms. The loss of one pleasure does not involve the loss of all. Denise was mourned for and missed no less sincerely because Thorne Alstrom lingered over his luncheon to talk to Gertrude about his summer plans, nor because they both laughed like merry children over certain of the details. And if Denise, looking down upon them, after such lingering and laughter had seen Gertrude, alone in her room, nuzzle her cheek into the black tangle of Mouche's curls, she would have been the first to understand, the last of all to feel objection. Denise's love for her husband had been so simple as to ask for one end only; that end was his own perfect happiness. Secure in the full possession of his love, she would have been the first to mourn for his undying sorrow. And Alstrom, realizing this in his clumsy man fashion, sought to accept that sorrow in the spirit which Denise herself would have urged upon him.

From the evening she had bidden him to coffee in her room, a new understanding, a wholly new frank-

ness had sprung into life between Gertrude and Thorne Alstrom. Formality was at an end between them and, conventions laid aside, they slipped insensibly into a new relation where each seemed to count upon the other to make good certain gaps in himself. With the melting snows, constraint between them melted wholly away; with the budding of the spring, there also sprang out the buds of an intimacy, a frank and cordial liking which was destined to grow on into lusty maturity, pruned by circumstance, but never killed.

And so winter had gone; its dazzle had left the landscape. May had come, and the world was all golden in its fuller, truer light. And Gertrude Hardwicke, walking out the Grande Allée to the Parliament Buildings, seemed to herself to be a central figure in the pageant of the May.

There was to be a final debate, that afternoon, and Tony was to speak for the second time, that session. The same night would come the prorogation. Late as it was, wholly deaf to the call of the springtime, the House had kept up its sitting until now. As Tony had foretold to Byng, it had been a long session, long and strenuous. There had been a squabble, a fight and an adjournment. After the reopening, there had been delays of every sort; but at last the prorogation was at hand.

Louisa was invisible just now, in the temporary seclusion which immediately precedes a wedding, so it was to Gertrude Hardwicke that Tony had turned for the support of a familiar, friendly presence. In fact, it would have been to Gertrude that he would have turned in any case, although Gertrude herself chose to regard herself as merely bound on doing substitute

duty for the absent Louisa. And Tony was such a dear, unselfish fellow that it was always a pleasure to do him a good turn. Besides, as it chanced, she never yet had heard him speak. She was conscious of a friendly curiosity as to the way he would acquit himself.

It was still so early in the afternoon and the afternoon was so intoxicating that she prolonged her walk a little, and it was with almost a sigh of regret that she turned at the Franciscan chapel, faced about and retraced her steps to the huge gray bulk of the Parliament Buildings which now dominate the little ridge where Montcalm was shot down, that far-off September day. Turning in at the low stone wall which always gave her a hoydenish longing to run along its top, she crossed the bit of park, entered the great eastern door and slowly mounted the familiar stairs, black and bordered with a double rank of gold-lettered names. At the head of the stairs, she was met by the Cerberus who guards the entrance to the Chamber.

"Not opened yet?" she questioned. "Postponed till four? How provoking!"

For a moment, she stood, irresolute whether to go down the stairs again and out into the sunshine, or to accept the antechamber opened for her use. An open window and an easy chair decided her, however, and, with a nod of thanks, she entered and sat down, leaving the door ajar behind her.

The room was underneath the central tower; the window looked out across the city, out across the river, across the Levis heights to the faint blue hills beyond. At her feet, the park swept downward in a level lawn, smooth-cropped and emerald green and bounded by the wall which runs there northward from the Louis

Gate. Beyond again were the trees of the Esplanade, the copper turrets of the Château and the primitive gray spire of the Basilica. Cutting its way, a dark blue stripe across the northern background, the river led the eye away into the purple distance, while, half-way down the northern channel, just beyond the gash where the Montmorency takes its final leap, a summer shower was sweeping above the water, its edges sharp-cut as with a knife. For moments, Gertrude watched it idly, watched the cloud pass on and the river come back, unbroken, to the sunshine. Then, bending forward, she fixed her eyes on a tall figure crossing the park below. The glint of the sunlight on the vivid, tawny hair would have rendered it unmistakable, even had it not been for the bundle of wool that trudged along on black and frilly legs close in the rear. The girl's eyes softened, as she watched the lagging step, the bowed head. Saturday afternoon, of course, and the office closed. She was glad that he too was out to revel in the May-time. And he had seemed depressed at noon, had seemed in one of those strange moods of haunting foreboding from which it needed all her tact to rouse him. Despise herself as she would for her curiosity, she yet found herself wondering what could be their cause. It was not solely for Denise; of that she was convinced. And for the rest, what could he wish, more than he already had acquired? Money enough; more than enough success; friends more than he cared to accept within his chosen circle. And, in a sense, his tastes were simple, while, for the regularity of his life, there could be no question. The women in the room below have few hallucinations in regard to the people in their boarding-house. In such a place as

that, it is not easy to prove a false alibi; and, moreover, Mrs. Hardwicke possessed all the ear-marks of a successful gossip. In the matter of his daily life, Gertrude could trust Thorne Alstrom implicitly. What, then, could be the reason?

A slight sound caused her to raise her head. Tony Mansfield was standing at her elbow.

"They told me you were here," he said, as he drew up a chair, seated himself by her side, and then bent forward to lay into the wide window seat the notes of his coming speech. "I telephoned over to tell you of the delay, and the people at the house said that you had started, a good while before. Down-stairs, they told me I'd find you here. I — I am rather glad. You see, it's quiet here, and — and there are some things I want to say to you."

Something in his gravity and in his unwonted hesitation made her turn about in her chair and take a long look into his honest face. What she read there seemed to confirm her suspicions. The blood rose, hot and scarlet, in her cheeks, and she put out her hand in a swift gesture, as if to hold off something that she dreaded.

"Please don't," she begged him hastily.

"Why not?"

"Because — they're better left unsaid."

"You mean they won't do any good?" Tony demanded bluntly.

She nodded slowly, once and then once more.

His second demand came with even greater bluntness.

"Is there any reason, Gertrude?"

She hesitated, faltered. Then her honest courage triumphed. Leaning forward, for just one instant she

rested her hand on his, as it lay across his notes in the window ledge beside her.

"Yes, Tony, there is," she said, with fearless simplicity.

For another instant, his second hand shut over hers, while, even more tightly, his teeth shut hard together. Then, —

"But I did want you so!" he said brokenly, and added, "I have wanted you for three whole years. I thought you knew."

Sadly she shook her head.

"How could I know?" she asked.

He laughed a little shortly.

"I suppose it is one of the conventions of the novelist; but women are always supposed to know. What was the reason I went in for this thing, do you think?" His arm, swept towards the inner door, explained his words.

Gertrude raised her head proudly at the implied rebuke.

"Because you like it, I suppose."

"Who taught me to like it? Who made me think that much — many things depended on my liking it?" he asked a little sharply.

This time, she withdrew her hand.

"If the game isn't worth playing on its own account, I certainly would never start it for the sake of the stakes," she rebelled proudly.

With an effort, Tony controlled himself.

"No," he said slowly; "no. You are in the right of it, Miss Hardwicke. There is no especial reason I should play brute and vent my bad temper on you like this. And yet — it is a good deal of a disappointment.

I had supposed you understood. In other things, you always have had a trick of understanding, before one starts to speak. I supposed this was just like all the other times. Miss Hardwicke," he faced her suddenly; "would it have made any difference, if we'd had this talk, three years ago?"

Gertrude's face was scarlet now, the pride had gone out of her pose, and her head was bent over her gloved fingers, clasping and unclasping each other in the folds of her lap.

Tony watched her for a few moments of silence, while the comprehension in his gaze slowly gave way before a deep regret.

"I'm sorry," he said simply at last. "I wish to God I'd spoken then; but it seemed to me I had so little to offer, so much to ask. Miss Hardwicke, I don't want to tease; but — are you sure it's no use, not the least?"

"None." Her lips could scarcely form the word.

Then Tony rose and bent above her, like the gallant English gentleman that he was.

"Then may I keep on being just your good friend?" he asked bravely. "I've missed the best thing in life; but that's no reason, unless you insist, that I should miss the second best. I had hoped, had counted a lot, on giving you reason to be glad you had my name," he steadied his voice with an effort; "but, as long as that is impossible, may I go on doing my best to make you proud of your old friend?"

His voice had the familiar, winning intonation, his hand the old friendly clasp, as he bent over her in brave farewell. Then, for the gallery was unlocked now, he opened the door and stepped aside for her to enter.

The door swung together behind her, behind his dearest hopes. As Tony Mansfield turned away to take his own place upon the Chamber floor, one great, big, boyish tear hung on his lashes and splashed down across the notes, now crumpled tight within his nervous fingers.

Alstrom took the Hardwickes to the prorogation, that night. Tony had sent them cards, and Tony had seen to it that the usher should save them seats next to the rail outside which Alstrom, doomed by the fact of his manhood, must remain. The vivid red walls of the senate chamber formed a gorgeous frame for the brilliant picture: the little figure of Vice-Royalty, stiff with gold lace and topped with its white-plumed hat, flanked with its guard of honour who, in their turn, blazed with gold braid and glittering medals. These on the right. On the left, the ministry, and before them, each at his desk, the senators, and beyond, filling the gallery and bordering the sides of the floor, a gay parterre of women in festal gowns and flowery hats.

Mrs. Hardwicke, in the very front row of the seats on the floor, smoothed her own gown complacently. Then she turned to Alstrom across the barrier of the single rail.

"Isn't it exactly like the Court Scene in *Alice?*" she queried, with an irreverence which brought down upon the unconscious back of her best bonnet a frown from the British matron in the rear. "It always makes me think of it; and here comes the *White Rabbit*, large as life."

"Mamma!" Gertrude's protesting hand sought her mother's arm. "Here is the Black Rod now. The House must be ready to come in."

So they fell silent, as the Usher of the Black Rod, tall and slight, sword at side and rod in hand, bowed himself slowly to the outer door where the three sharp knocks, strange relic of the feudal days, betokened that the House of Commons sought admission to the floor of the House of Lords. Then at the door, the Black Rod faced about, entered the space within the railing and closed the gate behind him. The Speaker followed next, gowned in his silken robe and carrying in his white-gloved hands his three-cornered hat. At his right walked the Sergeant-at-Arms, and both men halted at the gateway in the rail. Then while, with his thrice three bows, the Black Rod slowly returned to his former place and stood at attention before the Vice-Royal throne, the long line of black-coated men came trooping in and stopped, crowded together outside the rail which bars from the Vice-Royal enclosure the real law-givers of the country. And then the gold-laced figure on the throne rose and doffed its white-plumed hat; and Mrs. Hardwicke, watching, bowed in return her republican neck, not to the small, slight figure in the gold-encrusted coat, but to the mighty Empire whose representative he was.

But Gertrude, for the moment, was blind to gold-laced coats and representatives of Empire. Instead, her eyes were searching the throng of black-coated Commoners who clustered at the rail, seeking one face which, all that afternoon and evening, had been haunting the secret places of her mind and conscience. At last, and quite in the rear rank, she found Tony, although, since his speech, that afternoon, had roused the applause from both sides of the House, many an older man would gladly have given place to him in

the front ranks. Standing as he did, far in the rear, he yet dominated the crowd, and not alone by reason of his inches. All the fire of the afternoon had left him; his eyes were heavy, his face was white and still and stern. Then, as Vice-Royalty upon its scarlet throne arose and doffed its hat to the assembled Houses, he lifted his eyes and let them fall slowly upon the face of Gertrude Hardwicke where she sat with Alstrom at her side. From far across the red-walled Chamber, bravely he flung her his own old friendly smile, as if in surety that he would make good his word, that the day should truly come when she should be proud of the manhood she had helped to make.

And Gertrude, watching, interpreting the smile aright, forgot the gold-laced figure, forgot the Empire for which it stood, and thought only of the one brave and gallant gentleman of the sort who have made that Empire what it is.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A LONG, narrow lake ringed about with mountains was lying in the August sunshine, blue as the skies above it, skies which seemed resting, lid-like, upon the mountain tops. The mountains themselves came sharply, smoothly down to the water's edge into which their sides slipped so imperceptibly as to leave the eye at a loss to discover which was the rugged fact, which the mirrored reflection. Above the water level, now broken by scarcely a ripple in the hot summer noon, the smooth, steep slopes lifted themselves in massy walls of shaded green, the paler birches below, higher up the deeper tints of tamarack and spruce and pine. No roof, no floating banner of smoke gave trace of human habitation in all the little landscape; but, far out across the lake, a boat floated idly on the water, and in the boat four men were fishing. François Allard was one of them; Pierre another, with two of his Sainte Anne comrades.

"It is going to be such a glorious trip," Pierre had said to Alstrom, one night in the preceding May. "I've always meant to try it; but it never seemed to come, till this year. I am glad now that I waited, for François says he can go with us, this summer. It's a thing one doesn't care to do but once, so it is much better to try it when he can do it, too. We shall go up for a

month, live in the boat, sleep in tents and eat the things we pull out of the lake."

"Where is it?" Alstrom queried, watching, as he spoke, the eagerness mounting in the boy's face and lighting the dark blue eyes.

"Up in the Townships, not far from your own borders." Pierre laughed, as he spoke, for Alstrom's foreign origin was a never-failing source of teasing for the merry boy. "You'd best come with us. At least, you could see over the edge of your own native land, and that should be a sight for you to covet."

Alstrom shook his head.

"I am too contented here," he said evasively.

"But, truly, can't you come?" the boy urged.

"I have my work, you know. I have to be in camp. You come to me, instead." Alstrom spoke with a sudden longing for the boy's companionship, for he was dreading acutely his return to the wilderness, that summer. The experience would be too full of memories of the year before, memories that, in the stillness of the aged forest, would be too insistent. In the bustle of the town, it would be far easier to forget.

For one brief instant which yet was long enough to measure in its limits the fate of other lives than his, the boy hesitated. Alstrom, watching, had no notion how long Pierre had hungered for just such invitation; he only, though perchance selfish in his sorrow, bethought himself of the pleasure he would gain from the boy's blithe comradeship, of the long evenings in the camp when Pierre's blue eyes would be there to meet his eyes across the fire-lit darkness. Then Pierre shook his yellow head.

"I'd like it, Thorne, like it better than you know,

better than anything else in the whole summer. And yet, I don't quite like to go with you. If I gave up this other plan, it would all fall into little bits, and François hasn't had a real vacation in ever so many years. It means so much to him, this living out of doors and playing boy with the rest of us. Why can't you come with us?"

In his own turn, Thorne Alstrom hesitated, and Pierre went on, eagerly, insistently, —

"You have no idea what it would be, nor how beautiful the place is. I was there once, when I was a little, little boy, and I never have forgotten. There are many lakes down there, some large and some built all around with summer homes of your rich people who have to come to us to find real beauty on which to spend their money." Again came the merry, mocking laugh, the laugh so like Denise's own that Alstrom, hearing the familiar cadence, had a sudden longing to stop his ears and bury his face in his arms to make moan for all that he had lost. But Pierre, his laugh over, was rushing on with his plea. "This lake is the smallest of all; there's not a house within two miles. We go by train to the nearest station, and then are driven in, ten miles, with all our tents and stores for a month. A whole month! Think of that!" The call of the wild was clamouring in Pierre's young ears. His eyes grew eager at the voice. "We'll fish, and row, and sail, and swim. And then, at night, we'll build such camp-fires! Can't you come, really, Thorne?"

Again Thorne Alstrom hesitated, weighing the reasons, pro and con. Like François himself, it was long since he had taken a vacation. Save for an

occasional day, his work stretched backward over unbroken weeks, back to the time of his return from his European honeymoon. There was no real reason that, this year, he should not abandon his field work, leave it in the hands of his competent lieutenant for at least a two-weeks holiday. True, in no one essential save lack of comforts would the camp on the southern lake differ from the larger camp far in the northern woods. The life would be the same in all respects: the long days afield, the long nights around the crackling fire. Only — one camp would be lonely, void to him of all things save a dainty memory which blessed him even while it hurt. The other would be full of comradeship, of gay boy life and fun, of the graver sort of understanding from François' maturer years.

But François? Yes. There lay the question. Could he endure the long days spent under the gaze of those steady, questioning eyes? Could he, in the presence of that trio of gay boys, so free from all prescience of his sin, endure the knowledge that François Allard was holding his secret in his hands, a no less irksome knowledge because he himself of his own will had placed it there? True, when he had given his story into another's keeping, he had had no foreknowledge what that giving meant, how like would be its tyrannic clutch to that which Wood had won upon him. From Wood to François Allard, the distance was measured by the whole stretch between the evil and the good. And yet, their hold upon him differed but little in extent or kind. The aim might be totally unlike; the fear, the daily, hourly terror was the same. And in that terror lay the full measure of his sin, the full measure of his punishment. No striped convict

suit, no flames of hell could bring to any man a surer retribution, Thorne Alstrom felt convinced, than did this hidden, ceaseless fear that would not down for one single instant, that gnawed the very heart out of every happy hour. Like the man who sees strange faces peering at him out of the dark, so Alstrom saw strange shapes of fear starting out upon him at every turn. It mattered not that they were intangible and almost formless. What did matter, however, was that they one and all came out from hiding within the folds of François Allard's soutane. In his hands François Allard had the power to make visible to all the world these spectral shapes, now seen by Alstrom alone. Of course, he would not do this; betrayal was contrary to all the priestly vows by which he had shaped his life. And yet, and yet. Alstrom's whole life training had only gone to show that nothing, nothing whatever, is quite impossible. In his less controlled moments, Alstrom felt his courage yielding to the fear; but, in his better hours, hours that came so rarely that each one left its separate mark, he assured himself that, in so far as he could do, he had placed his soul in François' hands, there to await its own regeneration, sure, complete, but distant. Meanwhile, however, he felt convinced that he was totally unfitted to bear the strain of daily and hourly intercourse with François Allard. Rather than that, he would give up all thought of the trip, however much it else might tempt him.

A week after the Houses prorogued, he started for the wilderness. For the first time in his life, his profession came upon his nerves. He was tired with the long strain of which he scarcely was aware. He dreaded his long days afield, his long nights under canvas,

with only his thoughts to bear him company, those ceaseless, accusing, foreboding thoughts which now were singularly devoid of the happy anticipations which before had held the forebodings at bay. And the great, arching forests, the rugged, strong mountains which, only last year, had wrapped himself and Denise in such friendly silence, now loomed before him, threatening and vast and ominously still. Even the tourist season, with its influx from the States and all which that implied, seemed tempting to him hy comparison. And then, almost unconsciously to himself, he dreaded his farewells to Gertrude Hardwicke.

There is not a living man, however independent, who has not, somewhere in the depths of his nature, the craving for the influencc of womankind. Let him deny it all his life, it yet is hound to assert itself in the end. And Alstrom was far from heing independent. And Gertrude was onc of his own racc and social kind. With Denise, he gladly had leaped the barriers which lay between them. Between himself and Gertrude, there was no harrier to leap, no harrier, that is, save that which their two personalities were bound to raise. And harriers such as that wcre rarely permanent.

