

THE ANGEL OF THE FOUR CORNERS

[Concluded From Our Last Issue.]

was a little woman, grown, oh, so bitterly wise! And when a woman grows bitter and wise the bravest should be humble, for she needs neither the help of gods nor of men to aid her tongue.

"When do you become a priest?" she asked, with slow inquisition.

"A fortnight," he said, "is the time fixed."

"Then, as I said, why do you come?" she asked sharply.

"Can't you understand?" he replied, with a strong rush of feeling.

"A priest should be about his Father's business, not at a dance," she replied scornfully.

"Marie, Marie, aren't you glad to see me," he said, "running all this risk as I do?" He had his eyes on the little cross at her throat. He had once given it to her.

"I have my own confessor," she replied—"the good Father Fabre. I don't need another." Her fingers felt for the cross, then suddenly dropped it.

She got to her feet.

"Marie, Marie," he whispered. But with a laugh she sprang down from the little platform among the dancers and caught Medallion's arm.

With rollicking laughter Medallion swung both her and Babette through the flitting changes of a cotillon.

An hour went by. Meanwhile Marie was gay, but Medallion noticed that her hand was now hot, now cold as they



"Marie, Marie," he whispered.

swung through the changes, and that her eyes had a hard kind of brilliance. It was not given him to read the heart of this woman. He would not try to probe the thing. He merely watched and waited. He had known Marie since she was only big enough to lean her chin on his knee, and many a time since she had grown up, and old Garon, the avocet, had talked of her and wondered what her life would be, for it seemed to them both that there was no man in the parish who could make her happy, that year in Quebec had changed her so, had given her larger ideas of life and men.

He had talked much with her from time to time, and she had always seemed glad of that. She thought him wise, and he had wondered at some deep, searching things she had said. He would have gone far to serve her, for the gossip, now almost legend, that he had cured for Marie's mother before she married Marie's father had foundation. The cure had stepped in, for Medallion was a Protestant, and that ended it, but Medallion had never married, and, strange to say, the cure and himself and Marie's father were the best of friends. Medallion was also busy watching M. Camille, for he felt that there was something wherein a friend might serve Marie, though how he did not know. He liked the young man's face, for it had that touch of loneliness and native solitary thought which the present gaiety of eye, voice and manner made almost pathetic. He even saw something more—a recklessness, not natural to the youth's character, which sat on him like a touch of doom—and as he thought Marie's allegory—her "wonderful, beautiful, dreadful" (those were her words) tale of love—kept showing in vivid pictures in his eye.

But if he could have read the young man's mind, could have seen the struggle going on there, the despair, the wild hope, the daring, the revolt, the breaking up of all the settled courses of a life, he would have been as startled as apprehensive, for while Camille Debarres was urging on this mirth and revel with a nervous eagerness he kept saying to himself over and over again: "I can't give her up! God forgive me! Marie! Marie!"

The words beat in and out of the music. Youth, humanity, energies of the active world, were crying out, fighting for mastery in the breast of one soon to be given to the separateness of the church, wherein the love of man and maid must be viewed with a distant paternal eye. A hundred forces had been at work to put him and keep him in the church, and when, as a student, Marie came into his life these forces, with loving yet severe apprehension, closed on him and on the girl

and had separated them, as it seemed, forever.

He was older now, but as he neared the final act that should set him apart from the world and close up for always the springs of youth and desire the old feeling had leaped up, had filled him; he had somehow got a few days of respite, and this was the result, this mad escapade, this dangerous play-time!

The night wore on. At last he was able to catch Marie's eyes. She could not resist that pleading, the inexpressible hunger in that look. She came and sat down beside him, and again Medallion called off the figures of the dance.

They spoke in very low tones, trying with what desperate anxiety to prevent their hearts showing in their faces.

"What do you want to say?" she asked, her breath catching.

"I want to know, Marie, if you still love me?" his voice whispered through the music.

"What does it matter?" she said. "And is it right to ask?"

"I've come all the way from Quebec to ask it," he said.

"You came to ask that? What did you come to say?" she flashed out, her lips quivering a little.

