

Duncan Campbell Scott

Two Stories

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1862-1947

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La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec

The English Collection

Volume 5 : version 1.3

Du même auteur, à la Bibliothèque :

In the Village of Viger

Two Stories

The Triumph of Marie Laviolette

It was a still night. Long clouds, pervaded with a peculiar moony lustre, lay above the horizon ; higher in the sky hung patches of diaphanous vapor, with a vast and steady outline, pierced here and there with stars. The very air had the seeming consciousness that awaits some event expected since the framing of the world. Even the black hill shrouded with pines, at whose base the river swept, seemed to wait. Over its crest, at first twinkling in the pines and then swinging clear above, the stars rose. Even the rapids seemed controlled, and their contemplative murmur was withdrawn and sounded afar off. Through the dense shadows of the forest, climbing a steep road cut into the bank high above the river, two figures were toiling. The man, with a canoe on his shoulders, was of gigantic stature, and carried this burden as lightly as a feather. Behind him walked a young girl, who paused now and then in the ascent to gaze through the gaps in the trees, over the river to the hill, which covered the horizon with its shadow. After the steep there was a level piece of road, and then a descent, almost to the river. As they reached

the foot of this hill, the man under the canoe gave a long whoop, and a few moments after a turn in the road brought them in view of a log-house, set back from the road. The door was open, and there was a light within.

“Is that you, Donald ?” asked a voice.

“It is,” shouted the man under the canoe, “and Maggie.”

“Why Maggie ; what did she come for ?”

“Came to see her father, I guess ; besides, she may be of some use.”

“She wasn’t asked, and besides she may be in the way.”

This last remark was almost whispered to the giant, as he swung the canoe off his shoulder. Maggie, without speaking, went into the house ; the man followed.

There was only one room in this house ; in the middle of the floor stood a stove, on a raised square of hard clay ; around three sides ran two rows of bunks, one above the other ; on the fourth side was built a sort of loft, reached by a small ladder ; there was one window ; the walls were discolored with smoke, and a smoky odor pervaded the place.

Before Maggie O’Mara fell asleep that night, she

heard her father and Black Donald talk over their plans.

“Is it the phosphates ?” said Donald.

“It is, you’re right, Donald, it’s the phosphates.”

“Is it a good show now ?”

“It is, you’re right, it’s a fine show. You know, knowing the phosphates as I do, I would call it a damn fine show, and there’s no use talking but it is.”

“If it turns out well now, how would it show up ?”

“That’s rather hard to tell, Donald ; you know enough about the phosphates to know that ; it’s as hard to tell as how a woman is going to behave after she’s married ; but if a capitalist was to plank down ten thousand dollars on this here stove for that there show, I’d tell him to shove it in the fire.

Donald whistled softly to himself.

“But there’s somebody on it ?”

“There is ; that is, there’s a Frenchman.”

“Well, what’s the good of our bothering over it ; I guess he’ll hang on, won’t he ?”

“Perhaps he will, and perhaps he won’t ; perhaps he could be coaxed off ; and perhaps he could be scared off. You see, he don’t know anything more about them phosphates being there than that girl Mag does ; and

he's only a Frenchman. He's got a young thing for a wife there, and a little kid ; and that's all there is to it."

"Well, and what are you going to do ?"

"I'm going to coax him, and you're going to scare him, but Frenchy's got to go. We'll go over to the 'show' in the morning and put in a shot, if you like."

"Is it far ?"

"No, it's back of the lake, under a little hill like."

The next morning a dense mist had shrouded the world ; it filled in the gaps in the trees and hung close to the river ; everything was dripping with moisture. It was so dark that Marie Laviolette had to light a candle to get the breakfast. Going about her work, singing softly to herself, she heard a sound a little heavier than the discharge of a gun. She listened, but it did not come again ; and when her husband came in from his morning work she said, "Gabriel, what was that firing back in the woods ?"

"Some prospectors letting off a blast, I suppose. I saw the little man they call The Tim O'Mara around here last week."

"Perhaps they're finding phosphates on our land."

"Never a bit ; no such good luck ; I've been over the whole place, and there isn't a dollar's worth on it."