Thorne Alstrom himself would have heen the first to scout with derision the idea that Gertrude Hardwicke was becoming in any sense necessary to his life. That he enjoyed her he was quite well aware, aware, too, that, in her blithe and downright presence, forebodings vanished and fears grew less, that Denise seemed never dearer to him, was never missed more hy him than when, as often happened, he and Gertrude sat and talked about her, about her gay, dainty little person, ahout the hours of her wedded life. Now

and then he stopped to marvel at Gertrude's instinctive comprehension of a nature so far unlike her own; but, for the most part, he took it quite as a matter of course. For some reason or other, most people did take Gertrude as a matter of course. Only on the night before he started for camp, did it dawn on Alstrom, lying awake to review the past months and to forecast the summer, that, in his experience of life, girls like Gertrude Hardwicke were not a matter of course at all. Yet, even then, so totally unlike was she to Denise that Alstrom was as far as ever from realizing the nature of the attraction she possessed for him. Still less realization had he that, whereas it was Denise whom he adored, it was Gertrude who was bound to have an influence over him, and Gertrude only.

Their parting had been most prosaic. Alstrom was to start at dawn; the evening would be needed for his packing. Accordingly, he had interrupted Mrs. Hardwicke's disquisition upon the proper sort of cheese to serve with Albert biscuits — which she loyally termed *crackers* — held out his hand to her and then to Gertrude, and was gone. Next night in camp, he wished he had been longer in speaking his farewells; he could have hurried over his packing, if need be. However, he suddenly bethought himself that he had neglected to inform Gertrude of the whereabouts of Mouche's leash. He took four pages of letter size to tell her that, and a few other things, and he closed the telling with a question. When he acknowledged the answer to the question, he preluded another question with a reference to his long, dreary evenings there alone in camp. And Gertrude, reading, smiled a little, for Tony had told her, only that very day, that

Alstrom manned a force of forty men, among them a brace of youngsters just out from their university in England. Nevertheless, she answered the second question, and then, scarcely two weeks later, she replied to a third.

Meanwhile, Alstrom heard repeatedly from Pierre, for the love between them seemed to grow with every waxing, waning month. Since Denise's death, they had become more necessary to each other, as if their hold upon the life which had gone from them had turned into a mutual grasp upon each other's love. It was no sentimental tie that bound them, man and boy, each to the other's nature; but rather the strong, free, virile affection which springs up between two temperaments alike in some essentials, in others diametrically opposed. All the past winter, they had met as often as Alstrom's office work and Pierre's studies could make possible, sometimes at Sainte Anne, sometimes in Alstrom's office or at his own room, sometimes in the Allard home. As soon as Alstrom started for the wilderness, Pierre's letters came, thick and fast, from Sainte Anne at first, and later from the southern lake, set jewelwise within the ring of mountains.

His last letter was in Alstrom's hand, one August day. It had been waiting there in camp since morning; Alstrom had found it there when he came in at four o'clock, driven off his work by the fiercest summer storm which he had ever known. Drenched to his skin, he yet paused to seize the letter with a curious little touch of welcome, almost as if it had been the boy's own hand. Then he let it rest, until he could put on dry clothes. That done, he lighted a pipe, picked up the letter once more, and began to read.

It was a strongly characteristic letter, more so even than Pierre's wont, full of eager affection and of boyish fun; full, too, of an all-day fishing trip they were to take, as Alstrom timed it, on that very day. The trip was François' planning. The dear old fellow was turning into a grand athlete, and now held the camp's record for successful fishing. Give him three months of such life, and he would be a cross between a champion oarsman and a boy of ten. Alstrom had no idea how François could cook, still less how he could eat the products of his own cookery. And such a splendid-looking fellow as he was now, brown as a berry and dressed in his rough camping suit and leather leggings! The other fellows adored him, and envied himself, Pierre, for having such a brother.

And so the letter rambled on, page after page of enthusiasm over the different members of the party, whole lists of food they had been cooking, of fish that they had caught, of so great distances that they had rowed and swum in so short times. Then Pierre added the details of that day's trip: their lunch, their destination and all the rest of it, and ended, as he ended all his letters, with a passionate regret that Alstrom was not there to join them in the fun.

And Alstrom smoking still, allowed the finished letter to slip from his relaxed fingers, as he sat there wishing, wishing with all his might and main, that he were with them in the little boat, instead of sitting there alone beneath the wind-tossed canvas of his dripping tent. Even François' grave eyes of kind interrogation, of sure knowledge, would have been a welcome sight just then. Happily for himself, however, Thorne Alstrom could not look across the intervening miles

of forest, could not know the sight on which those grave, kind eyes were gazing, could not know that sight was doomed to be their last.

For the storm had been swift, far-reaching and terrible. With no warning at all, it had swept down upon Thorne Alstrom and his men in their northern forest, had driven them, drenched and beaten with the hail, back from their work into their tents. With just as little warning, it had swept down upon the little boat, now dancing upon the ripples that fretted the blue and silver surface of the lake.

Pierre saw it coming, when it was close at hand, one huge, dun-coloured cloud above, one great gray wave beneath. At his cry of alarm, François turned and, even as he turned, the sunlight was quenched in the cloud, and the boat's head lifted to the coming wave. There was one instant of bitter, paralyzing fear; then, as the boat righted, ready to lift itself again upon the full crest of the wave, François rallied, rose to his feet and stepped to the little seat in the stern. Tall and slim, bronzed by his month in the open and clothed in his rough, stained suit of tweeds, he yet was never half so much the priest as now, standing upright, his hand, blistered with rowing and sun-tanned, clasping his crucifix, his head bared to the coming storm, his face serene and full of trust. The boat tilted once more, tilted never to right again; but, in that very instant, François Allard found time to speak the final words of absolution, —

"*Ab omnibus censuris et peccatis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spirit —*"

Then, his hand still shut upon the symbol of the faith which nerved him to face death, unflinching, he dropped

into the gray, boiling waves, as the boat sank from beneath his feet.

It seemed to him hours later that he came slowly back to consciousness. In reality, it was but a short time, yet the time had sufficed to hide the mountains behind a wall of mist, and to turn the whole lake to a sea of black and boiling waves. Tossing and tumbling on the waves was their gay little boat, now upside down; and Pierre was clinging to its sharp keel with one hand, with the other holding his brother's head above the water which splashed up viciously about them, as if seeking to drag them back into its depths.

Dazed by his unexpected return into the life he had supposed himself leaving for ever, at first François could only smile up at his brother's face, marvelling, even in his weakness, at the transfiguration wrought in the blue eyes above him, at sight of this faint sign of life. Then, —

"The others?" he asked faintly.

"Gone." The boyish lips stiffened themselves to speak. "But you are saved, dear fellow."

Another gust of wind came, lurching the boat and putting an imperative ending to his words, since it took all his strength to maintain their perilous position. All his strength and more, François told himself, as he watched the ebbing colour in the cheeks above him, watched the blue ring grow and widen about the brave young lips. And to what end? The fury of the storm was increasing fast. The boat, lurching and tossing on the waves, could never bear them both to safety. They were far from the deserted shore; no help was at hand, and every moment was bringing nearer the one inevitable end. However, merely because both

could not outride the storm, both did not need to perish. With an almost superhuman effort, he stretched up his arm and laid his hand, in one last, long caress, upon his brother's cheek.

"Pierre," he said then quietly; "there is no chance for us both. One of us may be able, if the boat is lightened, to hold it till it is driven ashore. You have your manhood before you. Keep it always good. For me, I am ready to die. My time has come, and I have had the best of life. And, Pierre —" Even as he spoke, he loosed the boy's clasping fingers, and the last words came across an intervening stretch of water; "whatever comes, be good to Thorne. He needs you."

An hour later, the storm had lashed itself into the quiet of exhaustion. Over the lowering waves, a little boat, bottom-side upwards, was driven slowly towards the shore, and clinging to its side was Pierre Allard, living still, but strangely apathetic. With his three comrades lost, and one of those François, it mattered little to him that he lived.

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

"HOW Fate has followed those poor Allards!" Mrs. Hardwicke observed, as she stirred her tea.

"They must feel great pride in Henri." Mrs. Mansfield, while she spoke, lifted the cover of the teapot and peered in. Then, as if reassured, she poured herself a cup of the clear yellow decoction, and added a plentiful supply of cream.

Mrs. Hardwicke watched her with manifest disfavour.

"So strange you never can be brought to use a lemon!" she murmured, as if half to herself.

"We always prefer the cream," Mrs. Mansfield said, with her unruffled little smile which now but half concealed her obvious desire to suppress her guest.

"In New York, we always use a lemon; it seems so much more dainty. But then, you English are so conservative." Mrs. Hardwicke gave her tea a final meditative stir, laid the spoon in her saucer and lifted the cup to her lips. Then she paused to add, "Your tea is a mystery to us, anyway. You drink it at all sorts of hours; but you know it is my pet theory that no truly American stomach can stand tea, for instance, before one is fairly out of bed in the morning." Mrs. Hardwicke's accent betokened her conviction that a

truly American stomach was the one proper organ to possess.

"Possibly. However, we are not American, you know." And, in its turn, Mrs. Mansfield's level voice implied her thanks to her Creator that such was not the case. "That reminds me, speaking of America, I was so sorry you were not at church, last night, to hear that Londoner, Doctor Percivall, tell of the grand mission work he has been doing in New York. Such accounts do give us so much courage. Of course, I knew that the field was a large one and in need of effort; but I had no idea how much one single man was able to accomplish."

Mrs. Hardwicke drained her cup.

"Gertrude was there, and she was telling me about it," she said sweetly. "We both agreed that it was such a blessing that those people could have a man of their own race to work among them. He can understand their peculiar temptations so much better than our American clergymen can do."

"But Doctor Percivall's work is all among the Irish Americans," Mrs. Mansfield corrected her, and the injudicious accuracy of the correction gave opening for the inevitable reply, —

"Oh, yes. But they all came originally from your stock, you know. We Americans think of them as being in reality the same thing."

Mrs. Mansfield had the merit, rare in woman, of knowing when she was worsted. Now she changed the subject.

"You were speaking of the Allards," she said. "I hope no new trouble has come upon them."

Mrs. Hardwicke held out her cup to be refilled,

eyeing, the while, the bread-and-buttery tips of her new gloves reproachfully.

" Just a very little to warm it," she said. " I do like my tea hot. Your cosies are so charming to look at; but, after all, there's nothing like a blue-flame lamp, and fresh tea with every cup. But about those poor Allards, it seems to be trouble upon trouble. There was Denise and her poor little baby, one summer; only the next, François was taken, and Pierre had that fearful nervous breakdown. And now, just as the poor fellow is quite himself again — though I'm not sure that anybody is quite himself ever, after such an illness as that. I should always be anxious, if I were his mother, for fear meningitis or something might develop."

Mrs. Mansfield recalled her from her devious trail.

" What is the matter with Pierre now ? " she queried.

" The poor dear boy is ill at home with an ulcerated tooth. Doesn't it seem like piling Belial upon Ossian? And it seems so strange. I never supposed those monks ate sweets enough to affect their teeth unpleasantly."

" Pierre is not a monk," Mrs. Mansfield said a little shortly; " and even a monk must live."

" On necessities, not luxuries. And he will be one, some day."

" A priest," Mrs. Mansfield corrected firmly.

Mrs. Hardwicke, with a gesture of her bread-and-buttery fingers, waved the correction to one side.

" It amounts to the same thing, just as it does with the Irish and the English," she averred. " What hurts me is the idea of that pretty boy face all swollen up askew and aching. And a tooth does throb so!

I told Mr. Alstrom to advise Madame Allard to put on a poultice. Bread-and-milk is very drawing. He promised me he'd see about it. He is such a thoughtful, kindly man."

This time, it was Mrs. Mansfield who aimed the final shot.

"Widowers nearly always are," she said conclusively.

For the past ten months, now, relations between the two matrons had been badly strained, strained, at one time, wellnigh to the point of permanent rupture. Only the pleading of Tony, her idol and the cause of the strain, had led Mrs. Mansfield to relax it in the least. Long argument, however, and much filial coaxing brought forth a compromise. Mrs. Hardwicke was welcome, if she chose, to come in to tea; she would not be asked to dine. Between these two manifestations of hospitality, to Mrs. Mansfield's mind, a great gulf was fixed, a gulf whose nearer shore she was determined to guard from all encroachment.

Mrs. Mansfield's present attitude was not wholly indefensible, however. Under the rapid fire of her mother's questions, Gertrude had been unable to keep to herself the detail of her talk with Tony, that afternoon in the Parliament Buildings. And Mrs. Hardwicke, long the fancied victim of what she herself styled Mrs. Mansfield's everlasting superiority, had lost no time in taking it out of that good lady by informing her that Gertrude had jilted her precious Tony. To Mrs. Hardwicke's thinking, that fact was a distinct feather in the family cap. Once for all, it settled the question whether or no all visiting American girls were not husband-seekers in disguise, for whom a man

like Tony Mansfield would be the furriest sort of big game. Gertrude had vindicated herself, and, incidentally, all Americans to come, from the slander thrown upon them by their Canadian hostesses. Mrs. Hardwicke imparted to Mrs. Mansfield all that she knew and somewhat that she imagined; and she ended her impartings by the statement that Gertrude would marry none but an American. From sundry other impartings previously made, Mrs. Mansfield was left in little doubt as to who that American would probably be.

Mrs. Mansfield had gone through the interview, courteous, unruffled; she had bowed to her departing guest with a suavity which gave no hint that such a bow was final. Then she had gone away, to shed her tears in secret. Still later, much later by reason of her reddened eyes, she had gone in search of Tony. Mother-like, she longed to hear him make his moan. Briton-like, he did nothing of the kind. On the other hand, he discussed the matter with her in a vein of most unsentimental frankness, accepted her condolences as the most valuable solace which could have been offered him, and sent her away in a state of perfect contentment which endured until the slow realization came to her that, leaving him, she knew just so much as she had done before.

On one point, however, Tony became specific.

"But who told you about it, mater darling?" he inquired, when Mrs. Mansfield's tears had been dried, for the second time.

At first she evaded the question.

"We mothers have sharp eyes, Tony," she reminded him.

"Yes; but just now?" he insisted, ignoring the evasion.

Mrs. Mansfield confessed the source of her knowledge.

Tony stared at her long, his hands thrust into his pockets, his lips shaped to an imaginary whistling. Then, —

"The old tabby-cat!" he said conclusively. "But, mater — "

"Well, my dear boy?"

Tony groaned in spirit. There are seasons when endearments fall, undesired, upon masculine ears. Such a season was on him now.

"It's all right, mater," he blurted out. "Don't worry about it. Most likely it wouldn't have been the best thing, anyway. But, in any case, you won't take it out on Gertrude?"

"What do you mean, Tony? I think I don't quite — "

Rising, Tony bent over her chair and laid his hand against her cheek. He spoke with his old cheery intonation.

"Don't fib, mater. I read your understanding in your face. Really, Gertrude is not to blame. There's no reason she is bound to love me, if she doesn't. Please don't make it hard for her."

Mrs. Mansfield bent her cheek to the caress.

"How should I make it hard, Tony?" she asked again.

"By not being friends with her. By making her feel there is a difference."

"There is," she interrupted him.

But Tony interposed bravely.

"No, mater; there isn't going to be. We've talked the matter out, and we're much too fond of each other to leave off being friends. Things will go on in just the same old way."

"You think they will, Tony; but they can't."

Tony dropped his hand to her shoulder, and spoke with swift decision.

"They can, mater. I shall make it my business to see that they do."

And Tony kept his word.

Nevertheless, and in spite of her promises to Tony, Mrs. Mansfield did let it make a difference with her attitude to Gertrude. For three years, she had been hoping for the time to come when she could call Gertrude *daughter*. At first, this had been solely for Tony's sake, because she saw that his heart was set upon it; later, it had been for Gertrude's own. In spite of her Americanisms, in spite of her calmly unsentimental fashion of viewing the world, a fashion so unlike to that to which Mrs. Mansfield had been trained, that good lady had come to care for Gertrude and, caring, to feel sure that she was the one wife for Tony. That Tony should choose Gertrude out from all the world was a matter of comment and surprise. That Gertrude could fail to accept Tony's choice as final was a wholly unimaginable contingency. And now, when Gertrude had actually had the temerity to refuse Tony, her own desirable son Tony, Mrs. Mansfield was unable to overcome all her tendency to treat the girl as culprit and offender against the social law. One clause of Mrs. Mansfield's creed was simple: that which was inconceivable was also bad. Gertrude's attitude to Tony was therefore both.

The girl could not fail to be hurt by Mrs. Mansfield's abrupt change of front, doubly hurt, since she lacked all clue to its cause. The clue was supplied, however, a few days later, when Louisa came heartily to her support.

"I think you did exactly the right thing, Gertrude," she said to her, one morning when they were walking together on the terrace. "You and Tony have been too good friends to make successful lovers."

Gertrude laughed, although her hand, touching Louisa's for a moment, showed her real appreciation of the unexpected support of Louisa's attitude.

"Does that follow?" she asked, as lightly as she could.

"Certainly. I don't believe you ever have disagreed in your lives, and such harmony is death to sentiment," Louisa answered calmly, as one who knew whereof she spoke.

"But that would imply that you and Mr. Byng have fought," Gertrude suggested, with sudden malice, for Louisa's exuberant honeymoon, lasting quite around the year, had been a cause of mirth to all her friends.

Again Louisa spoke calmly, so calmly that it left Gertrude gasping.

"We have, dozens of times. We do now, every little while. For my part, I believe that friction is necessary to perfect contact."

"Yes," Gertrude assented; "but it is also very wearing."

Louisa smiled, with the little superiority even a year-old bride is prone to show in the presence of her spinster friends.

"Wait till your turn comes," she bade Gertrude.

"Then you'll know." The next instant, however, the superiority left her voice, and she spoke with a cordial friendliness, laying her hand, the while, on Gertrude's arm. "But about you and Tony, Gertrude, I am so glad you're not engaged. How did I know about it?" She laughed a little. "There has been a regular round-robin of mothers, and some war. I fancy the feathers flew a little. Then mother came to me, and begged me to remonstrate with you."

"Well?" Gertrude's tone hardened a little. It was galling, this knowledge that the subject of her talk with Tony had been bandied about among the other members of their two families. Too late, she blamed herself for taking her mother into her confidence, and the self-blame gave the hardening to her voice.

"Don't be cross, dear," Louisa urged her. "I know it is horrid to be talked over; but I suspect it is one of the few privileges left to the older generation, this discussion of their offspring's welfare. But as for remonstrating with you, I told my mother flatly that I should do nothing of the kind. I am sorry as I can be for poor old Tony; he is badly hurt by the whole thing. Still, it is a hurt he will get over in time, and I never have felt you were the right people to marry each other; you were too much like brother and sister for that. You can't make over bread-and-butter, however good it is, into *pâté de foie gras*. You only spoil them both in the process, if you try. I'd love you for Billy's sister, but not for Tony's wife."

And so, shorn of her daughter's support, unaided by her remonstrances with Gertrude, Mrs. Mansfield was left to face the situation alone. Even apart from Tony's urging, she was unable to dislike Gertrude. Long

since, the girl had become too dear to her for that; and Mrs. Mansfield, after a few weeks of apparent toleration, lapsed slowly backward into her old attitude. Towards Mrs. Hardwicke, however, there was no lapsing. The softest natures now and then develop one implacable, irresistible point; that point, so far as Mrs. Mansfield was concerned, was directed towards Mrs. Hardwicke.