He understood. "Forgive me. I thought you knew I couldn't ask you if you cared unless I—"

He paused, for if he spoke the words the die would be cast forever; he would never return to those quiet walls where incense and not the breath of woman—a breath like this, soft, sweet, instinct with youth and delight—would touch his senses. Yet what had he come for? To rack a girl's heart and soul and then return to his masses and prayers, leaving an injured life behind him? When he started from Quebec he scarcely knew what he was going to do, save that he must see this girl's face once—once again. He had had no thought beyond that. That desire was hot within him. He did not know—she might be married or dead or the betrothed of another, but he would see her, then return to his sacred duties and forget. In coming at all he had committed a sin for which he would have to atone bitterly when he returned, if he returned, but the latter thought had not presented itself to him definitely, though it had flashed in and out of the vapors of emotion like a flying flame.

But now here was Marie, and here was he in the garb of the workaday world, and frivolity and irresponsible gaiety around them, and he, all on a sudden, with his faraway boyish recklessness again alive in him, the master of the revels.

"Unless?" Marie asked. "Yes, 'unless?' There were two little lines at the corners of her mouth—lines which never came to a girl's face unless she has suffered and lost. Marie had not only a heart, but a sense of honor, too, for the man. Having come to her thus, whatever chance he should justify himself in so far as might be by saying what any honest man would say. She had a right to know if he still loved her, and he had no right to know if she still loved him until that was done. He must be justified in her sight. If he loved her and said so, then let the Angel point what way it would; she would submit.

She flushed with a kind of indignation. Must she always be the sufferer? He, a man, had a work of life to interest him; she had nothing—nothing save herself and the solitary path of meager parish life. She would have her moment of triumph in spite of all. She would hear him say he loved her, she would make him give all up for her. She was no longer the wistful, shrinking girl who had been hurried back to her home from Quebec and handed over to the tender watchfulness of M. Fabre, whose heart had ached for her, yet who felt that what was best.

She was very much a woman now, and if only for an hour she would have her way.

"Unless what—Camille?" she asked.

Her voice dwelt softly on the "Camille." It was the first sound of tenderness that he had heard from her since he came, and it thrilled him. It was three years since he had heard a voice with that sound in it. Life was grave and far from sentimental in the seminary. His youth—the old Adam—came to swelling life in him. He put it all in the words, "I wouldn't have asked you if you loved me yet, Marie, unless I was sure you knew that I loved you"—he drew his bow carelessly along the D string, so that a sweet, aching joyfulness seemed infused into the dance—"and that I've risked everything to come and tell you so."

A low sound, half delight, half pain, came from her. But she turned her head away. There was silence for a moment.

"Won't you speak? What are you thinking? Don't turn your head away," he continued.

Slowly her face came toward him, her eyes shining, her cheeks pale, her lips slow and moving gently, but the words dropping like metal.

"You are true to nothing," she said; "neither to the church—nor to me."

"Marie, haven't you any pity?" He did not know what or how he was playing now. His fingers wandered, the bow came and went, but he was not thinking of the music.

"Why are you so selfish, then?" she said. "Why didn't you leave me here alone? A woman is always at a man's mercy!"

Something scorched him from head to foot. He now felt, as he had never felt before, what that incident three years ago meant, what this girl's life had been since, what was the real nature of that renunciation. The eight hand reel was near its end. He got to his feet in his excitement, played faster and faster, and then with a call to the dancers and Medallion brought the dance to a close. In the subse-

quent jostling, as the revelers made their way to another room for supper, he offered his arm to Marie, nodded as gaily as he could to the frequent "Merci, merci, monsieur!" and they walked together to the end of the room, saying nothing.

At that moment Alphonse entered, followed by Antoine, who grasped his arm and held him back. "Don't be a fool!" Antoine said. "A row won't get you the girl!"

But Antoine had had two seasons as a lumberman and river driver, and he had just been drinking. He held the coat of the river—that where two men and one woman were in the triangle of love war must be the end thereof.

"I'll give him the grand bounce!" said Alphonse in wild English idiom. "He don't belong here—some lawyer's clerk or loafer."