But whether this was so or not, there was not a happier home on the Lievres than Gabriel Laviolette's. He had built his log-house about a stone's throw from the river; it was as white without and within as whitewash could make it. A group of sunflowers blazed against the shining wall, and scarlet runners covered the windows. The floor was as clean as the walls; just under the ceiling there was a row of saints pictures; there was the good St. Anne, and St. Nicholas with the children in the tub, and one of the Christ, with His wounded heart upon His breast. On a very high chest of drawers, that Marie had brought from her own home when she was married, was a clock, and when it struck a rooster came out and crowed. Her little baby boy, Desirè, watched every hour for this rooster to crow. Gabriel had the whole of fifty acres of land of his own, but most of it was covered with timber. He had cleared some new land, and had a fine crop of oats, which he was going to sell to the lumbermen for their horses.

A few days after Marie had heard the shot in the woods, she took Desirè in her arms and went back to where Gabriel was working. He was where she had expected to find him, but as two men were talking to him, she put Desirè down and let him play about in the long grass. By and by the men went away.

“Who were they ?” asked Marie.

“The little man was The Tim O’Mara ; the great big man was Black Donald McDonald.”

“I don’t like them ; they look very bad.”

“And they’re just as bad as they look ; that Black Donald is the worst man on the river. I have heard tell how he has smashed a man’s jaw with one blow.”

“Oh, Gabriel, I hope he’ll never be angry with you.”

“I’m not afraid of him. They’re over at the old shanty.”

“And what did they want ?”

“They want us to sell the place ; they say they will give us a thousand dollars for it.”

“And what do they want it for ?”

“I don’t know ; I didn’t ask them, and they didn’t tell me.”

“Gabriel, they’ve found something on our land.”

“Never, there’s nothing on it ; but –” he hesitated.

“But we won’t give it up, will we ?” said Marie.

Gabriel shook his head.

Day after day Tim O’Mara came to talk it over with him. Gabriel asked him what he wanted the land for. “I don’t mind telling you,” said Tim ; “I have found the phosphates back here about two miles, not anywhere

near your land, but I want to get a clear road to the river, and your place is on the line. We're going to work that mine, and we want all this land for a farm, and for horses and such."

Gabriel told Marie this. "And where will we go if we leave here?" she asked.

"Well, there are plenty of places."

"But this is our home, and besides, if they want our land for all that, it is worth more."

Gabriel was wavering. The next time he saw Tim that speculator offered him twice as much. He had hard work to keep from saying yes, but he said "Well, I'll see." "He's just about done," said Tim to Black Donald, "if that little wife of his doesn't talk him over."

When Gabriel told Marie of this last offer she said, "Gabriel, don't give in; I'm sure they don't want it for that; they could get out to the river in other places; say No, and we'll wait and see what comes of it."

"It's always the way with you women," said Gabriel. "You're afraid to make a move."

He was angry and went out on the river in his canoe; but Marie had won her point."

"It's no use," said Tim, "the Frenchman won't budge."

“He will,” said Black Donald, with an oath.

“I don’t see why you can’t leave him alone, there’s plenty of phosphates lying around,” said Maggie, who was leaning against the door looking across the river.

“What do you know about phosphates ?”

“I was back and looked at the show.”

Her father jumped up and came over to her. “Will you give the thing away ?” he said.

“Let go of me, I’ll do as I please,” she said, sullenly, shaking him off.

“That girl’s taken a shine to Frenchy,” he said.

“Can’t you leave her alone,” said Black Donald, with a scowl. So they all fought and did not speak for three days.

One day when Marie was working outside, she took Desirè and put him on the grass to play. He had a pink blossom of hollyhock and a wooden horse, which divided his attention. He would throw the flower as far as he could, and then crawl after it and come back and present it to the horse, which stood stolidly observing the proceedings. Marie kept her eye on him, and called to him not to get too near the edge of the bank, and once she had to go and lift him back to safety. Then she left him and went into the house. When she came back,

