

Springtime

Novelized by
**Porter Emerson
Browne**

From the Play of the Same
Name by Booth Tarkington
and Harry Leon Wilson

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(Continued from first page.)

plain about the butterfly. But would these things, that explanation, be sufficient? She did not know. Her father was a strange man, a proud man, a man reserved. She loved him much. But sometimes he was strange. She did not understand. She felt far from him, very far. And Aunt Marguerite was even the shadow of her brother. And so she hurried on.

In the great room of the house of Valette, a room that once had had even the splendor of the old chateau in the Norman hills, but now time worn, sunk into the dullness that marks decay, were they preparing to do their last dead slave the honor of the candles, for old Christian had been obedient, faithful—yes, even to the end of his days. And for this he was to have the honor that comes to the Valettes in their going.

It was old Louise who counted the candles now for the last slave, the slave that was dead. Stout, heavy featured, clad in rough gray gown and cap of spotted white, she bent over the leather box that lay upon the old table, taking therefrom the candles and counting them as she did so. And as she counted there came to the kindly old face a look of worry.

At length she turned, hearing footsteps. Came through the door the sister of M. de Valette. Across the summer room she came, a highborn, high bred woman of sixty, a woman of delicate, pale, gentle face and slender figure. Old Louise courtesied.

"You are counting the candles?" asked Mlle. de Valette. It was a question that was not a question. She went on. "My brother tolls the bell for old Christian with his own hands."

The old servant shrugged her shoulders. "Who else is there to do it?" she queried.

Mlle. de Valette said, "Le maître will play the requiem." She was counting the candles. Finishing, she exclaimed: "My good Louise, there are not enough! Old Christian was sixty-three."

"Again Louise shrugged her shoulders. "Here are thirty-eight," she grumbled. "That should be enough. Old Christian! He was but a black slave, after all." She shook her head.

In the year of our Lord 1815, you know, slaves, especially dead slaves, were not of much value. Candles were. Mlle. de Valette, pty in her gentle heart, would have made reply, but ere opportunity was hers there had entered the room Father O'Mara, priest of the parish—a kindly man Father O'Mara, who lived much in the out of doors, a strong man and rugged and a man of the kind that it were good for God to have in his labor.

He spoke in a full, deep voice that echoed resonantly from the dim rafters with barely a trace of brogue. The old servant courtesied, Mlle. de Valette inclined her head graciously.

"You are welcome, Father O'Mara," she said. "We are preparing the candles, you see. But there are not enough, Louise!"

The old servant turned. Mlle. de Valette, with a light gesture, indicated where, upon the walls, tarnished sconces upheld blackened candles.

"Take those," she commanded. "I will look through the house for others."

She bowed to Father O'Mara, who himself bowed, and passed through the door. Old Louise obediently went from sconce to sconce, gathering the half burned bits of wax and wick that were to be the last earthly tribute to the dead slave. At length she came again to the table, laying the old beside the new.

Father O'Mara took a pinch of snuff, watching her with shrewd, kindly gray eyes.

"Not enough candles?" he said at length. The old servant shook her head.

"No, father," she returned, "not unless you can convince the master that old Christian was much younger than he said he was. Wouldn't you say, now, that he wouldn't have been more than—she stopped, counting the new candles and the old—'forty-four?' she finished."

"Much more than forty-four, Louise."

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said Father O'Mara, smiling a little. "But what has his age to do with it? Four candles are enough for your chapel altar."

"His age has all to do with it," she replied. "You haven't been long in this parish, father, or you would know."

He lifted his hands. "Long!" he exclaimed. "My soul! I've been priest of this parish sixteen years come Easter!"

"It is seventeen years since the last death in the De Valette family. That was Mlle. Madeleine's mother. She pass' to the blessed saints when Mlle. Madeleine was born, the year before you came, so you do not know our custom here of Valette, father."

"Your custom?"

"The custom of the candles. In this family of Valette they call it the honor of the candles. They have that for hundreds of years. Since the time of the Emperor Charlemagne, in France, one bears, whenever death comes to visit one of this family candles to the number of his years, one candle for each year, were set upon the altar of the old chapel at the chateau in Normandy. No matter how or where one of the family died, perhaps at home, perhaps far away in battle, there were the candles upon the altar. It is a curious custom, father. And the old tales say it led to a tragedy once. But because of that do you think that the De Valettes abandoned it? Not they! The De Valettes do not abandon custom."