"Hien," said Antoine, still holding him back, "suppose Marie stand up for him?"

"I shan't! He don't belong here, and she said some things to me about him—I know. I'm going to ask her to supper with me."

The two were standing silent at the end of the room, watching this scene, but not hearing the words. Marie, however, guessed what was meant.

Presently Alphonse with disjointed glances came and said to her, "Have supper with me, ma'm'selle?" He turned his shoulder on Camille.

Marie did not hesitate. "Not now, Alphonse. I have a guest"—she reached out her hand toward Camille—"and he's been working hard for us all the evening."

Alphonse looked at her with an attempt to be disdainful, then, snapping his fingers under Camille's nose contemptuously, said "Pah!" and walked away, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"It wasn't so easy getting used to that again after I came back from Quebec three years ago," she said.

Singular how the priest in the youth was being so swiftly lost in the man. Camille's fingers opened and shut, and

the girl because she loved Philippe. It seemed to Philippe that he himself had killed her; that if he had been with her it wouldn't have happened. Since then the room has been as it was the day he died.

Outside the trees were snapping in the frost, and now and again a dull boom told that the ice was cracking on the river—a night of deep wrenching frost, the snow three feet deep, the cold steel sky brooding above. Presently as the two stood there the bells of the parish church rang out. It was midnight, the morning of the new year. There were voices, too, of men singing as they drove past the house, sleigh bells joining with the song and the church bells. They could not hear the words, but they knew the air, and they knew what the song was.

Three men went forth to woo a maid—Hieho, those lovers three! And the first one was a roving blade, and the second came from cloister's shade, and the third from the gallow's tree. C'est ca! Ho, hot C'est ca!

Try as Camille would, the second verse of the song kept beating in his ears. It did not leave him all that night, and it followed him for many a day with a kind of savage irony.

These men knelt down with a lover's plea—Ho, ho, for such a maid! And she chose not him of the gallow's tree, And the roving blade had an eye too free, But she set her tongue on the cloister's shade! Ho, hot C'est ca!

The song died away, but the bells kept on ringing, and there came to them faintly laughing voices. There was a strange look in Camille's eyes and swimming in his face. He stood still and did not offer to touch the girl, though he stood very near and her hand rested so near his, she leaning against the bureau as though to steady herself, but standing as though to steady herself.

"Perhaps you will never understand," he said, "how it all was. No one can ever quite know. I was younger. They told me it was better for you, better for me, better for the church, that we should part. I thought you would forget. I thought that perhaps I should never see you again. I used to pray for you both. I never heard from you or about you, but I could not forget. . . . This week it all came back to me—to shut myself out from you always, forever, by the sacred office! I sat up in my bed, choking. I could have shrieked. I could not rest till I had seen you again. I thought perhaps she is married, perhaps she is dead. So I came here. Somehow I seemed to break loose when I put off my student clothes, and you see me as I am tonight. You think I am wicked, that I am untrue to the church and to you. Ah, Marie, you no longer care as you once did, and I, God help me—I cannot go back now to the other. And I cannot live without you. I am punished, punished!" He dropped his head, and a sob caught him in the throat. He was so boyish, so honest. There was a silence.

"Camille."

The voice was low and sweet and very near. It drew his head up like a call. Their eyes swam in one burning, hungry look; then there was a little cry from her, and in an instant he was sliding away two tears that slowly gathered and as slowly fell down her hot cheek. The woman had conquered at last, in spite of the "great men of the kingdom!" For the man there was no going back now. He had cast the die forever. But she was a woman, and, having conquered, having justified herself, she was ready for sacrifice. Now, when the man had wiped out all his past to begin life with her, she was ready to immolate herself. She loved him so well that she thought only of his good.

"Camille," she said, gently disengaging herself, "I am paid for those three years. But now—now it must go no further. The others parted us before and made you appear unworthy—twas that which hurt me so. Now it is that part us, dear. You must go back. You mustn't ruin your life. Think of it all—what would be against you. Go back. Be a priest, and I—"

He was very pale and quiet. "And you—what would you do?" he said.