after a moment, he was nowhere to be seen. There stood the wooden horse headed to the river ; but Desirè was not by. She ran to the edge of the bank and looked over ; he was not there ; he could not have crept as far as the bushes, she had only been away a moment. She rushed into the house and gave one hurried glance at the cradle. She felt faint ; “Desirè,” she cried, “Desirè !” and listened. There was no cry in answer ; she ran into the bushes and then back, crying out all the time “Desirè, Desirè ! Then she rushed down to the landing and looked along the shore. There was nothing ; he was not there. But something caught her eye in the water ; her heart stopped ; slowly in the turn of an eddy rose the pink hollyhock blossom. She darted into the water with a scream, and holding on by a bush waded in up to her waist, and leaned far enough out to catch it as it rounded with the swirl. Then her one thought was for Gabriel ; he could swim and dive, and she could do nothing. So she ran back through the garden and into the clearance, shouting – “Gabriel, Gabriel !” She knew he was back at the lake nearly a mile away. On she went, struggling over the uneven ground, calling out as she caught her breath, and almost falling with terror and fatigue, until at last her voice reached him where he was working.

Before Marie had returned to the river, Gabriel had dived time and again, and was standing up in his canoe

paddling slowly with the current. Down he went ; and Marie climbed the point and sank there to watch him. He went right into the head of the rapid, until she thought he would go over ; but he turned and came back. Then he paddled about the shores until almost dark, Marie watching him in a sort of dream. Suddenly he called out “Desirè,” with a loud, choking cry. Marie answered him from the bank, and crying “Desirè, Gabriel !” ran along the shore to the landing.

The summer days passed ; but how heavily without Desirè. Marie could not bear to look at the river ; she tried not to think of it, and would shut her eyes when she went out, and not open them until she had turned away. She had pressed the hollyhock in her prayerbook ; the wooden horse and the cradle she kept by themselves, until Gabriel would not let her have them, she cried so much, and hid them away and would not tell her where.

Black Donald and Tim were seldom seen ; they made no overtures for the place, and seemed to have forgotten they had a desire for it. Maggie was the only one who seemed to pay any attention to her neighbors. Twice, when Gabriel was mowing, she rose almost from under his eyes, as he paused to whet his scythe, and went trailing through the grass, giving him a look over her shoulder. Then she would sit watching coolly

from the bush as Marie and he turned the hay. This enraged Black Donald. "The girl's daft on the Frenchman," he said one night to Tim. That gentleman was mending a pair of shoe-packs beside a smoky coal-oil lamp. "Maggie's a fine girl," said he.

"And what for do you say that?"

"Because you are too coarse, Donald; if you were educated, now, you might carry on the negotiations in French with Frenchy; and there's no telling what would come of it."

"Come of it – I'll French him. I'll talk to him in a language he can understand. I'll fire his hay for him, and see how he likes that."

There was a silence, broken only by the pulling of Tim's threads, and Donald's hard breathing. "That mightn't be a bad idea," said the former, quietly; "to warm him up a bit. But no more was said about it, and Black Donald went off to Paltimore in a rage with Maggie.

Gabriel had built his stack in the field and was cutting his last hay; when he had circled round a charred stump and had cut the hay clean away from it, he noticed a piece of paper pinned there. He pulled it off; there was writing on it; English writing. Gabriel put it in his hat and showed it to Marie. She read it to

him. “Look out, Mr. Lavolet, watch that hay, that’s wat’s the mater, it may get skorchd.”

“It means that they’ll burn the stack, Oh, Gabriel !”

“They’ll burn the stack, will they ; well, let them try, that’s all. I can’t sit out there and watch it all night, but if they burn my hay –” and here he brought his fist down on the table, thinking of all the work he had had with it ; but he did not finish his threat. Every morning at gray daylight he walked out to his field ; but two weeks passed and no sign of fire was on the stack.

Marie used to go out and help Gabriel with his work ; she was so lonely.

“I wish you’d sing a bit,” he said.

“Gabriel, I couldn’t sing.”

“Sing now ‘Sur le pont d’Avignon’.” He tried to start it himself ; she joined in and he let her finish it alone. “That’s good,” he smiled ; but Marie commenced to cry. Gabriel went on with his work bitterly.

When Marie went home to get supper, she found a scrap of paper pinned to the door. She read it with her hand on the latch. “Missus, your little kid ant drown, that’s all ; if you go of that land that’s all right, but if you don’t go he’s safe enuf, but you won’t hay him.”