As for Mrs. Hardwicke, it was impossible to tell whether her unconcern was wholly genuine. However, it was wholly impenetrable, and that served the same purpose in the end. Her conversation now bristled with little barbed points; but that was the only change in her manner to Mrs. Mansfield. She still dropped in for tea quite as often as of yore, still urged her hostess to return the visits, an invitation which was steadily refused, and the refusal had now endured for ten long months.

On that particular March day, Gertrude and her mother had been out for a round of calls which had ended at the Mansfields' door. Twilight was falling; and Mrs. Hardwicke had been tired and undeniably cross, as she entered the cosy room and accepted her cup of tea. Her irritation had been increased when Louisa Byng, chancing to be there, had carried Gertrude away up-stairs with her, leaving the two matrons alone together to share their cup of tea.

It was Mrs. Mansfield who brought the talk back to the Allards, and then, with a leap, to Alstrom.

"How death has followed him!" she said, and there was honest pity in her voice. "It is strange for one young man to be the centre, you might almost say, for so much tragedy."

Mrs. Hardwicke tasted her fresh cup of tea, and burned her tongue. The smart added a touch of rancour to her tone.

"Only his wife and haby," she said defensively. "That might happen to any man, and he certainly mourned for them most loyally. He even had a new hlack pearl to pin his neckties. I do like a man, I confess, who ohserves thosc little forms, and he is so punctilious. But two deaths — "

"Four," Mrs. Mansfield corrected gently. "There was Mr. Wood — "

"But he couldn't possihly have mourned for a man like that," Mrs. Hardwicke interposed.

"And François Allard — "

"Just a brother-in-law," Mrs. Hardwicke interposed again.

"But they were so fond of each other, and Father Allard was a most noble man."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Hardwicke sighed, with polite regret. "And Mr. Alstrom is so loyal. To this day, he can't bear to talk of his poor brother-in-law. Of course, so many deaths do seem a little strange; but I suppose they are needed for some incvitable end. I read that, only the other day, in regard to deaths in fiction; and fiction, after all said and done, is really a good deal like fact."

A half-hour later, Tony put his head in at the open door.

"Is tahhy gone?" he asked composedly.

"Now, Tony!" Louisa's accent was full of rebuke.

"Yes; hut she is a shocking tahhy," Tony urged, as, crossing the room, he sat down beside the tray. "Half a cup, mater, and some for yourself, some that is sweet

and strong, for I've a bitter pill to give you, afterwards."

"Tony! What now?"

With the same gesture he had used when in knickerbockers, he reached up and caught her hand in his.

"Have I given you so many?" he inquired gravely. "I hope not that, mater."

"No, Tony." The level English voice was full of love and pride. "You know that's not it at all. But what is it, dear?"

For a moment, Tony met her eyes gravely. Then he straightened himself, with a little laugh.

"Nothing so serious as all that, mater. I've had rather a knock-out, this afternoon; that's all."

"At the Parliament Buildings?" Louisa asked swiftly. "Oh, Tony, what ever made you go into it, in the first place?"

"Because I'm a man, and owe a man's duty to such things," Tony made sturdy answer. "Don't howl, Louisa; leave that till you can get home and have it out with Byng."

"But what was it, Tony?" His mother's voice still held its gentle note, although her eyes were full of trouble. "Is it very bad? Was it your speech they didn't like?"

Tony shook his head.

"The wrong fellows liked it, mater; that is where the trouble lay. The Opposition cheered me, made no end of a row. My own crowd sat silent, only for one little hiss from somebody under the gallery."

"Hissed you! Tony!"

Tony laughed, in spite of the trouble in his eyes.

"I confess I felt rather like an actor being boo-ed.

It wasn't pleasant; though, if I had had time to study my emotions, it might have been rather interesting. But that wasn't all; worse came later. As soon as I sat down, that man, Arsenault, stood up and launched out into a torrent of invective, reviewed my whole career from A to Z, said I had gone into it for one end, bought my way in, if you please, with Conservative money, just for the sake of masquerading in the Liberal party and urging them on to their own betrayal. He called me all sorts of things, a traitor to my party, said I had broken faith in all sorts of ways with the people who had elected me. The Lord knows how he managed to piece together so many facts into a perfect cloth of lies; but he did it, and ended up by publicly denouncing me and asking for my resignation."

"Tony Mansfield!" Louisa's spoon clattered to the floor. "What shall you do?"

Tony stooped, picked up the spoon and sat turning it this way and that beneath his own unseeing gaze.

"I've already done," he answered heavily at length.

"Done what?"

"Wired in my resignation. I stopped in at the office on the corner, as I came down."

"Oh, Tony!"

"Tony, my dear boy!"

Two different generations of womankind spoke in the two brief phrases. It was the second phrase which Tony turned to answer.

"It's too bad," he said; "and it's an infernal lie, from end to end; but it made my resignation quite inevitable. You see that, mater? But," this time, the colour left his face, as he went on; "the worst of

the whole thing was that he quoted one man against me, and that man was Henri Allard."

Next morning, while he was still at breakfast, two envelopes were brought to Tony. One held a telegram from his Lorette committee; his resignation was accepted with decorously empty expressions of regret. The other message, albeit a note, was almost as brief.

"*Stick to your guns,*" it ran. "*I'm proud of you as ever. You'll win out in time.— G. H.*"

And Tony, casting aside the tatters of the telegram, put away the note within an inside pocket.

CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO

TO Alstrom, far in his northern forest, the tidings of François Allard's death came with a shock that was immeasurable. It never once had occurred to him that François could die, that that strong, useful life could meet its end. Still less would it have occurred to him that, granted the possibility of that end's coming before his own life was finished, it could cause him anything but the most acute regret. From the hour of their meeting, he had admired François keenly; out of that admiration had grown a love which, he told himself now, must have been strong indeed to have survived the strain he put upon it. For it had survived. Under all his dread of François' presence, under his anxiety lest some chance force François to betray the secret he had kept so well, there had lain strong, though dormant, the unchanged regard for the man, the inherent trust in the priest, the conviction that ultimately and in some fashion Alstrom could not foresee, François Allard would bring salvation into his injured life, would restore it to perfect health, save for its single scar. He had spent hours and weeks of dull, agonizing forebodings, of fears that had sapped his strength and shaken his nerve; yet looking backward now, he told himself that such forebodings came only from the

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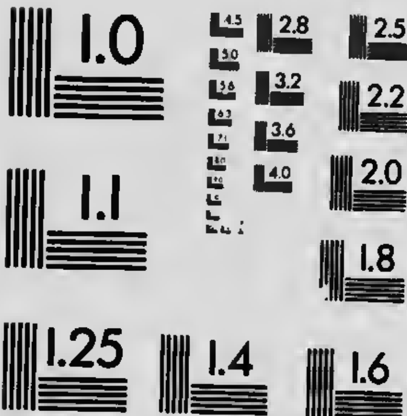

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surface of his mind; that he trusted his life to François' hands just as surely as he trusted his soul to François' keeping. For in the man, Thorne Alstrom, there was a curious boyish stripe which made it easier to trust himself to François, the mediator, rather than to François' Creator.

The loss of François, then, came to him with a double force. His friend was gone; gone, also, was his strongest, most active influence to good. True, Tony Mansfield's influence was always helpful, and so was that of Gertrude Hardwicke. But they influenced him for good casually, unconsciously and because it was the natural end to seek. François Allard urged him goodward, consciously and with fervour, because good was good, and therefore hard of attainment. Alstrom's mind came slowly out from beneath the crushing force of the shock to face, first of all, the knowledge that he had lost his greatest outside stimulus to good, that henceforward his salvation lay in his own hands, his only. For not once did it occur to him that there would be need, a second time, to place his life secret in a confessor's hands. François' influence had been too strong for that. Instinctively, Thorne Alstrom realized that, François dead, his influence would yet be undying, that no other man could be for him so potent a force for good. All this came on the first day, all this and much more of the same import, mingled with a sorrow as tender as it was unalloyed. And, even then, Thorne Alstrom had as yet no knowledge that the last words of François had been for him. That would come later, bringing its own wave of passionate regret, of passionate longing to hear again that steady, kindly voice, urging him on to make the restitution from which he shrank,

of passionate determination to make himself a worthy object of François' final thought.

The next day, clear and sunny and charged with the ozone of the northern woods, brought to him a swift revulsion of feeling. Already, as he took hasty breakfast and started to the front, the fact of François' death seemed old to him, something that had happened so long ago that even his sorrow was blunted by the passing time. And, as his sorrow lost its sharpest sting, he drew a sudden breath of sheer relief. The next instant, he checked the breath as hastily as he condemned the relief, yet each had escaped his vigilance and started into lusty life. And, all that day, in spite of all the determination he could bring to bear upon the matter, the relief kept springing up again, forcing itself upon his attention above the insistent needs of his work. And, each time it sprang up, he was conscious of an excitement which sent the blood buzzing through his head and made his heart leap violently. François was dead, dead; his secret was his own again, unviolated and, henceforth, inviolable. His life was in his own hands once more. He could make of it what he would. No one would see the hidden scar. Besides, time would obliterate any scar, however deep, time and care and skill. Over the old, old wound he could graft the healthy skin of his new life, and none should look beneath, or, looking, be the wiser.

At noon, he refused his share of the luncheon which was sent after them from camp. Instead, wandering away by himself into the thicker woods, he sat down by a little brook, shut his hands around his knees and deliberately sought to review the whole situation, to review it with the same cool logic he would have

accorded a similar situation with another man as hero.

At first, he found it impossible to concentrate his thought. The mossy bank on which he was sitting was so like the bank where he and Denise had sat, that last day of theirs together, that his mind rushed off to her, instead. He wondered if she were not sorry for him, sitting there alone; wondered if she had yet met François, if they had not talked of him; wondered — With a jerk, physical as well as mental, he sat up and pulled himself together. The future was never faced by keeping one's eyes upon the past.

By degrees, however, he fell back into the old position, and sat there, brooding, listening to the chatter of the brook which seemed trying to make him understand some insistent message, just as a little child, pulling at one's coat and jabbering formless words, tries to make known his wants to the uncomprehending older ears. Pierre would have been doing it by now; he would have been almost a full year old, and the little tucks and frills would long since have been cast aside, outgrown.

Suddenly Alstrom sat up again, and sharply. Would Pierre, growing up to manhood, have come to know his father's story? Would he have been forgiving, or implacable? And he himself, would he ever have been forced to shrink with shame before the honest eyes of his own little son? Just how bad was it, anyway?

His hands clasped about his knees, he fell to brooding again. It was all such an old, old story now. The slow temptation which all his life of indulgence, of parental spoiling, had ill fitted him to resist, the sudden yielding, the long struggle for recovery, and the flight, rather than face an investigation which, he knew now, would

never have been made public regarding his father's son. And still, sitting there in the silent forest, he recognized the fact that now he was ten times the man, facing the publicity of his own flight and starting life anew, that he would have been at home in all the ignominy of an influence-bought silence. His life was scarred, scarred perchance past all concealing; yet, thank God! even now it held no hidden sore, eating its health away. The tragedy, however great, was in the past. Done with, known to none of his present associates, it left him to live out his life among them, an honest man who would win their whole respect, win it no less by his daily, hourly record than by his brilliant success in his profession. At least, he had a right to do so much, to make full amends for something which could never be undone.

As for his secret, he had a right to guard it as he chose. Coming among them all, a stranger, it was for them to seek to trace his past, not for him to shout aloud the facts of his former life. One met new men constantly and everywhere; one took them on the merits of their present. And, if he kept his present quite unsullied, quite free from blame, was it his duty to weight that present with the handicap of the past? He shook his head; but, even with the motion, there flashed across his brain a Kipling couplet:

If we fall in the race, though we win, the hoofslide is scarred in the course;
Though Allah and Earth pardon Sin, remaineth for ever Remorse.

Yes, and in the remorse lay the final punishment. It was for him to take it bravely and in silence. The

first lesson of his own school days had been to the effect that it was bad manners to talk about his lickings. Best take the lickings of Providence, then, according to the same code.

Again his mind shot off at a tangent. His secret was his own. His own it must remain. The fact had dropped into the past; it had absolutely no connection with his present life. In the past, unknown and unnoticed, he would let it lie. Twice it had come into the present, had threatened to overshadow all his future. Once it had been in the hands of Wood, unscrupulous hands which had sought to use it as a flail to beat out the heart of his manhood and, beating, to reduce it to impotent powder which Wood, gathering up, could mould anew to his own ends. The other time, François Allard had held the clue and, holding it, had used it as a scourge to drive him forward along the road to complete redemption. But the hands that held the scourge had fallen, never to rise again. The brain that held the clue was stilled, and, so far as Thorne Alstrom was concerned, François' work was done. But was it?

And then there was Gertrude Hardwicke. Even as he reiterated his resolve to hold his secret safe for evermore, Thorne Alstrom was conscious of a vague wonder how its knowledge would change his attitude to Gertrude, change hers to him. How would the matter look to him, viewed in the pitiless, clear logic of her straightforward nature? But that he could never know. It was not for him to seek to guess; he would face death at any time, rather than meet one look of scorn from the girl's steady eyes. Denise's love would have been strong enough to lead her to forgive. Gertrude was

made of other stuff. Some things, to her, were unforgivable. Not, after all, that her forgiveness counted. And it never would be put to the test, in any case. François Allard, good friend and noble counsellor, was dead, irrevocably dead; and with him, no less irrevocably dead, Thorne Alstrom's secret was buried, never to be exhumed again. He rose stiffly, stretched himself and, his hands in his pockets and his soft hat on the back of his tawny hair, went strolling away in search of a belated cup of coffee.

In a sense, those noonday reflections beside the forest brook had held in themselves the very essence and epitome of his whole winter. The following March found him not one whit further advanced in striking his mental balance than he had been, that noon, when he had risen, dismissing reverie, to go in search of his belated cup of coffee.

The winter had been an uneventful one to Alstrom; yet, looking backward over it, by March he had come to see that it was one of the most important winters he had ever known. Day had followed day, week week, in a monotony which had been wellnigh unbroken. Like a river whose very swiftness leaves its surface stirred by no ripple, so the unbroken, monotonous passing of the days was sweeping his life onward towards two ends. Gertrude was one; the other was the fulfilment of François Allard's mission to the soul of the penitent whose confession had been at once his greatest shock, his chiefest care. And of his progress, of the existence, even, of those two ends, Thorne Alstrom was totally unconscious. For the time being, at least, he had abandoned all effort at self-analysis, self-blame. The year before had been

one constant period of self-research. He had viewed himself from every possible point of sight. Now, tired of the subject, he sought to dismiss it and allow himself to drift, not knowing that, just in his drifting, there would come his hour of greatest progress. There are times when paddles are only hinderers of advance, if only by reason of the resistance developed by their splashing.

Alstrom's promotion had come in October. He was chief engineer of the B. T. now, and his salary was proportioned to the honour rather than to the actual work, which had diminished perceptibly with his advancement. The change was good for him in more ways than one. Official life, even in railroading, involves some social duties. His time outside of business hours was slowly filling with a variety of interests, petty, but absorbing. His mirror, meanwhile, now that his first year of mourning was at an end, bordered itself with a triple rank of invitations which could not always be shirked. As a rule, he met Tony at these functions, and Gertrude was often beside him, for Quebec is retentive of the pairs she lays aside, and shuffles her pack but rarely. However, when Alstrom sauntered up to them as to his chiefest friends, and Tony lingered, as if loath to give him place, it usually ended by Alstrom's carrying off the girl, leaving Tony to stare after them with more perplexity than envy in his honest eyes, as if their desertion had left him grappling with a problem he was powerless to solve.

Alstrom was quite as unconscious of Tony's perplexity as he was of most psychological facts, that winter; but Gertrude saw it, and, seeing, wondered. Gertrude was watching Tony closely in those days.

As often happens with an absolute outsider, she had heard the mutterings of the parliamentary storm before it broke, had watched with wrathful eyes the careful patching together of many facts into the mantle of one huge lie which was to be cast over the head of the unconscious Tony. At first, she had thought to warn him; then she held her peace. Tony's integrity, his simple, boyish honour might yet win over his adversaries who, she was convinced, were moved far more by jealousy than by loyalty to any cause. By the end of his second year, Tony had made three speeches which had gone on record; he had won for himself a word of undisguised approval from the federal Premier, and he had been sought out by the Governor General, one night, in a pointed fashion which would have turned the head of a less modest man than Tony Mansfield. However, Tony had the saving trick of ignoring honours and measuring himself by the achievements of greater men than he. He had no ends at stake; but, rather, one certain end in view. His clean eyes, fixed on that, saw nothing between. And Gertrude, watching, exulting in the very singleness of that end, forbore to rouse him from its contemplation. In the end, the storm broke before she had quite expected. She could only look on, hot with wrath against Tony's adversaries, warm with admiration for Tony himself who took it no less hard because he took it bravely.

Only once and briefly he made his moan.

"It's not the row," he said to Gertrude, a week after he had stowed the note away inside his pocket; "it's only their having the cheek to think such things about me. I'd always hoped I'd be able to keep my shoes out of such muck; but, even if I accidentally

stepped in it, I never thought it would have the confounded effrontery to stick."

"And the worst of it all is," Gertrude complained to Alstrom, the next day; "a good handful of it was thrown at him by Henri Allard." Then she coloured swiftly, as she bethought herself. "I truly forgot he was your kin," she added penitently.

Alstrom laughed.

"My kin, but not my kind," he answered. "Really, I know Henri surprisingly little."

"It doesn't surprise me in the least," she replied quickly. "Once, long ago, I thought I knew him. He used to come to see me often, you know. Then, all at once, I found we didn't understand each other in the least. And yet, I have always respected him, till now."

"And now?"

She faced him hotly.

"I never respect the man who turns upon a friend."

"But if he has cause — "

"He hasn't."

"Or, what amounts to the same thing, thinks he has?"

"Then he can keep still. He owes at least as much as silence, as tribute to an old-time friendship. Besides, he knows Tony."

The absolute finality of her phrase brought the colour to his cheeks. It implied much, so much more than any phrase that could be used of himself; in its three words was summed up all of Tony Mansfield's life.

"Yes," he echoed slowly. "He knows Tony."

Side by side in the March noon, they were loitering

along the western end of the Ramparts. An errand for her mother had called Gertrude to Lower Town, that morning. In Peter Street she had been overtaken by Alstrom, just starting home to luncheon, and they had walked on together, leaving behind them the direct route up Mountain Hill and, instead, threading their way beneath the hanging galleries and flapping clothes lines of Sous-le-Cap and climbing Dambourges Hill, they came out beneath the latticed gallery where the white-robed monks are always pacing, pacing to and fro. Thence, turning westward, they walked on past the snow-heaped garden of Villa Montcalm, past the bastions with their black guns looking out across the dazzling Beauport Flats and making impotent pretext of guarding the valley just beneath their dumb old muzzles, past the long, low wall which bounds the garden of the Hôtel Dieu. Opposite the rearmost wing of the building, Gertrude halted, her back to the little iron-barred window in the wall, and stood there, gazing out across the roofs beneath to the mouth of the Saint Charles valley where the high tide filled the river bed from bank to bank. The picture at her feet, banded with thin columns of white smoke rising from many a chimney, was lovely enough, however familiar in its each detail, to hold her full attention. Now, however, she gazed at it with unseeing eyes.

Suddenly she turned and faced Alstrom sharply.

"Of course," she said; "Henri has been mistaken, misinformed; he will be the first one to be sorry, in the end. But can you imagine any one, any human being, thinking of Tony's honour as being even scarred?"