"There is always the nunnery left," she answered wearily, yet bravely.

"You think that I ought to go?" he questioned. "You wish me to go, Marie?"

"For your own good. Think of the trouble that would come unless. You will go, Camille?"

His reply came with a low force: "Never, never! Remember how your brother blamed himself, and she was an actress, you said. To leave you now, how I would hate myself! Never!" His voice was strong and decisive; there was no wavering. "There are a hundred men, better men, to take my place there, Marie, but is there any to take my place here?" He ran his arm around her waist. "There is no one," he added.

"No one, Camille," she said faintly.

The man had in a vague yet direct way, too, realized that to save a bruised life at your feet is better than to go a-hunting for souls with the king's men. He had wandered out to the crossroads and had been motioned back to his own door. The woman had been willing to save the man, but her heart beat for joy that he did not go.

"Come what will, Marie," he said fervently, clasping her hands and gathering her eyes to his, "we must not part again."

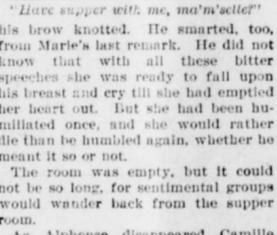
"You do not fear the church?" she asked.

"I am a man!" he cried, drawing himself up proudly.

"Perhaps they will not—"

"Perhaps they will not—marry us?" he said, piecing out the sentence. His eyes flashed. "How dare they not?" he added. "I was not yet a priest."

How strange that sounded in her ears! Already they had begun a new



"Dance supper with me, ma'm'selle!"

his brow knotted. He smarted, too, from Marie's last remark. He did not know that with all these bitter speeches she was ready to fall upon his breast and cry till she had emptied her heart out. But she had been humiliated once, and she would rather die than be humiliated again, whether he meant it so or not.

The room was empty, but it could not be so long, for sentimental groups would wander back from the supper room.

As Alphonse disappeared Camille said, "Marie, I'm seeing things as I never saw them before. I want to talk with you alone, just ten minutes; that's all I ask, but alone, where no one can interrupt us."

"Would it be right?" she asked. He could not tell whether she was ironical or not.

"It shall be right," he said stoutly.

"You won't mind if it's cold?" she questioned.

"I won't mind anything if you'll only give me that ten minutes," he answered. "But if it's going to be cold wrap yourself up well."

He took a man's coat from the wall.

"Come," she said and opened a narrow door that led into a little hallway. As she did so he threw the coat over her shoulders.

"Give me your hand," she added and, taking it, led the way for half a dozen steps in the dark. Then she took a key from the wall and turned it in a lock, which clicked back rustily.

"It's my brother Philippe's room," she said as she stepped inside, he following.

The moonlight on the frosted pane gave a ghostly kind of light to the chamber. Marie felt along the wall for a matchbox.

"Oh, there's not a match here," she added.

"Feel in that overcoat pocket," he suggested. "Its owner is a smoker—smell it."

She did so and drew out a handful. He took one and scratched it on the wall. Neither of them knew it, but it was Alphonse's coat. Camille lit a half burnt candle that stood on a chest of drawers and then turned to Marie.

"We have never used the room since Philippe died," she said.

"I did not know," he rejoined gently. "Philippe had been to Montreal," she said. "There he'd fallen in with a girl"—her voice faltered—"an actress. He came back to see us, and mother begged him not to go to Montreal again, for we knew—a priest had written to us about the girl. One day he got a paper. He opened it at dinner. He saw something, gave a cry and fell against the table. 'Elle est morte! She is dead!' he cried. A man had shot

life, and now proud she was of him, the rebel for her sake! She ran a hand over his shoulder.

"You must go to the cure," she said. "To good M. Fabre. He knows all. I confessed to him."

He thought a moment. "Yes, I will go," he said, "I will go."

"You must go at once—now," she urged. Then she added hastily, "We have been here too long—I forgot!"

With a laugh he picked up the overcoat which had dropped from her shoulders and carefully wrapped it around her. He was big with energy, emotion and courage, a rebel who doubted not of success.

A moment afterward they were about to issue into the other room.