Marie hung to the door for support ; then she went

in and had to sit down, trembling all over. She went about her work wildly. Now she was all for giving up the land. "I'll have him back," her heart cried, "my little boy ; I'll have him back again." She let Gabriel sit at his supper for a minute as if nothing had happened, then she cried out – "He's alive, Desirè isn't drowned !" He thought she had gone crazy. She went on, leaving her place and going over to him. "There, this paper says so ; I can have him back if we only leave the land and let them have it."

"The land ?" cried Gabriel, with an angry accent.

"Oh, Gabriel, what's the good of the land to us without Desirè ! Let them have it."

"The land ? Let who have it ?"

"The Black Donald and the little man."

"Never, I'll never let them have it."

Marie tried to coax him, but he would not hear. He was angry, and struck the table, and broke his dish. "You women are always talking," he said ; and then he was silent.

He did not eat a thing, but Marie sat and watched him thinking. He walked up and down for a while, and then went out. As it was getting quite dark, Marie lit a candle. It threw a light on Gabriel, who came in carrying Desirè's cradle and the wooden horse. Marie

flung her arms around his neck and commenced to cry softly ; she thought “He has made up his mind to sell the land.” When she asked him that, he said, “No, I am going to have Desirè, and I am not going to sell the land.” Then a terrible look came into his eyes, and he walked to and fro and then stood and glared at the floor, with his hands in his pockets. Marie was frightened when she saw him take up his hat ; she put herself against the door.

“I am going to get Desirè,” he said. She could not keep him, but she snatched her shawl, threw it over her head, and followed. It was bright starlight ; a whippoorwill in the dark woods gave his notes boldly ; his call was answered from the black hill, rebounding across the rapids. Marie kept close to Gabriel, who walked fast ; she wanted to say something to him about being careful, but she wanted to get Desirè and she did not know what to say. Just as they got to the door she touched him on the shoulder. He did not feel her ; he struck the door with his fist and shoved it open.

The room was dimly lighted ; by the stove, in which a little fire was burning, Tim sat hunched together smoking ; Black Donald was smoothing a whiphandle ; Maggie was hidden in the shadow.

“I want my boy,” said Gabriel.

No one spoke for a moment ; then Tim glanced up at

Black Donald. "He wants his boy, you know !"

"What have I got to do with his boy ?"

"One of you devils has got my little boy, Desirè, and I have come to have him or I want to know the reason."

"Your little boy ain't here, mister."

"He is, or you've got him somewhere, and I'm going to have him, or else I'll kill somebody before I move out of here."

"I guess," said Black Donald, putting down the stick and rising slowly to his full height, "you'd better kill me."

Marie, standing by the door, gave a little moan, and hid her face in her shawl. Gabriel stood with his hands by his side as Black Donald came on.

"You'd better go away, Mr. Lavilet," he said, reaching out one big hand for his shoulder. Gabriel tossed it aside and stepped back. Black Donald hit down on him and broke through his guard. Gabriel staggered, but recovered himself, and gathering all his force, sprang and struck at the same time. Black Donald flew off his feet and fell crashing into the stove, knocking it off its legs ; the pipes came down with a clatter. He did not move. Maggie was down over him, holding up his head ; her hand showed some blood.

“You’d better get away before you kill me,” said Tim, who was bringing some water in a dish.

Gabriel strode out past Marie ; she followed him, but just on the threshold she turned about and called, “Desirè ! Desirè !” very clearly ; but there was no answer. She cast a glance at the group by the dismantled stove ; a thin smoke from the fire was ascending into the room and travelling along the rafters ; the wounded man lay immovable.

The night was as clear as before, only the whippoorwill had come over the river and was in the woods, and the two birds moved about, singing monotonously. The rapids roared below the black hill, with no sound beyond.

Gabriel owned he had spoiled everything by fighting. “Now we’ll never get him back,” he said, moodily. Marie turned white ; she could not blame him, because she had let him go without trying to hold him.

One night, just a week after his fight with Black Donald, Gabriel woke up to see a glow on the wall. He sprang out of bed and looked from the window ; there was a glare in the sky. Marie sprang up and lit a candle.