Again he flushed, this time, at her use of the word he had so often applied, in similar sense, to himself.

"No," he said slowly. "No; I can't."

Once more Gertrude faced about and dropped her hands, muff and all, upon the coping of the wall before her.

"After all," she said, as if half to herself; "I suppose that is what counts. And yet, in the eye of the world, it isn't. Sometimes it seems to count for more, if a man escapes suspicion than if he escapes blame. Granted appearances, it doesn't make much difference what a man really does in this world."

She spoke swiftly, vehemently, yet it seemed to the man at her side that each syllable was dropping, slow, distinct, into the well of his mind, dropping and falling with a thud to the bottom, there to lie until time and he and his mind should be no more.

"Mr. Alstrom," again she faced about; "I wonder if you will understand me, when I say I hate appearances. What I adore in Tony is his thorough-going honour, an honour that is as transparent as the sunshine between here and Charlesbourg church." She pointed to the distant spire, glittering golden in the golden light of noon. "But if Tony, if you yourself, had ever done any wrong, I could forgive the sin, when I saw it, but never the effort to keep up appearances and hide what is underneath. If Tony had done this thing that they accuse him of — he hasn't. We who know him can take our oath of that — I should be sorry, of course; but I could make excuse, even then, for temptations I knew nothing about. But, if he'd done it, as Henri Allard claims, and gone on pretending to be an honest man, gone on taking respect which he

had no business to receive, then I'd never forgive him, when I found him out. So far, I understand Henri Allard's position. He thinks he has found Tony out, and he believes it is his duty to expose him."

As she paused for breath, she turned to look at Alstrom. He stood beside her, his elbows on the wall, his hands shielding his face from the glowing sun which struck down full upon him from over Gertrude's shoulder. What she could see of his expression was so impassive as to irritate her, roused as she was by the abstract question involved in Tony's wrongs. His voice was as impassive, too, as were the lips from whence it came.

"But isn't it his duty to expose him?" he queried.

Under his shielding hand, his gray eyes leaped into life at the glance of scorn she flashed upon him.

"No. A thousand times never! What is friendship for? To expose the fault of an old friend is to be the most contemptible sort of traitor. If Henri thinks Tony is wrong, let him go to him and have it out, out to the bitter end and behind closed doors. If he is so great a fool, if he knows so little of mankind as to distrust Tony Mansfield, he should do that, or else keep still. Those are the only courses open to him."

"And which," again Alstrom's curiously impassive voice marked strange contrast to her vehement speech; "which seems to you the fairer course to choose?"

Gertrude's reply came without hesitation.

"To have it out with him, of course. It's better to know any truth, however bad, than to slide comfortably along a track of misconceptions. For my own part, if friendship is to count for anything, I'd rather know my friends for what they are than for what they seem."

She stopped speaking and once more stood gazing out between the smoke columns that striped the sunny foreground, while Alstrom, at her side, allowed his glance to rest upon the grated window in the wall behind. And so they waited, the one seeming to face the close-locked past, the other to be looking into the limitless future. Then Alstrom shivered and dropped his eyes, for, behind the bars, tight-locked upon his past, he could see a spectre peering out upon him and, after him, at Gertrude Hardwicke.

Her friends for what they were, not what they seemed! How would he meet such test?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"REALLY, you know, it's very decent of you fellows to make this offer; but are you certain I'm the man for you?" Tony blurted out at length, after listening in blank surprise to the spokesman of the party who had invaded his den, that last morning in March.

The spokesman reiterated what had gone before, that and many other things more or less relevant to the main question.

Tony heard him out to the end, let the silence drop over that end. Then he said, with boyish bluntness, —

"I don't want to funk; neither do I care to fish for compliments. But what the deuce would I do at Ottawa?"

The answer came pat.

"Represent our interests."

"But — but you are Liberals," Tony stammered, for the very unexpectedness of this deputation, arriving hard on the heels of his ignominy, had driven conventional phrases from his mind.

"Yes, and, pardon me, so are you." The voice held no hint of question.

"I thought I was," Tony said, with the same boyish bluntness; "but these fellows here have chucked me out of the party."

The spokesman waved his hand, as if dismissing a detail too paltry to need spoken words. Then, apparently reconsidering, he said, —

"Yes, a mere provincial matter, a tempest in a teapot, if you will allow me to use the expression."

Tony laughed.

"Rather! But some of the grounds boiled up and stuck to me. However — "

"However, that is over, and the province is so much the worse off. Now the question is, are you willing to be our candidate for — "

Tony shook his head.

"Impossible," he interrupted briefly.

"Why, if I may ask?"

"That is Henri Allard's territory, not mine."

"But there can be two candidates."

Tony turned on his heel, assaulted the fire, turned back again.

"Henri Allard is my oldest friend. I prefer not to run against him."

"But you are sure of a good majority," the spokesman urged.

Tony took one irate step forward.

"Majority be hanged! You be hanged with it, if you say another word!" he exploded wrathfully. "Henri Allard's heart is in the game. I have not the least desire in the world to crowd him out."

The spokesman bowed, as if to end an interview which already had been overlong.

"Monsieur Allard hardly deserves such loyalty from you, Mr. Mansfield, however much such an attitude, when known, is bound to help your cause. I thank you

for this tentative interview which, as we both know, is by no means final — "

Tony cut in, without awaiting a full pause.

"I tell you it is final," he said. "I thank you for the compliment, and all the rest of it; but now, for heaven's sake, go to thunder! Can't you see when a fellow is in earnest?" And, with an emphasis which was scarcely necessary, he closed the door behind his guests, and sat down to smoke and exult upon his victory.

The deputation did not go to thunder, however. Instead, they returned to their committee room and sat themselves down to consider what should be their next step to capture this truculent candidate whom neither urging nor specious promises could swerve from his fancied obligation to a disloyal friend. Next day, they called on Tony again; again, the next week, they appeared at his door. This time, they held a trump card in their hands.

"Monsieur Allard has announced his intention of withdrawing from politics," the spokesman said, as soon as he had rushed through the needful greetings.

Tony eyed him keenly, but his voice was bland.

"Sure?" he queried.

"He sent us word to that effect, last night."

"Did; did he? Hm! Poor old Henri!" Tony observed, with dispassionate sympathy. "What sort of a thumbscrew had you been putting on?"

"Mr. Mansfield! On my honour — " The spokesman half rose from Tony's easiest chair.

Tony waved him back once more.

"Three weeks ago," he said a little bitterly; "I used that phrase. I was promptly reminded that such

phrases have no place in political life, no place and no meaning. However, for the sake of the old conventions, we'll let it pass. Now you see here; you talk man-talk to me. Don't hedge. Do you mean to tell me that Henri Allard, quite of his own will, is going out of politics?"

"For the present, yes."

"What for?"

"Because he is out of sympathy, not only with the Government, but with us whose party interests he represents."

"In other words, you've asked him to get out," Tony made thoughtful comment.

"I beg your pardon, no. We merely have reminded him of certain promises he made us, promises that he has taken no steps to fulfil."

"And Henri?" Tony asked again.

"As I say, he has decided, for the present, to withdraw. When he reënters the arena — "

"Oh, come now, we're not gladiators and wild beasts and things," Tony assured him blandly.

The spokesman frowned. He was less versed in classic lore than in the cant phrases of his errand. Tony's interruption struck him as wilful frivolity in face of serious issues.

"When once more he comes before the people," he amended; "it will either be as leader of an independent party, or else as the upholder of a much more radical Government. In either case — "

Tony rose to his feet, pushed aside the litter on the mantel to make room for his elbow and stood facing him.

"In either case, you are out with him? Yes? Very

good. Now let me tell you a few things. In the first place, whatever his opinions, however far he goes beyond the limits of your little platform, it will be long and long before you will get a better man to represent you than Henri Allard. You called him a firebrand, only the other day. So he is, on fire with his conscience and his principles. He is as honest a man as the Lord ever made, as honest and as clever. If he goes to excesses, now and then, what of it? You knew him, when you elected him, knew he was French and a fellow with copper-wire nerves and an iron will. What you did not know, apparently, was that both nerves and will are ruled by his conscience. He may not have a wide optical angle; but, at least, he sees straight, and that is more than most of us can do. If he promises you things, he will either make good, or else convince you that the promises were bad. I'm sorry you didn't stand by him. You never will get as good a man again. Moreover, it won't be easy to persuade any man to step into his shoes, for fear of getting lost inside." His say said to its finish, Tony smiled with bland suggestiveness towards the outer door.

"You may be right, Mr. Mansfield. Still, you will hardly refuse to help us in our time of need." The spokesman, in his effort to palliate Tony's indignation, once more took refuge in his well-worn phrases.

Tony, with unruffled calm, interposed what he thought a final barrier.

"That is for Monsieur Allard to say," he responded coolly. "As yet, I have had no notice that he intends to withdraw. I certainly could not consent to stand against him." Once more the spokesman found himself bowed blandly from the room.

Three days later, Henri Allard did say, and not by means of the note in which most men, placed as he was, would have taken refuge. Firebrand he was, would always be; yet it was not in him to seek evasions, to shun the consequences of his hasty acts. Tony, listening to his explanations, felt that haste and conscience made no despicable combination.

They met at the door of the Garrison Club whither Henri, just down from Ottawa, was bound in search of Tony. Turning, they walked away together down Louis Street, up Ursule, then back and to the terrace; and, as they walked, the grip of Henri's hand tightened on Tony's arm with all the old-time pressure. Explaining, he yet made no attempt at self-excuse. Misinformed, he had been ready to believe the guilt of his old friend, ready to condemn him, unheard, upon the charges of his avowed antagonists. He had been wrong, wrong and unjust. As the months went on, his path and Tony's had diverged; the angle between them was wide by now, the space impassable. And, for the present, the Government was on Tony's side. To Henri that mattered nothing in the end. His own side was bound to have a final triumph. Meanwhile, he would withdraw from public life, and wait until his own time should come. His resignation, as voluntary as it was desired, was already in; the end of the present session would also be the end of his occupation of his present seat. Before he left it, however, one duty lay ahead of him; that was the retraction of his ill-judged words concerning Tony's policy and honour.

And Tony heard him, perforce, to the end. He knew Henri of old, knew that, in moods like his present one,

he would brook neither opposition nor interruption. But, while he listened, his mind was fixed far less upon his own prompt vindication than on the character of the man beside him. Aggressive, radical, outspoken as he was, Henri Allard was confessing his mistake as simply as a little child. When he had finished, he held out his hand to Tony.

"You have heard the truth," he said. "Does it make us friends, or enemies?"

Tony pulled off his fur-lined glove and crushed Henri's fingers in his strong grasp.

"Friends always, man," he answered. "That was what hurt the worst, the fear it wouldn't always hold good."

"And you will stand in my place?" Henri queried.

"Only on the edge of it, if I do at all."

But Henri took the answer in another sense.

"That is all now that can be. Even if we take the name of one party, we must go our separate ways. Just now, your way is the safest for you, for us all. And yet, I can not follow it. My belief is all the other way." He smiled a little, and the smile was sad. "It is not easy to step out of one's own path. Still, if another man must walk in it, I would rather it were you than some one else."

Once more Tony wrung his hand, and there fell between them the silence which serves to veil emotions in those who understand each other. Tony broke it, with a vain effort to resume his wonted careless speech.

"After all, they may not put me in," he suggested dubiously.

"No danger. My own people would be the only ones to oppose, and I think I can influence them. Arsenault

wishes to stand against you; but his chance is slight." And Henri, his confession done and over, fell to instructing Tony in the strength and weakness of his new position.

At Tony's door they parted. Henri was returning to Ottawa, that night; he must look in on his mother for an hour. His hand shut hard on Tony's in farewell, then reluctantly let go its clasp. Then he turned away, while Tony, his mood one of sudden thoughtfulness, made a swift resolve to go in search of Gertrude Hardwicke and tell her the good news. And Tony, in that final phrase, neglected to include his own political regeneration. Instead, he merely meant his restored understanding with his old boyhood friend. Tony Mansfield was nearing thirty. Nevertheless, he was no nearer than he ever had been to viewing life in the light of expedience. Given his choice between winning Henri's regard, or a seat at Ottawa, his selection of the former would have been made without an instant's hesitation.

To his unspeakable and unspoken disgust, he found Mrs. Hardwicke purling alone beside the tray, and he made the speediest possible sort of exit. He had never regarded Mrs. Hardwicke with affection. Of late, he had acquired for her something as closely akin to aversion as his good temper could evolve for anything even remotely connected with Gertrude. When he could avoid the good lady, he did so without compunction. When he was forced into close proximity, he assumed his most killing manners, smiled his sweetest and let her do all the talking.

"It makes her good-tempered, you know, and I'd rather she'd purr than put up her back," he explained

to his mother. "One can stand the discomfort for the sense of safety it gives one." However, he made a point of fleeing from the presence at the first available moment, and now, according to his custom, he drained his cup, set it on a corner of the table beside the tray and incontinently fled.

And Gertrude, meanwhile, was biding her time as best she could in one of the upper offices of the Levis ferry.

The thaw had begun early, that year. Although April was only just at hand, the river was full of floating ice cakes and swollen with the flow of the melting snows. Then came the full moon and, with it, the high tide of the month, with the result that Gertrude, going down to cross the ferry, found the water already splashing up on the pier and washing out across the roadway. She was in no especial haste, and by the time she had made leisurely progress across the street, walking on her heels through the deepening pools, the boat had gone. Accordingly, she abandoned herself to awaiting the next boat and, with that end in view, she sought out the dryest spot on the pier, and solaced herself by watching the swirling ice cakes on the back of the incoming tide. The increasing smallness of the island of floor on which she stood at length aroused her to the fact that the river was rising by inches, and she took refuge in the higher offices beside the waiting-room to bide her time until the boat's appearing.

Instead of the boat, however, it was Alstrom who appeared, the water running from his feet and ankles. At the unexpected sight of Gertrude, his face lighted, and he crossed to her as fast as his sodden shoes would carry him.

"You here, Miss Hardwicke?" he exclaimed. "What luck for me! There's no telling how long we'll have to wait, and I was just facing the prospect of boredom unutterable till it would be safe to send out a dove."

She laughed at his rueful glance backward at the pools which marked his progress across the floor.

"Noah should come in out of the flood a little more promptly," she suggested gayly.

"He tried to; but the flood was too sudden for him." Alstrom shook himself like a dog. "I'd no notion of it; the news isn't over in Peter Street yet. It's a flood, all right, though. Finlay Market is a lake, and Champlain is asoak, too. There's a good foot of water, outside, and nobody knows when they can land a boat; not till the tide drops, anyway, and that won't be for a full hour yet. Let's hope the Ark won't float away."

Gertrude shook her head.

"I think it would be a good thing to have it float across the river. Do you realize that my poor friend is Arked in, on the other side?"

"Your friend?"

"Yes, the one I am crossing — or ought to be crossing — to meet. Surely I told you about her?"

He turned from the window where he had been watching the tossing, grinding ice cakes, and, as he turned, he shook his head, with a little smile.

"No; you never told me."

"Odd. I thought I did. My old school chum, Edith Harcourt, is coming up, to-day, to spend a week or so with us. She ought to have been here at noon; but the train was late, as usual, and she wired me she'd

not get in till after five. I suppose she is just across the river now, wondering why I don't appear. You ought to welcome her, Mr. Alstrom. She is a true New Yorker, and we don't often find them here in winter."

As she reached the end of her phrase, she glanced up at Alstrom, standing at her side. His eyes were once more fixed upon the river, and the light of an angry sunset, striking across his face, seemed taking from it every particle of colour and leaving it ashy gray. The room about them was growing dim, and, as he stood with all the light focussed upon himself alone, it appeared to Gertrude Hardwicke, watching, that Thorne Alstrom was wearing a face she did not know, a face of mortal fear. There was a little pause before he answered, with a flat convention rare in him, —

"She should bring her own welcome with her, then. But I am sure you never told me about her, Miss Hardwicke. The name is not common; it must have clung to my memory."

"Neither is she common," Gertrude assured him quickly. "You'll realize that, when you see her; she is a grand type of girl, large and good and handsome. I had counted so much on having her here before Lent; but it would have made no difference now, for Edith isn't going out. She is in mourning for her aunt, Mrs. Jack Penhale. I beg your pardon?"

Alstrom let himself slowly down upon the seat beside her. His face was ashy now, his lips blue and drawn, but shaping themselves into a bleak little smile, as if to reassure her.

"It is nothing," he said, with a steadiness which she knew was forced. "I hurried more than I ought,

I suppose, and I grew a little dizzy. I do that, now and then." He took off his otter cap and wiped his face. "You were saying — ?"

"That I am very anxious about you," she answered quickly. "What can I get you, Mr. Alstrom? I am afraid you are really ill."

He put up his hand again, as if to settle his cap; but Gertrude felt that it was to shield himself from her steady gaze.

"No," he reassured her. "It will go off. It always does; really, it is nothing serious. Please don't think about it. And your friend, then, is not going out at all?"

"Not now." The girl saw that he was anxious to bring the talk back into its normal channels. The colour was slowly flowing back into his cheeks and, although still alarmed by his sudden collapse, she yielded to his manifest desire. "It was a terrible blow to Edith, her aunt's death. They were very intimate; in fact, Edith had spent two or three years in their family."

"When — did she die?"

This time, something in Alstrom's tone caught Gertrude's quick ear. Was it again that little gasp of failing breath; or was it —

"You knew her?" she asked abruptly.

"Every one in New York knew about her; most of us knew her well by sight," he answered. "She was a beautiful woman."

Gertrude nodded thoughtfully.

"And Edith is like her, they say. I never remember seeing her. She died, just before Christmas. It was sudden, and there was no real disease. They say she

never had been well since the trouble with young Jack."

Alstrom glanced up sharply.

"What was that?" he asked.

"I never knew, and I hated to ask Edith. There was something wrong, and they spirited him away somewhere, to Europe, I suppose. I never even heard whether he came home at the time of his mother's death."

Alstrom rose to his feet, white still and moving weakly, as if his attack were not yet wholly in the past.

"Miss Harcourt can tell you all that now," he said; "and I shall be interested, too, to hear about it. Poor Mrs. Penhale! To my mind, she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, the sweetest and the noblest." His voice died away into a sadness which was almost reverential. Then he roused himself again. "Miss Hardwicke, here comes your boat. It is so late, there is no use in my trying to find my man. If you can get on alone, I think I won't go over. I still feel a bit shaky, and I believe I'd best go home."

That night at dinner, Gertrude Hardwicke turned from her guest to speak to the maid at her elbow.

"Where is Mr. Alstrom?" she inquired.

And the maid answered glibly, —

"He's just been called to Montreal on business, Miss Hardwicke. He left a good-bye to you, and said he was sorry not to see your friend, to-night, but he hoped to be back before she went away."

However, he was not.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A SEA of faces, rising wave on wave, and each wave pointing towards one fixed point. Behind the sea, the Saint Charles valley, blue in the distance, nearer at hand all tawny red and yellow in its dress of autumn colouring; behind the point, the walls of the little Lorette schoolhouse whose every window was packed with human heads. Above the schoolhouse, the great Union Jack flapped and fluttered as the breeze stiffened and died away; and over all arched the golden, cloudless sky of early October, across which slowly marched the golden sun. The sun was shining his best, that day, as if to do honour to the crowd which thronged the little Indian village. All day long since early morning, the crowd had been arriving, on foot and dusty, or in the comparative luxury of the two-wheeled carts which would be late for market, the next morning, by reason of this other use which had forbidden their being packed, the day before.