"A tragedy?" The priest was interested. He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his cased knees.

Louise went on: "It was a De Valette who went to the crusades, they say. He was a lover, father, and the woman he loved was his wife. He left her there a bride and very beautiful. He was a great soldier, and King Philip, in the Holy Land, made him count of all Valette, in Normandy. So he rode home gayly all the long journey to kiss his bride again. But as he passed by the chapel before he came to the chateau he saw by the lighted window there were candles on the altar. So he went in to count them. They were twenty. His wife, she was twenty."

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"The very last of all the hundreds that were in other days. All are sold or dead. Ah, these few acres that the Americans have left the master! It is good that these few acres don't die!" Father O'Mara opened his snuffbox. Deliberately he took a little of the pungent powder and placed it to his nostrils.

"The chapel bell has stopped," he said.

Louise, hastily gathering up the candles upon the table, placed them in the box.

"Then the master will be coming," she cried.

"We were trying to make out what that there thing was," replied the man, pointing to the comet.

"And what do you imagine it is?"

"Dunno, your honor, but Bill Jones here, as knows most things, says as how it's a star that's sprung a leak."—London Telegraph.

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The officers were on the quarter deck
looking at a comet and noticed an eager
discussion among the crew forward.
The captain called one of the men aft
and asked him what was the subject
of discussion.

"We were trying to make out what
that there thing was," replied the man,
pointing to the comet.
"And what do you imagine it is?"
"Dunno, your honor, but Bill Jones
here, as knows most things, says as
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ty, father. So he knew. And then he
set his dagger at the armpit where
the breastplate does not meet the
shoulder piece, reaching his heart that
way. Next day the candles were for
him."

She finished. The priest sat back in
his chair, folding his hands.

"But that," he said, "was in the old
world and hundreds of years ago."

She turned a little to him.

"What is that to the master?" she
demanded. "It is enough for him
that he is a De Valette. Here are we
in Louisiana. But what difference has
the new world made to the De Valettes
when they come here and bring their
customs with them? They build our
chapel yonder." She thrust her arm
behind her, indicating the window
through which one might see the
heavy spire of stone "like the one in
Normandy," close by the house. "Yes,"
she went on grumblingly, "they must
have their chapel—even an organist,
old Lemaitre, the master keeps here—
one more mouth to feed! And he can
do nothing in the world but play
the organ. And now the master has
said that old Christian, though he was
a slave, must receive the honor of the
candles because he has been a mem-
ber of the household all his life."

Father O'Mara said:
"That does honor to your master's
heart."

"In his place," muttered Louise, "I
would rather save some for my stom-
ach. Old Christian was sixty-three
years old. Here, with these others
from the sconces, I can make no more
than forty-four candles. If the master
makes us buy more to fill the count,
there will be no more than salad to
eat tomorrow."

Father O'Mara rose, wandering to
the window.

"So Christian was the last slave be-
longing to M. de Valette?" he said.

the air of being not more than forty-
four."

"Which means," stated M. de Va-
lette, "that you have but forty-four
candles."

"Miche," cried Louise extenuatingly,
"Mlle. Marguerite looks for others."
"That will not do. We must have
no burnt ones. Throw out those that
are burnt."

Louise raised her hands protesting-
ly.

"But, Miche"—
"Go to the village and buy more.
Take the box. See that it is filled.
You know where the money is kept."

She made a gesture of imploration,
but the master stood before her inex-
orable. Slowly she opened the drawer
in the table. She took therefrom a
few coins of small denomination.

"It is the last," she whispered—"the
very last."

He said simply:
"Have the box filled." He turned
from her, saying to the priest:
"Father O'Mara."

The latter turned.

"Touching the matter of masses for
old Christian?" he began, but M. de
Valette interrupted him.

"It is in regard to another ceremony
that I wish to instruct you. One of
'he quick, it is, not of the dead.'"
O'Mara said, smiling:
"I have but christenings and wed-
dings. I