“Thats the hay, sure,” said Gabriel, as he struggled into his clothes. He snatched his gun and ran out. Marie bolted the door and put out the candle ; then she sat and

cried ; and the fire on the wall swelled and wavered through her tears. When Gabriel got to the stack it was burning up straight into the air. He could do nothing ; he stood and watched it blaze. Gradually it smouldered down, and in a transport of rage, he fired his gun into the woods. An owl commenced to hoot, and he went home, half blinded, through the dark.

Black Donald had set fire to the hay ; Tim did not try to prevent him, and Maggie could not. He went about with his head tied up in a red handkerchief, and he swore, as deep as he knew, not to take it off until he had his revenge. But the burning of the stack did not satisfy him.

“I must have a shot at him,” he growled to himself. He was still angry at Maggie. One night she went out and did not come back until late ; this time he was furious and commenced to break things like a child. Tim got up on one of the highest bunks and kept perfectly still, while Donald raged underneath. When the girl came in, he sat down still for a while, then he said, quietly enough : “Where have you been ?”

“That’s none of your business,” she said.

He leaped up and caught her around the neck. Tim raised a doleful howl from the bunk, and, as Donald was near enough, he threw a blanket over his head. He let Maggie go and threw off the blanket ; then he pulled

Tim down, threw him on the floor, and stood over him for a minute. Then he went out and did not come back that night.

Marie could neither sleep nor eat ; she thought of Desirè all the time. Gabriel, too, had become morose ; he walked about with a frown, looking at the ground. He found that a bear had had come into his oats one night, and he had built a little stand by a stump, and for two or three nights had sat there watching for him, and thinking all the time how he could get Desirè back. Black Donald knew he was watching for the bear. He said to Tim, when he thought that Maggie was nowhere about :

“I must have a shot at him ; there’s no use. He’s down there every night watching his oats. I must have a shot at him, that’s all there is to it.” His eyes were bloodshot, and he broke his pipe-stem in his teeth.

Gabriel had been half wild all that day because Marie would do nothing but cry, and his fighting mood came over him again. “To-night,” he said to himself, “I’ll leave the bear alone, but I’ll have Desirè back.”

“I’m going out to watch the oats,” he said to Marie, and when it was darkser he slipped away. When he had been gone some time she noticed he had not taken his gun. She was frightened when she thought the bear might come in when Gabriel had no gun ; so she took it

up and went off to the oat-field.

So soon as it had got dark, Maggie had stolen away from the shanty, and had gone down to the place where Gabriel had waited for the bear. She laid down on the stand and waited, but Gabriel did not come. After an hour she heard things breaking in the woods.

“That’s Donald,” she thought. But he had been watching her for a long while. The moon was shining dimly behind a cloud. He leaned against a tree, and every little while he would raise his gun and take aim ; but he did not shoot. “That thing’s too white for the Frenchman,” he thought. The crashing in the bush grew louder, and then ceased altogether. Suddenly a huge black bear came swinging down into the oats. He rolled about and pulled them down with his paws. Maggie watched him and drew a knife she had with her. Suddenly the bear rose up and came by just beside the stand. Maggie leaned over and struck down on him. The knife went in between his shoulder-blades, but her blow was not strong enough, and she had lost her balance, and fell almost over on the bear. He gave a growl, and as she tried to recover herself he rose and pulled her off the stand. She tried to cry out, and struggled with him. Just then Marie came up with the gun ; she thought it was Gabriel struggling with the bear. “Gabriel !” she screamed ; “Gabriel !” and she

thought it was all over with him. But she put the muzzle up to the bear and fired. He swayed for a moment, and then fell over, and commenced to struggle about in the oats.

Maggie was badly torn, but she tried to sit up. Marie shredded her apron into strips and bound up her arm. Then Black Donald appeared above them, looking like a demon in the half light. Maggie made him take the handkerchief off his head to bind her wrist ; he looked about for Gabriel and then pulled it off.

“I won’t forget you, missis,” said Maggie, as she walked away holding to Black Donald.

Marie waited until they had gone a little way, then she left the gun and the bear and fled.