These came first, these and the passengers on foot, arriving in time to eat their picnic luncheon before going on to the little enclosure in front of the school. Later came the people by train from Quebec, people more smartly dressed and having in their bearing the nameless air of superiority which distinguishes the native of Saint Roch's from the countryman of the

villages among the hills. These also and with haste sought that same enclosure. Last of all came the carriage people and a motor car or two, driven out from town for the afternoon. Filled for the most part with gayly-dressed women, showing here and there a livery, they worked their way craftily through the outskirts of the crowd that made place before them and came to a stand at its very heart and close in front of the little platform which was the point to which the entire assembly was now turning. For little Jeune Lorette rarely had seen such a gathering as was grouped together on that one small platform before the open schoolhouse door. Ministers from Quebec and members from Ontario and even a senator or two from Ottawa were sitting there in close view of the crowd, grouped about one central figure, tall and slim and bearing in his smooth-shaven face a dignity which was by no means all reaped from his years alone. And one and all, ministers and country habitants alike, were gathered there to help bring to pass the coming election of Tony Mansfield.

Tony himself, jolly and debonair as ever and disdaining the personal support of his chairman, had driven out with his mother in their own old-fashioned carriage, albeit the fat old horses, though winded now by their long expedition, had been forced to start a good hour earlier than would have been needful for the hired victoria which had been put at Tony's service. Now they stood puffing, not twenty feet from the edge of the platform, while the aged footman on the box sought to repress his grins of triumph over all this festival in Master Tony's honour, and Mrs. Mansfield, sitting alone inside, was trying equally hard to repress her

own great nervousness beneath her wonted quiet little smile. Of Tony's ultimate triumph, Mrs. Mansfield felt no doubts; but, for the intervening steps, she acknowledged her own grave misgivings. It seemed to her a bit incredible that all ranks were meeting there, all ranks from the habitant in his market cart to that impressive central figure on the platform, just to proclaim the prowess of her son, her Tony, whom she had cuddled on her knee.

And then, if something should go wrong? For Mrs. Mansfield's nerves had lost somewhat of their poise, since that afternoon of last March. Her trust in Tony was unshaken; but she had learned that, for success, trust in a man is not enough, one must also trust his enemies. And Tony's enemies, that day and since, had shown themselves anything but trustworthy.

Close in the lee of Mrs. Mansfield's grizzled footman, another carriage was drawn up, as if to extend the line of Tony's personal bodyguard. This second carriage held Alstrom, Mrs. Hardwicke and, of course, Gertrude. No power on earth could have kept Gertrude from Lorette, that day; yet it was an open question whether any other of that great assembly, whether even Mrs. Mansfield was at heart so nervous as this well-groomed, smiling girl who sat and nodded this way and that to her different friends. To Madame Allard, still swathed in heavy crape, who sat in the next carriage but three. Beside her sat Pierre, erect and alert as ever, though bearing in his blue eyes a curiously haunted look as of one who has come face to face with horror in its most pitiless shape. To Henri Allard who paused, his elbow on the carriage door, to talk for a moment with his mother, leaving Pierre free to slip away and exchange

a word or two with herself and Alstrom. To Byng and Louisa who had left their motor car and were sauntering to and fro in the crowd, exchanging greetings with the high and low, in fulfilment of the British instinct which considers electioneering of that sort as half the game.

Gertrude's face was unruffled, her manner full of nonchalant unconcern, her greetings as carelessly gay as ever, though a shade more cordial. Nevertheless, when she allowed her smile to die away now and then, her teeth shut themselves tight together, while her eyes scanned the faces of the crowd who stood there, huddled together, waiting impatiently for the speaking to begin. And Tony's fate was dangling from the hands of such as these. The men upon the platform, men of his own social and mental rank, could only set forth his fitness for the place; the decision rested in these other brains. And what could these low-browed, gaudily-dressed habitants know, which should help them to judge a man like Tony Mansfield? Even now, the restless swaying of the crowd assured her that they would be no docile sheep to follow a stranger shepherd. After their own fashion, they would think for themselves, arrive at their own decision. And their decision would scarcely lead them to a man so unlike themselves as Tony. The very jargon of their daily lives would be unfamiliar to each other. How could the pettiness of their horizon attach itself to Tony's broadening aims? Then as Tony, bearing on his tall, slim figure the nameless imprint of the British gentleman, stepped out upon the platform, Gertrude fell back in her seat, content. It did not need the clamours of the crowd to reassure her, for, whatsoever Tony's

figure might betray, his honest face told its own story of humour and integrity and of human liking for his fellow men.

Long since and by circumstances quite unusual to the life of any woman, Gertrude had had ample chance to find out how dear to Tony's heart was the successful issue of that day, the climax of his whole campaign, the keynote to his election, now only one week distant. She had spent the entire summer in the Mansfield home, in the daily company of the man whom, fifteen months before, she had confessed she could not love. Not only that: but the summer had passed and ended without a twinge of pain to either one of them. Once denied the possession of the moon, Tony Mansfield was not the man to spend his days in whimpering to own its full, round circle. Instead of that, he was large enough to accept the inevitable, to share the moon's light with other men and, sharing, to take all that belonged to him and enjoy it to the utmost. Losing Gertrude for a wife, he saw no need to lose her also for a friend. Rather than that, he had the superlative degree of good sense to recognize the fact that a single word of misplaced sentiment, a single footstep across the line dividing friendship from love, could take her once and for all away from his life. Lacking the best, he chose the good and made the best of it after his own fashion. Had Gertrude been one iota less sane and simple, less downright in her attitude to all men, Tony included, this end could never have been accomplished. From the hour of their parting at the gallery door of the Chamber, she never once had tried to shirk the situation, nor to avoid Tony's comradeship. For the first day and the second, it was hard for them both

to keep up the careless pretence that their fateful talk had been forgotten. Hand in hand, however, they buried their past and let it lie, untouched, until its memory had lost all power to cause even a passing sting.

Gertrude's summer in the Mansfields' Island cottage had been quite unexpected to them all. Mrs. Mansfield had found her previous summer there, her first summer since Louisa's marriage, a lonely time, and one apparently unending. Tony had been devotion itself; but, in certain seasons of domestic crisis, the heart of woman cries out for woman. Tony, however devoted in his affection, could not entirely fill the need, when the shower came in and soaked the new drawing-room curtains, nor when the cook forgot the wild raspberry jam and allowed it to burn into an evil-smelling cinder, nor when the housemaid overturned the ink all over Tony's bedroom floor and, in her flurry, absorbed the widening pool with Tony's new pajamas. In town, Louisa was in the next block and could be summoned, at an instant's notice, to discuss the crisis and serve as outlet for the woe. Down at the Island, it was different, for Byng had carried Louisa off to Cacouna, and mere neighbbours were bound to view catastrophes in more impersonal lights. Mrs. Mansfield was filled with dread, as she contemplated the prospect of her second lonely summer.

And then, as often chances, Providence intervened, and solved the problem, and dismissed the dread. A chronically moribund sister in the States had, for the fifth time, summoned Mrs. Hardwicke to her dying bedside, had sent her away again, still able to wear her favourite dark blue costumes. Mrs. Hardwicke's hasty departure had coincided so closely with Mrs. Mansfield's own

move to the Island as to seem an act of special providence. An invitation to Gertrude had been sent off, the very night Tony had brought the news of her being deserted at the *pension*, had been accepted, next morning, in all gratitude. Between the two evils of the boarding-house in summer and a repetition of the four preceding journeys, Gertrude had not found it hard to choose. Still easier was it for her to decide to shirk the lesser evil in favour of a week or two in the society of the gentle lady she had learned to love so well, both for her own sake and as Tony's mother. She had promptly packed a suitcase with a few essentials and betaken herself to the Island boat for at least a taste of holiday. A week later, she went back to town and packed her trunk to be sent down after her. Mrs. Hardwicke had thriftily resolved to make good her railway fare to the States by utilizing the journey to accomplish a long-deferred round of visits among her kith and kin. And her grandmother had had eleven children, and Mrs. Hardwicke counted cousins. As result, early October found Gertrude journeying back to town in company with her three-months hostess.

And the three months had been equally happy for each one of the trio. As a rule, it was a trio. Now and then, though, it broke into this or that duet; and when, Gertrude absent or busy writing letters, the duet consisted of Mrs. Mansfield and her son, its theme was unvarying. Nor, in comparing notes, as they so often did, could they discover into which of the two other duets the girl flung herself with greater zest: the one that talked of humdrum, practical things like table cloths, and the proper way of dusting cut glass, and of making missionary nightgowns; or that other one which

phrased itself in terms political. Not that Tony's political future was discussed only in duet. Night after night, they three sat on the veranda, watching the crescent moon slide down behind the Citadel, and talking, talking of this one subject which never seemed to grow trite or dull. Now Mrs. Mansfield shuddered at the past, berated those of his foes who had dared speak out against him. Then Gertrude took up the theme, sounding the praises of the man who was willing to give at least a tithe of his attention to the concerns of his colony and empire. That usually aroused Tony in his turn, and he launched out into his ideals and the way to fit them into his opportunities. Then, together, inevitable finale of all their talks, they tried to forecast the future, that autumn election and what would come after. And now that autumn election was at hand.

Gertrude, sitting there in the carriage beside her mother and Alstrom, felt in a sense a world-width away from them. Liking Tony as they did, they yet were mere spectators, looking on. Gertrude, on the other hand, was viewing it with Tony's eyes. Not in vain had she spent the past three months in the same house with him, discussing every detail of the campaign with him, listening to his own creed, now beaten out upon the anvil of experience, beaten by the hammer of opposition, interpreting his reservations no less surely than his spoken words. She had slowly come to the full realization of all it had meant to the man, this career upon which he had so lightly embarked. Bravely and with a laugh upon his lips, Tony would accept a possible defeat; but the hurt of such defeat would be keen and lasting. Victorious, he would simply feel he

was proving his right to make good. Unspoiled in either event, he would still push on along the way he had chosen.

Her eyes fixed absently upon the platform before her, upon the faces at her either hand, memories of the past three months were drifting to and fro through the girl's idle mind. The speaking had long since begun. A senator had followed a member, to be in turn followed by a minister of local fame; already it seemed to Gertrude that she had learned to predict in advance just how each and every sentence was bound to end. Abandoning her effort to concentrate her attention upon the dreary periods, she stared alternately at Tony whose eyes alone broke the passiveness of his fixed listening, and at the crowd who either yawned in boredom or wakened into sudden fire. And, at her side, while she watched Tony, Alstrom watched her, gloomily revolting at her absorption in another man, an absorption which he was able to attribute only to one certain cause. For that last summer, spent on a vacation hunting tour among the northwestern lakes, had taught Alstrom many things. For one lesson, he had learned that one sorrow does not mar a lifetime; for another, that comradeship is by no means always death to love, at least, upon one side. Certain phases of his happiness seemed to him to have stopped entirely with his farewells to Gertrude Hardwicke. True, with her tacit consent, they had resumed their desultory correspondence of the year before; but now, for some unexplained reason, he found her letters increasingly inexpressive. Returning only a week before, he had discovered her so absorbed in Tony's concerns as to give him adequate explanation of this apparent change. And Alstrom,

in spite of all his old love for Tony, was not willing to yield to him first place in Gertrude Hardwicke's thoughts. Impatiently, just now, he was wishing he could distract her gaze and mind from that face upon the platform. Last May, even, when his own wishes had been far less certain, he had regarded their fulfilment as far more assured.

And Tony was no mean rival. He had all of Alstrom's own advantages: money, education, gentle birth; he had others, too, which Alstrom, even to himself, chose not to name, but which, he felt assured, would count preeminent with a girl like Gertrude Hardwicke. Moodily, gloomily, he sat and pondered, his eyes still fixed on Gertrude's unconscious face.

A little stir aroused him. The crowd, bored by a succession of oratorical flights which had soared far above their heads, was growing restive. Here and there, uneasiness showed itself; a little scuffle was causing a diversion at the far corner of the enclosure. Nearer at hand, a carriage was turning about, preparatory to starting homeward. On the platform, there was a slight answering stir, a hasty consultation with the chairman, a withdrawing of one or two ponderous and influential politicians to make room for a slim figure with a fiery young French face. With one bow to the slender figure in their midst, with another bow to the faces at his feet, directly and scorning introduction, Henri Allard began to speak.

From his first phrase, he held the crowd, expectant, cheering assent to each crisp, trenchant word. He knew his audience; they were his people, of his own race and kind. He swayed them at his will to tears and laughter, thrilled them and cajoled them by turns;

but, with each separate phrase, brought them steadily nearer to the point he had in view, that point the shifting of their allegiance to this stranger from out another creed and race, who was to accept their interests as his sacred trust. And the crowd listened and cheered, heedless of the way along which he was leading them, heedless, too, of the smiling faces of the carriage people who were exulting in each word of Henri, not only for its exceeding cleverness, but for the sake of what it could not fail to do for Tony Mansfield's cause.

Suddenly Henri stepped backward, as if to make way for the man seated in the rear.

"And now," he cried, and, as he spoke, his thin, ascetic French face was all on fire with his emotion; "I call on you, my brothers, to rally to the support of this man whom I am introducing to you. You can have no better man. His country is yours, his aims are yours; and, what is more than all as a promise for the future, I, standing here, assure you that his past is wholly open, wholly honest, wholly clean." And, with another bow, kindly and curt, he vanished inside the building, just as Tony rose to speak.

But Tony did not speak. Instead, he stood there, bowing and dumb before the storm of cheers that met him, cheers which came from every throat. And, over the cheers, there arose, clear and distinct, one strident call in broken French and English, —

"*Vivat! Vivat! Hourra pour le* man with *l'* open past!"

Above the heads of the crowd, Tony's glance moved towards the direction whence the hail had come, rested

for an instant upon the speaker, then moved onward in search of Gertrude Hardwicke. She was ready to meet it, ready to send back to him the nod and smile which, she felt, could be made to tell him much. But, on its way to her, Tony's honest glance wavered, his smile grew troubled. Moving to meet Gertrude Hardwicke's friendly smile, his glance had fallen upon Alstrom, and Alstrom, as that strident hurrah clamoured forth again and yet again, had dropped back in his seat with an odd little smile fixed upon his lips, and eyes that stared across at Tony with a look of sheer affright.

Even Tony, however, troubled and perplexed as he could not fail to be, and gifted with the keen intuitions of his class, could gain no possible inkling of what must be passing in Alstrom's mind, sitting there with Gertrude Hardwicke and realizing to the full the bitter, bitter contrast between the two men who, he knew instinctively, were standing nearest to her woman's heart and life.

But Tony had rallied and had begun to speak. He spoke, as was his wont, briefly and well; but the good half of his speech was quite unheard by reason of the cheers which tore the air and only died away to rise again, longer, more inarticulate and more loud, a tremendous blare of human voices rising in one cry for the victory they were bound to urge on at any cost. Smiling and boyish, Tony took his ovation as a casual sort of detail, even to the quick patter of platform applause which led the final gusty storm of enthusiasm that greeted the ending of his speech. Then at length, the colour rushed across his cheeks, and his eyes, still seeking Gertrude's, grew a bit dim, as once more

the strident voice took up its former cry, now echoed from a thousand throats, —

" *Hourra pour le honnête* man with *l'* open past ! "

Tony Mansfield's hour of success had come. Well-earned, he found it also sweet.

CHAPTER TWENTY - FIVE

THE next day was Saturday. Accordingly, when Alstrom closed his desk at noon, the snap of the lock came with a finality which betrayed the fact that the closing would hold over until Monday morning. He pocketed the key, took his hat and started towards home and luncheon. Then, at the corner of Des Soeurs Street, he halted, turned and came out upon the pier. The river before him was tossing like a choppy sea, for the breeze of the day before had stiffened to a miniature gale and, under its sweep, the waves, gold-capped in the noon sun, were running high. Around him, the little pier was fringed with the dangling legs of a close row of fishermen, each intent alternately upon his taut line and his shabby little grape-basket, fast filling with silver-bellied smelts. Now and then the fishing was interrupted, as a ferry boat came splashing in to shore; but it was speedily resumed and went on in an almost solemn silence.

Alstrom glanced at the other piers on either hand, then at the cliffs above his head where the old black guns poked out their patient noses over the great gray wall, then farther up at the square of scarlet, fluttering above the round gray bastion of the Citadel, then out again at the tossing, chopping tide. And there, between the majesty of Empire and the still greater majesty of

nature, unconscious of either one, there sat the long line of men and boys, filling their shabby baskets up with little smelts. After all, that was the way of the world. Next morning's breakfast was far more important than the fluttering flag of Empire, than such minor details as Tony Mansfield's coming victory over his quondam foes. It was with a rush that Alstrom's mind shifted around to Tony. He found himself wondering how Tony's rival, Arsenault, whose record was somewhat sooty, had welcomed the battle cry invented by Tony's enthusiastic adherents. It must be a bit disconcerting to have the other fellow, the fellow who is running against you, singled out for such a phrase as that and one implying such comparison. Then his brow clouded, and his gray eyes, of a sudden, looked heavy, tired. With a second rush, his mind switched around to himself. Yes, it was disconcerting. None knew it better than himself.

And as for Gertrude Hardwicke — He lifted his eyes to the window in the wall of the building beside the Levis ferry. It was there they had stood together, months before, looking out upon the ice-spotted waves and talking, he remembered now with an almost maddening distinctness, of Mrs. Jack Penhale and of the younger Jack. What perverse influence guides conversations such as that, he wondered gloomily. With high anticipations, with things long unuttered on his lips, he had crossed the floor to Gertrude's side. Instead, they had talked of this woman whom Gertrude had never seen, and his long-repressed words were still unuttered. This other theme, coming in so unexpectedly, had delayed them for a time; or would it be, he asked himself, for ever. Impatiently he turned his

back upon the tossing river, and faced about towards home.

He found Gertrude already seated at luncheon, when he entered the dining-room. She wore her hat, and her mother's face was clothed with a mask of solicitude.

"And when you are so tired, after all that excitement of yesterday, and when there is every chance of rain!" Mrs. Hardwicke made lamentation. "To be sure, I can't see how you could find yesterday so exciting, after all. I thought it very dull; didn't you, Mr. Alstrom? But, really, I do regard it as very inconsiderate of Mrs. Mansfield to ask you, especially after all you have done for her, all summer long."

Gertrude made no effort to dispute the second half of the arraignment. Instead, —

"She didn't ask; I offered," she corrected her mother quietly.

"It doesn't make any difference what you call it. She knew you would, you see. And I always worry about those Island boats; I am such a poor sailor, and they do roll so in a storm."

His many months' experience of Mrs. Hardwicke made Alstrom judge it wise to interpose a question in the hope of leading her off along another trail.

"Are you going to the Island, this afternoon, Miss Hardwicke?"

"Yes. Mrs. Mansfield has lost a little brooch; she thinks it may be in the cottage, and I offered to go to look."

"Isn't that so like Gertrude?" Mrs. Hardwicke said, a little too explosively for Alstrom's taste.

It was Gertrude who answered, and with the level

patience she invariably accorded to her mother's outbursts.

"Just like anybody, I hope. Louisa is 'at home,' to-day, and Tony had to go to Montreal. It is certainly easier for me to go to the Island than for Mrs. Mansfield."

"You'll have a glorious crossing," Alstrom assured her. "The river is superb."