She opened a creaking door. He shut it for an instant, clasped her to his breast, then opened the door again, drew his cap from his pocket, put it on and was gone into the frosty night. She shut the door slowly and went back to the dancing room. It was nearly filled, and dancers were clamoring for the fiddler and Marie. As she entered the room Alphonse strutted over to her.

"Been for a walk with the fiddler in my coat?" he said in a rough way.

"Here is your coat, and thank you, Alphonse," she said quietly and reprovingly.

He flung it over his shoulder. "Lucky that the fiddler wasn't wearing it or I'd never seen it again. Perhaps he was running off with it and you stopped him, eh?" he added.

She turned on him with a still, cold face, her eyes all fire. "Behind his back, Alphonse. It's so easy."

"I'll say it to his face. He's only a tramp anyway."

"You'll find him at the cure's," she added coldly, turning away to Medallion.

Anxiety showed in Medallion's eyes. "What has happened?" he said.

She hesitated.

"I wish you would tell me," he added. "It's better that a girl should not go through some things alone."

"Their eyes met. The love that he had once borne her mother gave now a kind of fatherliness to his look. Vague, but she felt it and with her fresh, frank nature responded at once.

"You remember the story I told after the dance of the Little Wolf?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes, yes."

"Well, that was all true. He—Camille—was studying for a priest. It could not be, and we parted. He has come back; that's all."

"What has he come back for?" Medallion gravely asked.

A look of triumph showed in her eyes. "What do you think?" she said.

"Is he a priest now?"

"He is giving it all up for you, Marie?"

"For me," she said, with a proud flash of her brown eyes.

Medallion's hand closed on hers warmly, strongly. "Bogad, he's a man," he said, "and, bogad, you're worth it and a hundred such men!"

"Oh, you don't know, you don't know, how good and brave he is!" she rejoined.

Medallion smiled quizzically. "Ah, I know men, and I know no man, my dear, that's as good as a woman! And sure of the best. Where has he gone?"

Again a smile crossed her face. To a woman there come but few moments of triumph, only a few great scenes in her life. She could not resist the joy of saying with a little dash of vanity, "He has gone to the cure."

Medallion gave a noiseless whistle. Frankly and promptly he said: "Well, a happy new year to you both, my girl! It's just now five minutes inside the new year."

Meanwhile Alphonse had hurried from the room and was hard on the trail of Camille. Even in the vague glimmer he could see a swinging pride in the bearing of the stalwart youth striding on in the moonlight. When he left the house, he had no definite purpose in his mind. Now he had a kind of devilry which gets into the blood of men when a woman stands between them. In the river driver's veins there beat the shameless agony of Abel's brother. He broke into a run. Swifter, swifter! Before Camille had half climbed the hill to the cure's house he was panting hard after. A cry broke from him be-

fore he reached Camille, the snarl of a man in whom there are working envy and hate.

Camille heard and turned. He recognized Alphonse.

"What you go to the cure's for?" asked Alphonse roughly.

Camille shrugged his shoulders. "What's that to you, my man?" he said.

Alphonse ripped out an oath. "What you put on airs with me for? 'My man, my man!' By the holy heaven, take that back, you tramp!"

"Perhaps it was a long training in the cloister, perhaps it was superior nature, but Camille responded calmly, "Yes, I will take it back, if you like, but you must not call me a tramp."

"You cannot exorcise a devil in a moment. The game had gone too far. War was in Alphonse's heart.

But there was also in Camille's face the freedom of his new life. "Perhaps," he answered meaningly.

"Then, by heaven, you fight me first!" shouted Alphonse and blocked the way.

An instant later he struck out. It was not altogether an unequal battle, for, although Alphonse was powerful and hardened by laborious life, Camille was well knit, supple and had, unlike most of his comrades in college, been constant in athletic exercises. Alphonse discovered this. By a sudden trick Camille, who was being pressed and punished hard, suddenly brought his assailant to the ground just as a figure appeared on the hill above them, the cure on his way to visit a sick parishioner.