With fine unconsciousness, the girl ignored the unspoken wish in his gray eyes. Not so Mrs. Hardwicke, however. She put down her fork, as preparation for her descent on Alstrom.

"Oh, Mr. Alstrom," she demanded alertly; "why can't you go with her? I know the air would do you good. Only yesterday, I was thinking how tired you looked, as if you needed a real outing. Do go and play with Gertrude, this afternoon. I know it will be the very thing you need."

This time, Gertrude frowned, heedless of the filial restraint to which she had schooled herself.

"Perhaps Mr. Alstrom may have some other plans, mamma," she interposed, and her tone, albeit very gentle, was full of chiding.

Alstrom hastened to reassure her. He had no other plans of any sort. The river, all rough and wind-tossed, had tempted him, only that very noon; and it was months since he had been down to the Island. If he only might —

Mrs. Hardwicke took it on herself to impress it upon him that he might. The change would be good for him, and she would feel so much less anxious about Gertrude who was always reckless on the river. If they hurried a very little, they could just catch the

two o'clock boat. That would leave them plenty of time, after they had found the missing brooch, to take a good, long walk and then get home in season for dinner. And, leaning out of her casement, ten minutes later, she waved her knitting after them in token of farewell. Her mood, in doing so, was much the same as that in which, nearly twenty years before, she had watched her daughter starting off for a kindergarten picnic, hand in hand with the small boy next door. There was no ulterior thought in either case.

They found the boat rocking and straining at her moorings, lurching heavily as the empty market carts came aboard, then steadying again as the horses plodded into line on the lower deck and fell into the well-earned slumber which, at noonday, awaits the early-riser. Save for their drivers and a gray-gowned nurse or two with her fluffy little charges, passengers were few, and Alstrom and Gertrude had the stern quite to themselves when, with a premonitory puff of steam and a kick or two from her engines, the little boat turned about and headed down the stream. Behind her rose the city, tier on tier and capped at the summit of each tier with Laval, Parliament Buildings and Citadel, emblems of Church and State and Empire. And, far up the tossing river, backed by a low violet cloud, the mighty arch of the half-completed bridge spanned the valley like a bow of promise.

Beside them, the Levis bank rose sharply, its side scarred with the long slanting, stripe of tramway from which Alstrom always turned his sombre eyes. A little farther down the shore, midway between the shabby piers above and the great stone graving dock below, the sun shone warmly across the point of rock

which juts far out to the southern channel, as if to bear to coming vessels its message from out another world. For on that rocky point, some pious hand has raised a little shrine whose cross offers one of the first greetings held out to those who seek Quebec by sea.

"I always like to look at that," Gertrude said impulsively. "I've no idea where it came from, nor when, nor who put it there. It's just there; that's all, and there always seems to me a certain fitness in it."

Alstrom nodded gravely.

"And yet, you are no Catholic," he demurred.

"What of it? The cross isn't yours alone. We have it in our churches," she retorted swiftly.

"But not with the same meaning," he demurred again.

She shook her head.

"Don't be too sure. The language may be different; it may even be spelled with different letters; but the meaning, after all, is just the same."

"Yes," he made slow assent. And then, after a little pause, he added, "I am very fond of my adopted church, Miss Hardwicke."

If he had expected her to shrink from the announcement, he was mistaken. Not in vain had Gertrude Hardwicke lived for three years face to face with one of the purest forms of Catholicism the world has known. Puritan to her own heart's core, she yet was ready now to acknowledge that, for other hearts, the older creed not only could suffice, but even be the one inevitable form of faith, satisfying, uplifting.

"Of course," she assented. "Why not? Why need you say so?"

He reddened at her downright question. Why

indeed had he said so? Certain things one takes for granted and leaves out of conversation. Then, as his reason came back again, he spoke out, as if to justify his words.

"Because," he said frankly; "when a man is born and bred a Protestant, and then changes, I feel as if all his friends would be watching him, waiting to see how long before he would return to his ancestral faith. I shall never do that, Miss Hardwicke."

Reflectively she turned her eyes from the cross beside them to his face; reflectively she spoke.

"No," she said. "I should despise you, if you did." And then, too late, she blushed at her own too frank speech.

In his surprise, not at her tone, but at her words, Alstrom's answer came almost involuntarily.

"But why?" he asked.

Gertrude hesitated.

"Really, Mr. Alstrom, I was too outspoken. I have no right to pass judgment on such a case as that."

"But you have already told your position," he made quiet answer. "Please tell me why you took it."

"Because I can see no other way. You were born into one creed, brought up into it." She answered steadily now and without evasion. "The other is the choice of your grown-up mind. You would not have changed without a reason. That reason, to be good, ought to be lasting."

"But you think your own creed is the only one?" he asked her abruptly.

"For me, yes. Not for all the world. If I didn't think so, I should change; but such a change should be once for all. I don't like the notion of the churches'

playing battledore and shuttlecock with a man's soul." She sought to end the subject with a laugh.

Alstrom read her wish and heeded it. It was not until Saint Joseph landing was behind them, and the boat, lightened of half a dozen market carts, was headed towards the Island that he recurred again to his former theme. A word from Gertrude made an opening for it, and he entered with a rush.

"Miss Hardwicke, I know it is bad manners for a man to talk about himself, and a good deal worse manners, especially in this country, for him to talk about religion. And yet, if you don't mind, I'd like to tell you where I stand. I really don't know why," he added, with a little laugh to mask his consciousness of his own deception, for he was fully aware why.

And Gertrude, in her secret heart, shared his knowledge, for instinct goes on when thought is checked with the very utmost care.

"I'd like to hear," she said, with quiet dignity. "Of course, I think I know; and yet there are things that an outsider can never really know."

"Not really," he assented. "Even now, there are things I scarcely know, myself. Among them, how much of it was Denise; how much the Church itself? If I had never known Denise, Miss Hardwicke, I should have lived and died a Protestant, of course; a Protestant, that is, as much as anything. Her influence was bound to be strong; it started me along the way, but that was really all. There is a certain conscience that enters into such matters; and I can truly say I went into the Catholic Church, in the end, because it seemed the only place for me. If Denise had died, three months before, I should have gone into it just the same. It

isn't simply creed that counts; it's the life of the Church, the life it demands of its people. Its demands on us are fearful; but there's a stimulus in it, all the time, that helps us to live up to them, to make our manhood stand or fall according to its teaching."

"Yes," the girl assented slowly; "it is bound to be, when you believe — "

He interrupted her.

"But it isn't simply a question of belief. No man can argue the whole of himself into any creed; and there are other elements which enter, too. The brain can never make my whole religion. That alone might, in time, send me back into the church I left behind. But I never feel myself so much a man, so stirred by something that makes me want to be good as when I am inside my church, kneeling in front of the altar which stands to me for so much. You can't understand it, I know. Neither can you understand that, if for nothing else, I should cling to it because it was out of its teaching that Denise was born, and François, too. It is bound to be an incentive to share even the outward forms of worship with such a man as he was; and I owe too much to the influence he brought me from it, ever to be willing to cast it to one side."

As if forgetful of Gertrude sitting there beside him, his voice had trailed off through one slow period after another into a thoughtful silence, and Gertrude liked it better so, since it called for no reply. Agree with the man she could not; yet she honoured him entirely, accepted his viewpoint as the final one for him. Nevertheless, she would have found it wellnigh impossible to put this distinction into words. Suddenly, as the boat, unnoticed by her, came into calmer water and

slid up to the Island pier, Alstrom rose to his feet, straightened his shoulders and stood looking down upon her with his curiously winning, boyish smile.

"Life is a hard knot to untangle, Miss Hardwicke," he said more lightly; "and the worst of it is, we have to untangle it; it's not allowable to cut. However, if I do win out and conquer my own knot, I shall be vastly more the man for what I've seen of life inside my church. And, after all, squabble about our creeds as we will, it's that that counts in the final end. Come, shall we go ashore?"

To the end of her life, Gertrude never forgot the afternoon which followed. In all her after memory, it stood out, brilliant and gay as the sunshine which came glittering down to her from above the low, dark cloud-hank in the west, emblem of a coming storm which as yet was quite invisible.

Alstrom apparently had left his gravity behind him, when he left the boat. Never had he been more gay, never more full of his old haunting, boyish charm than when they went strolling up the shady road together; nor while they searched the Mansfield cottage for the missing brooch which finally turned up under the kitchen table; nor while, their search at an end and the house locked up once more, they wandered off across the fields and sat down to rest under a huge scarlet maple tree whence, in the intervals of their light talk, they could stare alternately at the city, now lying purple underneath the rising cloud, and at the reddish gash cut by the Montmorency in the opposite shore.

And their talk, light as it was, yet skimmed all sorts of subjects. Now they agreed, now wrangled gayly in their argument; yet every spoken sentence seemed to

bring them only into better understanding, each of the other's point of view. Now and then such hours are bound to come, hours when natures rush together with the momentum stored up during long, unnoticed days of normal intercourse. To Alstrom, save in one respect, that afternoon had brought no change in his intentions. Downright, uncompromising and the soul of honour as Gertrude had always shown herself, he felt convinced at length that, meeting her at all, he could only hope to do so by means of her own straightforward methods. For weeks and months, that belief had been growing on him. That October afternoon, although scarcely needed to complete his knowledge of the girl, had yet served to complete his half-formed resolution.

But Gertrude, as she rose to her feet and started towards the pier once more, was ready to confess to herself that, at length and in spite of all her care, her life, that afternoon, had been swept from all its former moorings. Henceforward, for a time, she was bound to drift on with the current, and no longer did she have any doubt whither, soon or late, that current would be bound to sweep her. Yet, over her head, the band of the storm-cloud was rising fast.

It came upon them sharply, as they reached the boat which was tugging hard at her moorings against a gale that rushed down the river towards them, clipping off the wave-tops, as it came, to drive them on in finest spray. The city was invisible by now, lost in the heart of the squall, and the water stretched away before them, a dun-gray path, sullen and swollen, leading into the storm. Thorne Alstrom, looking up the angry path before them, likened it to the chances for his own

future, over which the storm clouds lay, threatening and now close at hand. And without the threatening cloud, both river and future would have been so fair, so glittering with hope.

But the storm was coming nearer. Under the impact of its approach, the boat was grinding and tossing against the pier where, for the moment, lay her only chance of safety. The air whistled with the wind which was driving before it little hillocks of water, their forward edge outlined straight as with a rule against the restless waves that tumbled up and down about the boat. Then, as if all things, man and nature, held their breath, there came an instant's calm, and then a lashing wind which cut the waves as with a knife and levelled them low to await the coming of the rain which followed close behind.

Instinctively, sheltered as they were within the boat, they bowed their heads to face the fury of the gale. Then, a moment later, Gertrude spoke.

"Look!" She pointed up the valley where, above the upper edge of the low-lying bank of storm, the summit of the city was creeping slowly into view. And then, while they stood there, watching, the clouds of the upper sky were torn apart, and one stripe of sunshine came filtering down, down, past the blood-red flag of Empire on the upper bastion, and rested full upon the ancient spire of the Basilica, turning it to a gleaming, silvery beacon above the bank of storm.

And Alstrom, following her glance, reading an omen into the sight she pointed out, took heart of grace for the future, now as near at hand and as pitilessly inevitable as had been the storm.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THREE days later, Gertrude and the Byngs were dining with the Mansfields. The dinner had been long and cosy, for the two things are by no means always incompatible. Then, for it was the night of the full moon and the terrace was temptingly near, the night temptingly warm, Mrs. Mansfield had ordered them all out for a stroll while she took the forty winks which should put her in trim for the game of cards that was to end the evening.

"By Jove!" Tony said, as they crossed the Governor's Garden and came out upon the terrace. "What a night! Shame the mater isn't here. Sure you're warm enough, Miss Hardwicke?"

Gertrude nodded out from the depths of the fur-lined wrap which she had thrown over her dinner gown. Tony's question was not wholly superfluous, however, for the west wind was sweeping crisply across the terrace, and one felt in the air the touch of coming November.

"Warm enough, and always glad of the fresh air and cold," she assured him. "I live in the winter, and merely exist and bide my time, the rest of the year."

Tony's bright face grew thoughtful.

"And I shall be out of it all, this year," he reminded her.

"But in something else," she rejoined.

"Else; but not half so good. I love the old place in winter, myself. I do hope, though, you'll miss me a bit, now and then."

"I shall," she answered frankly. "I have thought about it a good deal, thought about it and dreaded it, too. And yet, I am glad you are going. It is where you belong of rights. Yesterday's election seemed to me to have given the final proof of all I have been saying for years. We are very proud of you, Mr. Mansfield."

He smiled down at her, and his smile held only a brotherly affection, a brotherly pleasure in her words.

"I am glad," he said simply. "You ought to be proud, if anybody is; it is a good deal of it your work."

"I? I never did a bit of electioneering in my life," she disclaimed, more for the sake of hearing him correct her feigned misconception than anything else.

He did correct her.

"No; you did better than that," he reminded her. "You made me worth electioneering for. If it hadn't been for you — "

But she interrupted him.

"Does it ever strike you that there is a certain incongruity in it, that a daughter of the model republic should be the one to incite you to devote yourself to the cause of Empire?" she asked him gayly. "Please don't ever mention the fact to any of my compatriots."

"I'll blazon it abroad in my maiden speech," Tony assured her gravely. "Do let's stop a bit and look at

this stunning moon. And see those Montmoreney lights! They look, to-night, as if you could chuck a stone down on top of them."

Side by side, they halted and stood leaning on the rail. Above the Levis heights, dotted with countless lamps which winked and twinkled back at the countless stars above, the full red moon was swinging out along her path across the sky. In the river beneath, rippling, dimpled trails of flame led to the lights upon the other shore, and the moving ferries, like great black beetles crawling upon a polished mirror, crossed and crossed again beside the ocean liner which lay anchored in mid-stream. Now and then a faint cry came up from the streets at their feet, or a bugle call rang down from the Citadel above. Otherwise, the night about them was as still as if the city's four score thousands were a myriad miles away.

"Billy and I are going up the glacis," Louisa's voice said in their ears. "It is after nine o'clock, and [illegible] we'll go up for gun-fire."

[illegible] laughed.

"All right. You'd better hurry. We'll be after you in a minute." Then he turned back to Gertrude. "We may as well let them get on ahead," he advised her coolly. "I know Louisa and her married bliss, and I have learned that there are times and places when it is as well to leave her with her Byng. In an unguarded hour, he confided to me that he said the momentous word, up in the lee of the bastion, one night when they had gone up to hear the echoes. To-night, they will be echoing it all over again; we may as well wait and give them a little start. I love my Louisa, and Byng is to me as a dear and long-lost brother. Nevertheless,

when I take them in conjunction, I prefer it should be in a spot void of all associations."

"As far as Louisa is concerned, I can't often find such a spot," Gertrude answered as, with manifest reluctance, she turned away from the high iron rail and from the picture at her feet. "Louisa has a retentive memory, and her courtship was a long one, long and most remarkably peripatetic. I keep thinking I must have traversed its length and breadth; but, every few days, I find I am mistaken. However, Louisa is a darling, and never tells the same story twice; and I shall get through them all in time. And yet, you know, I rather like it. It's not too often one finds it so, in this bad old world of ours."

"I know," Tony assented, as, far in their wake, he led the way up the terrace and across the few feet of level grass at the foot of the green glacis. "It's funny; but it is refreshing, after all. I wonder — " he hesitated; then he blurted out abruptly; "I wonder if you ever realize how great a share of the credit of it belongs to Byng?"

Turning, Gertrude looked at him keenly. The light of the full moon, striking across his face, showed that his eyes were troubled, his lips determined. The sight was emphasized, verified by a certain tone in his honest voice which told her that his words were premeditated, charged with purposeful meaning.

"More than to Louisa?" she queried, with a carelessness designed to lure him on to greater explicitness, for Tony's earnest moods rarely assailed him without a cause.

"Yes, infinitely more," Tony answered gravely. "It is the common phrase, nowadays, to say that

marriage is a lottery; but the lottery is pretty much all on the one side. The man, as a rule, knows what he is getting. The average woman doesn't have buried secrets in her past, not the sort of woman you and I are likely to meet. But the man is always rather an insoluble problem; compound, rather. It isn't always safe to analyze him."

Gertrude spoke thoughtfully.

"Is it well to try?" she asked.

"Not as a rule. Sometimes. Generally, he ends by analyzing himself, if you give him time, and casting the elements at your feet. You observe, Miss Hardwicke, that I know my ilk." Tony laughed a bit uneasily.

Again she looked him in the face. Again she wondered. It was plain that Tony had things on his mind, things he could not bring himself to say out with his wonted clearness. Later on, she understood and, in the light of her understanding, went in search of Tony to thank him for his unerring loyalty. Now, however, she was in the dark regarding Tony's purpose, albeit certain that he had one, and that urgent.

"And you think Mr. Byng has done the deed, and that the elements are quite to Louisa's satisfaction?"

"Better than that, he had nothing to analyze," Tony answered, and, at the wholesome thought of his lifelong friend, the husband of his sister, there came back into his voice a trace of its old, hearty ring. "More than almost any man I know, Byng has lived his life in the sight of all men. It's not a great life; in a sense, it may be rather humdrum; but it has the one grand merit of having no weak spots to bury out of sight."

Again came the curious intonation in his voice. Again Gertrude wondered.

"Good reason that Louisa is so happy," she commented, as she paused for breath, half-way up the steep, grassy slope at whose summit two dark figures could be seen silhouetted sharply against the starry sky.

"More happy than you know," Tony rejoined quickly; "and more exceptional. Miss Hardwicke, I — I know men better than you do. I know what a fearful risk a girl is bound to run when she takes a man on trust. Nine times out of ten, it may come out all right; but, the tenth time, she strikes a record that ruins her life and throws a black trail over all the generations that — " Tony pulled himself up short and gave a shamefaced little laugh. "You'll think I'm daft, Miss Hardwicke," he said, with an utter change of tone. "It is a queer sort of subject to be haranguing about, in the face of such a night as this. I really haven't gone off my head, I assure you. And yet, there's a certain amount of sense in my central doctrine."

"What is that?" she asked, as lightly as she could, for not even Tony's abrupt change of accent could disabuse her mind of its belief that more underlay his words than as yet she was able to discern.

For an instant, Tony faced her, and his eyes met her eyes squarely. Then he answered, and his voice was incisive, full of meaning, —

"In a nutshell: take no man on trust, unless you know his forbears for at least three generations."

The next moment, he had cast away from him his gravity, as one casts aside a worn-out garment. He held out his hand to Gertrude, and spoke gayly, —

"Come along, Miss Hardwicke. Do you realize we have been dawdling horribly? It is ages since Louisa and Byng became merged into one common shadow, and I suspect it's nearly time for gun-fire. There's the bugle, now. Let's run."

Hand in hand, breathless and laughing like a pair of children, they went scrambling up the last of the steep slope, and halted at the bench where the Byngs were sitting in a state of beatific silence. They were but just in time, for, as Tony dropped Gertrude's hand from his warm, strong one, there came a spit and flash of fire from the muzzle just above their heads. The flash was followed by the crashing thud of gun-fire close at hand, a thud which sank to silence, only to be broken by a full score of answering detonations as if from some invisible battery placed along the Levis heights and reaching far down the river bank. Boom followed after boom, each one more distant, less distinct until, caught and thrown back by the circle of hills far away to the southward, the sound came rolling up again and yet again until it died away into a distance where the mountains, passing the sound along, were yet powerless to cast its echo back again to those still waiting on the slope of the green glacis beneath the gun whose voice had spoken the first message of the night now completely fallen. And to Tony Mansfield, lingering there with Gertrude Hardwicke by his side, it seemed that his vague and hard-forced words, spoken under the stress of a motive he could not yet explain, were bound to go on indefinitely, raising echo upon echo which should die away into a silence far beyond his ken. Their effect might be nothing, might also be immeasurable. However, in his heart,

he could not regret that he had given voice to them in Gertrude's hearing.