The cure called out apprehensively. At that instant, with a helpless moan, Camille rolled Alphonse and blood gushed from his neck. Alphonse then sprang up and disappeared in the woods. A moment later the cure knelt beside the youth, stanching the blood from the wound. Sleigh bells sounded near. He raised his head and called loudly. The cure lifted him up and felt Camille's heart to see if there was life.

A few minutes later Camille lay in the cure's little room, conscious now and able to tell, little by little, his story—why he had gone to the parish and why he was seeking the cure, but he did not tell then, and he never told, whose knife it was that left a scar up on his neck. People guessed, for Alphonse never came back to the parish, but guessing does not put a man in prison.

The cure was a wise man. There was but one way now, and he was sorry that that way had not been entered on three years before, for the lives of these two young people had been on the road to misery ever since. In any case, after this affair with Alphonse, the church was impossible to Camille. The best words that Camille had heard in his life came now from the cure, who, after walking up and down the room thoughtfully for a time, said, "My son, I will send for Marie."

Marie, Medallion and the cure saw the first sunrise of the new year from beside the saved and sleeping Camille.

The church had one priest less, but the Angel of the Four Corners was glad to see two human souls on the highway to that tavern which men call home.

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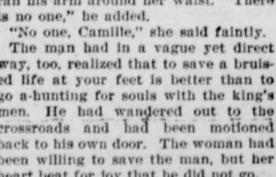
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Camille shrugged his shoulders. "What's that to you, my man?" he said.

Alphonse ripped out an oath. "What you put on airs with me for? 'My man, my man!' By the holy heaven, take that back, you tramp!"

"Perhaps it was a long training in the cloister, perhaps it was superior nature, but Camille responded calmly, "Yes, I will take it back, if you like, but you must not call me a tramp."

"You cannot exorcise a devil in a moment. The game had gone too far. War was in Alphonse's heart.

But there was also in Camille's face the freedom of his new life. "Perhaps," he answered meaningly.

"Then, by heaven, you fight me first!" shouted Alphonse and blocked the way.

An instant later he struck out. It was not altogether an unequal battle, for, although Alphonse was powerful and hardened by laborious life, Camille was well knit, supple and had, unlike most of his comrades in college, been constant in athletic exercises. Alphonse discovered this. By a sudden trick Camille, who was being pressed and punished hard, suddenly brought his assailant to the ground just as a figure appeared on the hill above them, the cure on his way to visit a sick parishioner.

The cure called out apprehensively. At that instant, with a helpless moan, Camille rolled Alphonse and blood gushed from his neck. Alphonse then sprang up and disappeared in the woods. A moment later the cure knelt beside the youth, stanching the blood from the wound. Sleigh bells sounded near. He raised his head and called loudly. The cure lifted him up and felt Camille's heart to see if there was life.

A few minutes later Camille lay in the cure's little room, conscious now and able to tell, little by little, his story—why he had gone to the parish and why he was seeking the cure, but he did not tell then, and he never told, whose knife it was that left a scar up on his neck. People guessed, for Alphonse never came back to the parish, but guessing does not put a man in prison.

The cure was a wise man. There was but one way now, and he was sorry that that way had not been entered on three years before, for the lives of these two young people had been on the road to misery ever since. In any case, after this affair with Alphonse, the church was impossible to Camille. The best words that Camille had heard in his life came now from the cure, who, after walking up and down the room thoughtfully for a time, said, "My son, I will send for Marie."

Marie, Medallion and the cure saw the first sunrise of the new year from beside the saved and sleeping Camille.

The church had one priest less, but the Angel of the Four Corners was glad to see two human souls on the highway to that tavern which men call home.

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The old idea that the body sometimes needs a powerful, drastic, purgative pill has been exploded; for Dr. King's New Life Pills, which are perfectly harmless, gently stimulate liver and bowels to expel poisonous matter, cleanse the system and absolutely cure constipation and sick headache. Only 25c at City Drug Store.

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Grant's Pass, Oregon.

With a helpless moan Camille rolled Alphonse.



With a helpless moan Camille rolled Alphonse.

fore he reached Camille, the snarl of a man in whom there are working envy and hate.

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