And, meanwhile, Alstrom and Pierre Allard were pacing to and fro upon the upper terrace, enjoying the moonlight, enjoying each other's comradeship, and totally unconscious of the quartette who were grouped below them.

Pierre had long since left Sainte Anne, and had entered upon his final studies in the Grand Seminary at Quebec. The change back to the city had been welcome, not only for Madame Allard and the boy himself, but for Alstrom as well. He had loved Pierre at sight. His later relationship to him had only increased the affection by bringing them into still closer contact. The year after Denise's death had added a new bond between them, the bond of bearing a common sorrow. Then had come the shock of François' tragic end, and, for long weeks afterward, Pierre had lain between life and death, lain in a sort of apathy from which no one could rouse him until, at length, Madame Allard had ordered Alstrom to be summoned, as a last resort. Alstrom had rushed in from camp, close on the heels of the messenger, and his coming brought with it a strange miracle of healing; for it was as if the tendrils of that fragile life, rudely torn from their lifelong hold upon the strength of François, had dangled, withering away, until such time as they could lay hold upon Thorne Alstrom.

All through those autumn weeks, Alstrom saw Pierre daily. Later, when Pierre, restored to a semblance of his old strength, took up his seminary studies, they met as often as possible, and parted again, each the better for the meeting. And as the weeks grew into months

and the months marked the passing of the completed year, both Alstrom and Pierre were ready to confess that François' death, following upon the influence of such a life as his, had been the final link which had drawn them into perfect contact. Each gave the other strength. Alstrom's was the rich physical vigour of his full-grown manhood; but Pierre's gift was wholly of the spirit.

That evening, as often happened, Pierre had gone to Alstrom's room; then, tempted by the full moon, they had gone for a walk far out the Grande Allée, over the Cove Fields, past the great targets of the rifle ranges and so to the upper terrace which hangs, a narrow ribbon of passage, along the river wall of the great gray Citadel. Below them, the Dufferin Terrace lay spread out, a huge expanse of boards dotted here and there with groups of figures, and below again, far, far below, the river, and, far down the valley as the eye could see, the clustering lights which mark Sainte Anne's holy shrine. Pierre pointed to it, with a little smile.

"Doesn't it seem very long ago?" he asked.

Alstrom nodded.

"The distance down there marks the whole limits of my life up here," he said. "Your first procession was also my own first one. Do you realize that?"

"How Denise did enjoy it!" the boy said thoughtfully. "She spent the night down there, for the sake of seeing me lead my first procession. My mother was not well enough to go; Henri was too busy. But Denise would go at any cost. She spent the night at the convent on the hill. I remember how she groaned, next day, about the beds. And then, you appeared."

"And then I stayed," Alstrom added. "But where was François?"

"He had been sent off on a mission, the month before. It broke my heart that he could not be there to see me, for I felt very grand. In fact, I think I regarded myself as being all there was of the procession, and the shrine besides. I wonder if I looked as conceited as I felt." And Pierre paused to laugh at the memory. Then suddenly he grew grave once more. "But really it was all the work of François. If it had not been for him, I should never have been there. He was so anxious I should enter the church."

"And now," Alstrom spoke as if to himself; "now you can carry on his work."

In the clear moonlight, he could see a spasm of pain cross the face beside him; but the boyish voice came steady in its answer, steady and full of reverence.

"I never shall be worthy for so much as that. François was not a common sort of man. He needs no one to take his place; his influence was too strong to die, even in his death."

The same reverent note vibrated in Alstrom's voice, as he made brief answer, —

"I know it, too, Pierre; none better."

For a long time, neither one of them spoke again, while, shoulder to shoulder, they paced the narrow ribbon of the upper terrace, turned at the end, paced back again and yet again. Pierre's thoughts, meanwhile, were all upon François; but Alstrom's wandered on from François' self to François' steady appeal to him for perfect restitution, then on again to the one person whom the fulfilment of that appeal was bound most to affect. If one's deeds were only isolated facts,

he rebelled even while he still admitted that, in time, the influence of François would be dominant, isolated facts, not mere links in an unbroken chain of circumstance which stretches from primæval man down to the race's end!

"Thorne," Pierre said abruptly, as he slid his hand within his companion's arm; "I wonder if you ever knew — I know I never told you — that the last word François ever spoke — "

Alstrom waited. It was not within his strength to interrupt that broken, boyish speech.

"That his last word," Pierre went on quite steadily at length; "was about you. It came back to me across the waves, after he had let go my hand. I thought you ought to know about it, even if it is hard to tell. Perhaps, some day, it may be a little help to you to know it." And, briefly as he could and steadily, Pierre told over the story of those last moments when he and François, facing death, had yet only seen each other's faces in that last, long look which meant farewell.

Alstrom heard him to the end. Even then he spoke no word, until moments had passed by. At last, he raised his head and faced Pierre in the moonlight which lay white around them.

"Pierre," he said gravely; "this is like a message coming from the dead. It has come when I needed it most. Some day, I shall tell you all the story; but not yet. Meanwhile, so far as lies in me, I promise you I will live out the rest of my life as François would have had me do, as, in fact, he always urged me."

And the sound of the evening gun, booming out from the bastion at their feet and rolling away in crashing

echoes which circled the whole wide horizon, seemed bearing out upon the night the tidings that now at last Thorne Alstrom's resolve was taken, François Allard's work was done.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OVER the basin at the river's mouth brooded the hush of the October noon. The tide was running sharply outward, and the baring rocks, wet and gleaming in the sun, showed far above the water-line the band of drift which marked the level when the tide was full. Above the circular stripe of tide-mark rose the higher circle of the bank, capped at the back of the basin by a dozen cottages which came straggling down from the crest towards the shabby little pier at the water's edge. At the left of the cottages, the lofty bank had been eaten away to form a narrow gash through which the little river, still murmuring about the fall it had so lately taken, came rushing over the stones in its shallow bed to find a quiet resting place in the deeper waters of the basin. The resting was but short, however. Seized by the current, carried to and fro upon the tide, it must slowly make its way out beneath the hanging bridge which linked together the ends of the broken arc of bank, out into the mighty Saint Lawrence whose current caught it in its hold and bore it onward, seaward.

Two hundred feet up from the basin, the chattering little stream was crossed by one of the lofty approaches to the great new bridge, a mere ribbon it looked, seen from below, a ribbon caught and held by spider webs

and totally unfitted to bear the weight even of the toy construction engines which puffed along its slender length. The sound of the engines, the occasional hoarse shout of workmen from the distant, invisible bridge, and the chug and splash of pumped-up water, the creak of the rusty pump itself upon the canal boat moored to the little pier: these sounds alone broke the stillness, save for the occasional note of the shrill, sweet song which came floating in from the channel of the larger river where a fisherman was drifting idly homeward upon the falling tide.

And rocking in a little boat adrift amid the stillness were two people, Thorne Alstrom, Gertrude Hardwicke. Saturday had come again, and Alstrom, without preface and masterfully, had claimed the day for his own purposes. Gertrude had made no effort to demur. She felt no wish to do so. Like the fisherman singing in his little boat, she too had shipped her oars and was drifting homeward on the tide.

For long minutes, her hands clasped lightly in her lap and her eyes bent on her companion, she had lost all sense of conscious thought in formless reverie. She roused herself at length and sat watching the clean, clear stroke of the oars, their perfect feathering, the long, strong undulation which marked their passage through the water.

"You are used to rowing," she made idle comment at length.

Alstrom lifted his eyes.

"I was bow oar on my 'varsity crew," he told her briefly. Then once more he dropped into the reverie which matched her own.

Passing beneath the high red bridge across the

basin's mouth, they came out on the larger river, skirted a stony bank, and followed up the nearer shore until they rested just beneath the mammoth arch which spanned the sky above them. Then, letting the boat's head drift about, Alstrom brought it into the current and, his oars held high above the water, went sliding, slipping down the vast and silent river, riding upon the tide as the fisherman had done before him. Opposite the basin's mouth, the blades fell back into the water and Alstrom bent to his oars, pulling with all the strength of his sinewy arms until the current lay behind them and once more they were rocking idly within the narrow basin where the tide already had passed the strongest ebb and lay, as if resting, waiting for the coming flow.

Then it was that Alstrom shipped his oars once more, and, turning to Gertrude, broke the hush which lay around them, broke, too, her reverie which was creeping back upon her, now that the struggle between Alstrom and the current had ended in his conquest.

"Miss Hardwicke," he said steadily; "I have something I wish to ask you."

His voice was compelling.

"Go on," she told him, low.

"Wait." He lifted his hand, as if to stay her speech. "I have things to tell you first, many things. However, they all can be summed up in just one. Miss Hardwicke, I — am Jack Penhale."

The surprise was too sudden to give her time even to brace herself to face it with apparent nonchalance.

"You!" she faltered, in utter stupefaction at his words. "Young Jack?"

"Yes." Alstrom's face was ashy gray; but his lips

were steady and smiling bravely, as he looked at her, awaiting in vain her judgment.

However, no judgment came.

"You!" she said again. "But what are you doing here?"

"How can you ask?" he answered briefly.

"How can I help asking? You are Thorne Alstrom. Jack Penhale is in Europe."

"He never went. I came here, instead."

"But — why?"

His gray eyes came up to hers, and, coming, betrayed their surprise at the query.

"How can you ask that question, after what Miss Harcourt must have told you?" he demanded a bit sternly.

"But Miss Harcourt told me nothing. The trouble was too near her, the hurt of it too great. I saw that, before I had asked a question. Except to refer to it once or twice, the subject was never mentioned."

Alstrom's hands shut on his oars with a strain which left the knuckles raised and bloodless, the nails white with the pressure placed upon them.

"Then you don't know what Jack Penhale did?" he questioned sharply.

"I have no idea what Jack Penhale did," she answered, and, long afterward, it came back to them both that they had used his name as if he were an outsider, alien to their talk.

Alstrom's grip on his oars relaxed. For an instant, his gray eyes followed the ripples about them with an unseeing glance. This was a situation harder than any he had ever dreamed of facing. In his surety that she must have learned from Edith Harcourt all the

details of Jack Penhale's story, he had braced himself to the simple announcement of his identity with Jack Penhale. Never once had it occurred to him that there would be the cruel need of going over, inch by inch, the whole black tale. But Gertrude still knew nothing, and it was imperative that she should know all. He pulled himself together, facing the need as bravely as he might. Strange to say, he felt no desire now to shrink back from the crisis before him. His last mad impulse to shun confession had overtaken him, not half an hour before, had overtaken him and been put to flight in that strong, hard struggle with the current which had sought to sweep their little boat away from the entrance to its safe haven within the hill-locked basin.

"I am sorry," he said bravely, but with sombre gravity. "I had hoped you knew. It is a long story, and an ugly one; but, if you don't mind too much, I think you would better hear it all. It would have been easier for us both, if you could have known it first from some one else, all but my own share in it. That, I think, it is my right to tell you."

There came a little pause. Then Gertrude said, as she had said before, —

"Go on." But now the words came from between unsteady lips. Even had she never heard Jack Penhale's name, her woman's instinct would have warned her that she was coming face to face with tragedy.

Alstrom did go on. Sitting there in the rocking little boat, ringed about by hills which shut them in within their circle of silence, his hands now and then closing on the oars beside him, he began to speak. He made no effort to account for things, none to

lighten any part of his blame. With an absolute impersonality, he laid his life before her and asked her to scan its every page and chapter. He began at the beginning, his childhood in the luxurious Penhale home, indulged, spoiled, his father's plaything and his mother's idol. Then came school, where he had been set apart as son of one of New York's richest men, pampered by teachers, sought out by his fellow pupils. Then college where, for the first time, he had tasted the joy of being able to stand upon his own merits, to be judged by the same standards as the men around him. Paris followed, a Paris where his father's fortune was unknown and hence devoid of influence, a Paris where he was supremely happy, face to face with congenial work.

After that came his recall home, coupled with his bitter disappointment when he found that his profession must be given up for the sake of a purely useless position in an ornamental niche made for him in the office of a famous down-town broker. For six years, he had been a man among other men, doing a man's work, facing a man's real problems. Now, all at once, his manhood was snatched from him. Once again, he was merely heir to a gigantic fortune, subject of paragraphs in the daily papers, toy of the huge organization named society, and as superfluous to the world's best life as is the vermiform appendix to the human being. Even the ideals of which he dreamed, were taken from him, partly by reason of the mockery of his fellows, partly because the futile treadmill of his daily life left him no leisure for the thing called dreaming.

And then, little by little, came tragedy, that tragedy which the world, and rightly, calls crime. Many of

the other men around him were doing the same thing, only, as his father's son, he felt bound to do it on a larger scale. In close touch with the market as he was, hearing a constant talk which expressed itself in thousands, knowing himself the heir to millions, his first investments were not for gain at all, only for love of the excitement and for mere bravado, for the doing as the other men around him did. And, with an annual allowance such as his father made him, a little risk in margins seemed as safe as whist at penny points seemed to any dowager of the pre-bridge epoch. And, as a matter of course, he had the luck which waits on all beginners, the luck which fixes the margin habit in its earliest stages. For months, the luck held good, and the habit and the margins both increased. Then came the inevitable sweeping loss which left him worse than even, his next year's allowance pledged and his friends jeering at his temporary ruin. The rest came in the foolish, pitiless old sequence: the resolve to make good; the pledging all he had in vain; the pledging all else on which he could lay his hands, and still in vain; the easy discovery of a broker willing to take the borrowed bonds, borrowed without permission, as collateral; and then the months when one set of bonds was forthcoming as the former ones were needed to appear before the rightful owners. And each new lot of bonds increased in value, for always the luck was bad, always the deficit grew and loomed before him like a mountain. And then, after eighteen months of faint hope and growing fear, of a dread which swept over him at times and seemed to stop his breath, at last the dread came to fulfilment. Confronted with the exposure which had faced him from the start, the certain exposure

which no man heeds in time, he had fled, rather than meet his father's honest, grieved gray eyes, had fled and left no trace behind him.

Then Gertrude spoke, and breathlessly, for the tragedy all seemed very real, very present, as it fell from the lips of its chief actor.

"Your poor father! How did he bear it?"

"As a hero, so the papers said. Of course, I had no other means of knowing. Do you realize that I only knew the fact of my mother's death from your own lips?"

"And you came away, and left them to face it alone?"

"I did. Since then, I have realized that they must have suffered more than I; they had their sorrow added to my crime. At the time, I didn't think of that."

"And you brought away with you —" She faltered over her own phrase.

Sternly he interrupted her.

"Nothing. Of so much, my hands are clean. My quarter's allowance was due, the week before. That was all I had. However, the rest was gone."

"Gone where?"

He laughed a little harshly.

"How should I know? The bucket shops are bottomless; one never sees the end of what one drops into them. In some way or other, it was eaten up. The brokers had the bonds; they were needed, and I had nothing at all to redeem them with."

"Your allowance?" she reminded him.

"How far does ten thousand go towards fifteen times that amount?"

Then, as if the mere concrete figures brought the fact home to her as nothing else had donc, Gertrude swayed forward in her seat, burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, how could you? How could you?" she wailed. "You of all men!"

He whitened at her words and, yet more, at the implication which lurked behind them. Upbraidings he could have borne with better courage; but not this bitter, bitter grief. If only he dared lay his hand on hers, dared speak one word of comfort though he scorned all self-excuse. But he knew he had no right to offer comfort, he who had brought the pain to pass. Instead, he took up his story once more.

He had planned to vanish, late one Sunday afternoon, meaning to lie in hiding for a day or two, and then escape to Europe. That morning, however, he had read that the Albany pilgrimage to Sainte Anne was to start, that night. He had seized upon its holy errand as the likeliest mask to cover his flight into Canada. His plans had been complete for days, even to the buying of the sodium peroxide which should bleach his hair into harmony with the Swedish name he had resolved upon adopting. He had watched his parents start for church, that sunny July morning; then, with no luggage, but with his pockets slightly bulging, he had left his father's house, apparently for ever and without farewell. A half-hour later, as Jack Penhale, he lingered in the office of a down-town hotel, talking with an acquaintance he had met on the steps. A full hour afterwards, unnoticed and unknown, Thorne Alstrom had passed through that selfsame office and vanished in the street.

"And Mr. Wood?" Gertrude broke in sharply.

"He intercepted my wire for a section, used the clue and followed me to Albany. I found him waiting, when I took my berth."

"He knew you?"

"I had forgotten, in my hurry, to change the buttons in my cuffs. They were very unusual, my father's crest and my mother's, cut in amethyst and linked together. He had seen them often; in fact, he had brought them home, when they were first done."

"But he would have known you in any case."

"I hardly think so. Only the summer after, I met and talked with my broker, one night on the terrace."

Gertrude started up.

"Mr. Alstrom! How dared you?" she exclaimed, and, for an instant, Alstrom took courage, for her voice was so full of alarm as to betray her sympathies.

He smiled.

"Sheer bravado, to see if my disguise were good. He could have made me no trouble in any case; he was too far involved for that. But he had no notion I was Jack Penhale."

"Who was Mr. Wood — unless you mind telling? I am not inquisitive, you know; it is only so terrible that I can't seem to understand." The fire had died out of the girl's voice once more, and its cadence was only dreary, as if nothing mattered to her very much, now that her faith in him was dead.

"He was a porter in my father's office, and did odd errands, too, for my mother now and then. His mother had done cleaning in our house, and had been

killed by falling from a window, so my father made a place and work for the son."

"And he showed his gratitude accordingly." Gertrude's tone rang hard with a scorn which once more brought a wave of hope across her companion's mind. "And he was after blackmail, I suppose. Why didn't you expose him to the police?"

"I dared not. He held too much in his clutch. And then he died, and I was free; but I had no time to exult — of course, I couldn't mourn — for they sent me to look over his papers in search of addresses of friends who should be notified. You remember? And how I met you at the foot of the stairs, you and your mother, and told you there were no papers to be found? At that moment, my shoes, my clothing were full of scraps of those papers, scraps I dared not burn in his room, but carried away and was days about destroying, a little at a time and in all sorts of ways and places. I found in his trunk a complete record of my guilt: proofs, addresses, affidavits even. The man must have been on my trail for months and months. Then he died, and my secret died with him."

He paused, and Gertrude drew a long, hard breath. Then, —

"And was buried until now?" she said.

"No," he answered gravely. "François Allard was my confessor, and he knew."

"You told him?" She raised her eyes, still stained with the tears which had come to them but rarely in her self-controlled life, and faced Alstrom with her wonted look of downright frankness in which a certain admiration struggled for expression.

"I told him," Alstrom answered briefly; "told him

of my own free will. I could not let him give me absolution, with such a sin as that hidden from his knowledge."

"And were you never sorry that you had told him?" As if against her will, the words slipped out.

The boat was veering to the current. With one long, steady stroke, he brought it to its old position. Then he answered, with reluctant frankness, —

"Now and then, while he lived, I was; but never since his death. No; not because I feel safer now, but because I am sure that his influence will go on, will steady me to the end of things, whatever that may be. Up to the time I told him, I had felt it would be quite enough if I lived out the rest of my life in all honour, as I have tried — and meant — to do. He taught me something different, made me see that no amount of later honour could varnish over any hidden sin, that one could not live down the past; but, instead, must make it good."

Again the boat veered in the sweep of the in-coming tide. Again the long, strong stroke restored it to its old position.

"Miss Hardwicke," he said then; "you have heard my story, all of it, and, I hope, in all fairness. It has not been an easy telling. I wish it might have been avoided; but it was the only thing to do. Before it came to any other ears, I wished you to know the whole, bad record."

He paused, waiting as if for her to speak. Her hands dangling listlessly in her lap, her wide hat shielding her face, she sat there silent, motionless, as if stunned by the shock of the story he had cast upon her, a shock she could not fail to realize the more,

with every passing moment. He could see only her lips, and they were drooping, pitiful, their self-reliant pride completely gone, tremulous, unsteady as if with fright. If only he dared take her in his arms, to soothe her, give her courage! And what soothing could he give to her? What courage, when his own courage was ebbing fast? And even apart from courage, what right had he to comfort her — as yet? What right would he ever have? But even now in his despair was mingled no regret that he had told his secret to her first of all. What better claim to know had any other one than Gertrude Hardwicke? The thought pushed him onward blindly, staggering to his final phrases, harder than any that had gone before, because another than himself was involved within them.

"I wished you to be the first to know, the first to whom I spoke. My reason will seem very strange to you, I know, and yet it's honest, at least. I told you first — "

But Gertrude interrupted, while she lifted to his a face he found it hard to recognize, so piteous was it in its absolute, utter woe, so gentle in its misery.

"I know the reason," she said, and her voice was singularly calm and steady. "It is because you love me, Thorne Alstrom."

He bowed in assent; then sat in silence, waiting for her words. They were long in coming.

"This morning," she said slowly at last; "I loved you more than I had thought I could love any man, and I trusted you as I loved you. Now — I honour you more than ever in my life before. My trust, though, has been — shaken. About my love, I don't yet know. It has been torn away from its place, torn almost by the very roots. And yet, we women are strange things,

Thorne," she tried to smile through the tears that now were dripping down her cheeks, and the smile was pitiful in its appealing; "and our love dies hard, very hard. I truly do not know what I think, and it seems to me I stopped feeling, hours ago. Don't be impatient at me. It takes time to get used to a shock like this. By to-morrow, late to-morrow after dinner, I can talk with you again. Now, if you don't mind, will you please take me home and — and not make me talk very much on the way?"

Her voice failed her at length; but she smiled bravely, as she took his hand, held out to steady her to the shore. Nevertheless, alone in her room, she threw herself down, gathered Mouche into her arms and gave herself over to her sorrow.

That morning, just after they had left the house, Tony had appeared with a message to Gertrude from his mother. Mrs. Hardwicke had received the message, and, in return, had babbled many things, real and imagined, concerning that day's expedition. As result, Tony sought Alstrom's room, that night, and demanded admission. To his surprise, he found his host dull and taciturn, and for long the two men smoked in silence. At length Tony, lighting a fresh pipe, broke in upon his comrade's musings.

"Alstrom," he said abruptly; "I have always held it a sin for a man to be in love with the wife of his friend. However, if it is, then I shall sin. I have loved Gertrude Hardwicke for the last four years; I shall love her till the end of time."

Alstrom made no effort to fence with the fact.

"Gertrude Hardwicke will never be my wife," he said bitterly.

"Why not?" And Tony's bluntness bore no hidden sting to Alstrom's heart, weary as it was, and raw with the long day's strife.

"Because I have told her — " And briefly, defiantly almost, Thorne Alstrom cast at Tony the story of his broken, patched-up life.

Tony smoked in silence till the end. Then, his pipe still in his teeth, he rose, crossed the rug and rested two steady, kindly hands on Alstrom's shoulders.

"Why, man," he said; "I've known it all for more than thirty months. I met your father in New York, the winter after you came here, dined with him and saw your picture on the mantel. I've known it all along. I also knew the time was bound to come when you'd speak out and tell us. Till then, of course, I couldn't stir; but now let's fall to work and plan the best way for you to make good." And his right hand, sliding down Alstrom's arm, shut on his nerveless fingers with strong and friendly grip.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

SHE had said "to-morrow, late;" but she came to him in the early morning.

Alstrom heard her step on the terrace behind him, and, turning, saw her walking towards him, backed by the ruddy haze of the new, early day. He made a hasty step towards her; then he checked himself and halted, waiting, while the level sunbeams rested in pitiless splendour upon his face whose beauty was marred by the heavy, listless eyes, by the gaunt shadows that lay beneath. And Gertrude's eyes were heavy, too, her face was wan, for dawn had seemed long in coming, after that sleepless night.

After his first involuntary motion towards her, Alstrom had checked himself, had hesitated. No hesitation was in Gertrude's manner, however. She went directly to him and placed her strong, warm hands in his. Directly, too, she spoke.

"Thorne," she said; "I have come. I saw no need of waiting until night."

The colour rushed into his face, then ebbed again, leaving him the hue of burnt-out ashes. He spoke no word, only stood there, waiting.

"I have come," she said again; "come to bring you all I have, myself."

"Because — you pity me?" he asked, with slow incredulity.

She moved back a pace or two, still holding to his hands, and, her head lifted, looked him proudly in the face.

"Pity! No. Why should I pity you. The time for that is past. One doesn't pity the man just convalescent from the disease that almost killed him. I might have pitied you, a week ago; but not now. I honour you too much for that, Thorne Alstrom."

"Then — "

But she broke in upon his slow, halting speech.

"Don't you know me better than that? Can't you read me?" she demanded impatiently. "Must I say it all, without help from you? Thorne, I have come to you for just one single reason. I love you, love you better than I love life. No, wait. Listen, Thorne, and learn what we women are. I have heard your story; all night long I have gone over it, and over it again, and it changes nothing, nothing, unless it makes me love you more. It was no little thing you have done for the sake of right, the breaking down the high, close, safe wall you had built between yourself and those horrible, unmanly days so long ago. You had walled them in, carefully, securely. Yesterday, for the first time, you buried them. And I was asked to be present at the burial. And at the end, after I had watched you meeting bravely the hardest test that any man could face, you told me that you loved me."

"Well?" he said, after the silence had lasted long.

When she spoke again, it was with drooping head.

"And I, shame to me, hesitated, hesitated when I had known, that morning, that I loved you better than

all the rest of the world. I saw only the sin, instead of seeing that, out of the sin, you had grown into a strength that made you able to conquer it, face all the consequences and use them as foundations for a new, better, stronger life. I hesitated. Now I know."

"You know what?" he asked her hoarsely.

Once more she raised her head, and her eyes looked into his, steadily, bravely, full of trust and of something akin to pride.

"That I love you; you, Thorne Alstrom; you, Jack Penhale; love you so much that I would go to the world's end with you; love you so much that I would even — even wait for you, in case the law should come between us and our happiness. But, Thorne, I am all a woman, after all. Loving you like that, I love you so much that I must never be disappointed in you, must never feel that your manhood bears a scar. So I am going to marry you because I must, dear, because, without you, my life would be of no use to me or anybody else. And then, Thorne, when we are married," she drew his hand closer to her, as she spoke; "when we are really married, we must go back."

"Back?" he echoed blankly.

"Yes. Back to New York, back to your father, back to the man you robbed."

"And give myself up?"

"If need be, yes." She was the strong one now. If, yesterday, she had wavered, to-day, she made amends.

"And go —" But his voice failed him on the final words.

Careless what early riser might be looking down upon them from the Château windows, she laid her hand across his shoulder.

"Yes, if there is no other way. You owe to the world, owe to yourself a full confession, whatever may be its consequences. It is too late to consider them now; they should have been counted up at the beginning. But now, only with this full confession can you ever really wipe out your blame. You must see that, Thorne, must have seen it before you made up your mind to tell me all the story."

"Yes," he assented slowly. "I did see it; and yet, as it comes nearer, surer, it is hard."

"It is hard," she responded instantly. "Don't you suppose I know it, too, Thorne? Don't you suppose I would screen you from it, if I could? But I can't; there is no other way. You must tell the whole story, tell it just as you told it to me, yesterday, to your father and then to the man you — robbed. After that, the matter will be in their hands, to do with as they like."

"And I must bear the punishment," he said, and his voice was dreary, hopeless, as if at last his strength were wellnigh spent.

"Punishment! You've had it, Thorne. You have been bearing it for years. On your own telling, no term inside a grated window could ever be half the imprisonment you've been through, shut up inside this wretched secret. That's done with and over, over when it might have lasted all your life. The rest can't count for much beside it."

"But the disgrace — "

"That came for you, when you went away. There's no disgrace in your return," she told him fearlessly.

"And then the — "

Once more she interrupted.

"Besides, who knows? Your own voluntary return, your father's influence, all this will help you. Faced out, nothing is ever so bad as one imagines it, when he looks at it over his shoulder."

Side by side, they had been moving slowly up the terrace. Now, at the very end, Thorne Alstrom turned and faced her.

"Gertrude," he said abruptly; "what is this thing that you are doing for me?"

Even her controlled voice broke a little, as she made answer, —

"Loving you, Thorne. That is really all."

"And you would go back with me, as my wife, to face this thing?"

"Yes, Thorne. And more, if necessary."

He took her hand in his and stood gazing down into her face with gray eyes which had lost somewhat of their heaviness.

"I can't realize it all," he said at length.

"Don't try," she bade him. "I will prove it, when we begin to live it out together."

Still holding her hand, he looked at her long, intently, while the love died from his eyes to be replaced by utter reverence. Then he lifted her hand to his lips and let it fall once more.

"Gertrude," he said; "in giving me your love, you have given me a new life. I shall do my level best to make it worthy of you; but I shall never, never in this world, accept your sacrifice."

"What sacrifice?" she asked him proudly.

"Of your own life, your pride, your whole position. Do you realize — "

She stopped him with a look.

"I realize it all. Beside your love, with your love, rather, it counts for nothing."

"But I never can accept — I have no right to take the gift."

Her answering gesture was superb.

"Take it or leave it as you will. My love is yours, Thorne, yours until eternity is ending. Take my life with it, if you can and will. If not, I — " She laughed a little, and her laugh hurt him as no tears had ever done; "if you refuse it, leave it lying at your feet, why, then I must pick up the bits and patch them together for some other use. But, Thorne, can't you believe me? You, you — yourself, my love for you, those are my very life. In taking it, you only take the thing that you have made."

She fell silent, her eyes, true, womanly and full of love past all describing, still searching his face, while, from across the broad river, a distant clash of matin bells smote on the sunshiny air. Then at last, reading her face, Thorne Alstrom knew.

"Gertrude!" he said. And he added, "My dear wife."

Side by side in the yellow morning light, amid the joyous clashing of the bells, they turned and started down the terrace, silent, satisfied. Just at the lower end, however, Gertrude spoke, spoke as a sudden recollection crossed her mind.

"Does Tony know?" she asked abruptly.

"I told him, last night,' Alstrom answered. Then, seeing her slight start as of surprise, he added, "And he told me he had known of it for months."

It was not until afternoon, however, that Gertrude found opportunity of telephoning to Tony Mansfield.

Tony was avowedly inaccessible, shut up in consultation with his lawyer. That night, his lawyer with him, Tony started for New York. Only his mother knew his destination, and she was pledged to secrecy.

In such a time as this, Gertrude, it must be confessed, longed acutely for her good and loyal friend, longed to tell him of the great change which had come to the shaping of her life, longed most of all to thank him for the unfaltering loyalty both to herself and to Alstrom, which had dictated his attitude to them both in days which, to his honest, clear-sighted eyes, looked so full of danger. A smaller man than Tony would have held his peace; a man less generous than he would have argued unreservedly. Tony, loving them both alike, willing to sink his happiness in theirs, had halted only to make sure where their happiness would lie, and then, with a touch too gentle to be resented, had tried to guide them towards it. Wondering, looking back upon the past few months, she asked herself if Tony ever did anything absolutely at random. And, weighing the answer that she gave herself, she wondered even more at this sudden, unpremeditated absence.

Nevertheless, during the next few days, Gertrude had scanty time and thought to waste on wonder, scanty attention to give to even her most loyal friends. Before they had parted at the door, that morning after their meeting on the terrace, they had agreed that a week would better pass before their engagement should be announced. There were many and serious details to be discussed, decisions made which would outlast a lifetime. Decisions such as these could not be faced and settled within the hour. How far should

Alstrom publish abroad the story of his life? How far destroy the record he had made, in his Quebec experience? If not all men, whom then should he choose to take into his confidence? What was right and honourable? What mere needless bravado? And, after they were married, what? A honeymoon of stolen bliss beneath the unsheathed sword; or a swift return to his old life, to make amends as soon as possible?

Bravely, unfalteringly Thorne Alstrom faced the future; yet, after all, it was Gertrude who made the final plans. Exhausted by the years-long strife, doubly exhausted now that the strain at last was broken, Thorne Alstrom dared not trust his judgment, dared not say where conscience ended, morbidness began. Long since, he had learned to rely on Gertrude Hardwick's judgment, upon her keen analysis of right and wrong, upon her unsparing sense of justice and upon her downright code of honour. Now, with implicit confidence, he cast the questions at her feet and left them there for her to take up, one by one, and answer at her leisure. Up to now, he had been guided by the influence of François Allard; but that influence had reached its destined end. François' pleading had wholly concerned itself with matters of the spirit; the practical, worldly detail of the outworking he left for others to supply. He insisted that Thorne Alstrom should strain every nerve in working out his own salvation; nevertheless, he left him to discover his own tools. And Alstrom, given time, would have discovered them. As yet, however, he had had no space to nerve himself for the new task; and time, just now, was short, completed action urgent.

In these days of ripening October, days when the golden heavens arched in a golden, flaming earth, days when the gray old city steeped itself in the scarlet flush of dawn, in the clear yellow glare of noon, in the purplish haze of sunset, seeming to absorb all the lights in turn, Gertrude Hardwicke faced the facts of her engagement in a mood no less joyous than does the merry bride whose plans concern themselves solely with silken frills and furbelows. Life was no less sweet and full of promise because it was earnest, tragic. For Alstrom's sake, secure not only in his love, but in the knowledge of what her love could do for him, she could move on, unfaltering. The worst was over, faced apart; hand in hand, they could meet what lay before them, smiling and with good courage. And even if, at times, her courage ebbed as, being human, she was bound to have it do, she had only to picture to herself Thorne Alstrom, going on alone to perform his expiation; and the added, sharper pang of such a thought restored her ebbing courage. And so the days went by, until the week was wellnigh spent.

Little by little, meanwhile, their plans had gathered focus. Mrs. Hardwicke, good lady but excitable withal, was to be told nothing until the eve of their wedding, two months hence. They shrank equally from her garrulity, Alstrom by reason of the embroideries which she was bound to add to each point of his story, Gertrude because of the conjectures which would take the present back into a past three generations long, then on into a future bounded only by a long row of Alstrom graves. Pierre was to be told at once. Alstrom insisted upon that, and he agreed that Gertrude should tell Mrs. Mansfield. In after time, when gossip

would be rife, it would be well to have the gentle lady knowing all the facts from their own lips. Until the wave of gossip did arise, however, she would hold her peace. Not even Tony would be aware she shared the secret with him. Before the wedding, this was all. After it, among the marriage notices should be a line of explanation that Thorne Alstrom and Jack Penhale were one. Then the rest should be left within the hands of chance. It might be that Jack Penhale's name would have no meaning in Quebec's ears. The world forgets quickly, and Thorne Alstrom's personality might still be dominant. In any case, no need to blazon forth all the old details. Like many another man, Thorne Alstrom had come among them without introduction. He had made his place, his record. Now the place would be empty, the record snapped in two. He had gone on his way; that would be really all.

And, married in the Basilica on Christmas morning, married according to the simple rite set apart for weddings between those of unlike creeds, Thorne Alstrom should then assume his old-time name, and, that same afternoon, carry his bride away to his own father's house. And there, what welcome would await him? What fate would follow him on his return? But questions such as these they made no effort to forecast. Knowledge would come in time, and, with it, also, strength.

It was not until the very eve of their announcement that Tony returned. He came straying homeward by way of Montreal, as blithe and carefree as a man could be, and totally dumb regarding his sudden holiday. Dinner over, he excused himself to Louisa and Byng, whom he had found there before him at the

table, sauntered out, looked in for a moment at the Garrison Club, then, his step quickening, he turned down Louis Street and crossed the Place d'Armes.

He found Alstrom smoking in his room, and Alstrom's greeting was punctuated with questions which concerned his absence; but Tony, for the once, showed himself taciturn, unyielding in his silence, until, perforce, Alstrom fell silent, too, and held back the announcement which had been trembling upon his lips. And Tony sat there long, smoking the while, and watching his friend with steady, kindly eyes. Then at last he took his leave, friendly as ever, but strangely silent; and Alstrom was left alone to ponder on this visit so unlike to Tony's normal self.

Next morning, earlier than was his wont to go abroad, Tony once more sought Alstrom. This time, it was the well-known Tony, jovial and full of cheery talk, smiling from ear to ear. He met Alstrom just entering the breakfast-room, accepted his invitation to take a second meal and sat talking above his coffee until, a half-hour later, Gertrude appeared behind her mother's shoulder. Even Mrs. Hardwicke had a share of Tony's exuberant greeting, that morning, and imputed the fact to her new tweed clothes; but Gertrude knew better than that. As she had confessed to herself before, Tony Mansfield did nothing at random. She waited for the moment to come when he would show out his purpose in that early visit.

It came at length, came just as Alstrom rose to leave the room. Tony's face was impenetrable; but a new note, half hope, half fear and all excitement, throbbed in his honest voice.

"Wait a minute, Alstrom," he said hastily, as he

dived into his breast pocket. "I've a message for you. Hang it, where is the thing? I nearly forgot to pass it on." And, blushing scarlet at his own untruth, he pulled out the telegram which had been burning in his pocket since the noon before, and cast it across the table within reach of Alstrom's hand.

Alstrom eyed it carelessly, and let it lie.

"What's that?" he asked, with supreme indifference, for Tony more than once had brought him similar missives from the office.

"Open it and see. It's a bit important and may need an answer." And Tony, able to control himself no longer, rose, thrust his fists into his trouser pockets and walked to the nearest window.

Still carelessly, indifferently, Alstrom picked up the folded paper. Then, as he read its words, his face went white and he put out his other hand, groping unseeingly for some support.

"Thorne!" Gertrude sprang up sharply. "What is it?"

His fingers were shaking, as he pushed the paper into her hand. Then, as her other hand sought his, he steadied at her touch and drew her close within the circle of his arm, while she bent down her head to read.

"*To Anthony Mansfield,*

"*Place Viger Hotel, Montreal.*

"*Everything arranged. Tell Jack to come at once. I need him.*

"*John Penhale.*"

There was a pause, short, expectant, breathless, as of one who tries to understand the meaning of some

sudden crisis. Then Alstrom's hand sought Tony's, sought it and held it in an iron clasp; but Alstrom's words were for Gertrude.

"With you, my dearest," he said briefly. "Not alone."

THE END.