When Black Donald and Maggie got home they found Tim tied to his chair and the room in disorder. He was going to say : “Frenchy’s been here, and he’s gone crazy ;” but he saw how pale Maggie was and the blood on her dress. Gabriel had tied him in his chair, and had ransacked the room ; but he did not find Desirè.

Marie was sure now they would never get him back ; but Gabriel was curing the bear’s skin. “It will make a coat for Desirè,” he said.

“I believe he’s drowned all the time,” moaned Marie, “and they just said he was alive to make us give

up the land.”

Gabriel commenced to take in the oats ; it was a fine crop, close and strong, and stood above the lake on the clear land. From a distance it looked like a wedge of gold driven into the forest. Marie worked with him, binding it and loading it on the cart. She could not sing, although Gabriel wanted her to, and would say : “Come now, ‘Sur le Pont d’Avignon’.” But when she would not, he would go on working as though he was never going to leave off, until the sweat ran into his eyes. Marie always went home early to get the meals. One evening she went back to get supper. It was raining across the river, and a great rainbow sprang up, hardly touching the plain with one of its delicate wavering feet, curving grandly with deepened and gorgeous colors against the black cloud, until the hill cut it off. Marie looked at it, with a hand on the latch, and then she pushed the door ; but there was something against it. Desirè had taken to his feet, had pushed a chair all across the room, and was holding it against the door. When his mother overcame the soft resistance, he laughed up in her face. There he was in his little pink dress, the same as the day she lost him, only bigger and stronger. When Gabriel came home supper was not ready ; but Marie, when she heard him coming, put Desirè in his cradle and threw the bear-skin over him, and when Gabriel came in he stood up just as if he had

been told, and his father had to catch him to keep him from falling out of the cradle.

That night when Marie undressed Desirè she found a piece of paper pinned to his dress. She read there, printed with a pencil, these words :

“Dear Missis : What did I tell you ? You safed my lif’. I g’e’s your lit’le kid is al’rite. There’s fosfates on your place, that’s the reason why. My dad ses it’s worth a pot. Tel’ your man to go back by the old road and by the end of the lak’. The show is there. That’s all. We’re going to get out.

“Maggie O’Mara.”

The next day Gabriel went back to see the ‘show’, and Marie went with him, and carried Desirè all the way ; but his father had to bring him back, he had grown so heavy.

A week after this, a curious procession took its way down the steep road ; first came Black Donald, carrying a canoe on his back ; then came a wagon drawn by an ox and a horse ; in the centre of the wagon a table was turned with its legs in the air ; between these sat Maggie on a feather-bed and some brightly-colored quilts. She had her eyes half closed, her arm was

bandaged, her face was rather pale and wore a contemptuous expression as she leaned back against one of the table-legs. Tim brought up the rear, with a pipe in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, and a whip under his arm, the lash of which trailed on the ground. It had been raining all day and the road was muddy ; water lay in the ruts. Gradually the clouds rolled off, and the night came, still and very clear, with many stars over the black hill, and the rapids roaring loudly through the dark.

Scribner's magazine. /

Volume 12, Issue 2, August, 1892.

The Ducharmes of The Baskatonge

In the heart of a northern wilderness, on the shore of an unnamed lake, stands the ruin of a small hut. Half the roof has fallen in. The logs are rotted and covered with moss. In the dark corners spectral weeds and ferns die longing for the sun. The winter wind, untamed out of the north, charges against its crumbling walls and drives the sifted snow, hissing like steam, across the surface of the lake. The haunts of men seem as far away as the stars that throb faintly in the lonely vastness of the summer sky. The silence that dwells forever in the waste places of the world is shaken by unheeded storms and the muffled cries of life in the gloom of the immense forests that darken beneath her brooding wings.

“Ducharme ! Ducharme ! François – has – gone – over – the – rapids !” The words came in short gusts across the water to where Octave Ducharme stood, pike-pole in hand. They were running the logs on the St. Joseph. The river was racing over the rapids to where the falls were roaring and pulsing under the dome of mist which the April sun was smiting with

rainbow shafts that broke and glanced upon its shifting sides.

Ducharme struck his pole deep into the boom, and gazed under his hand up the gleaming river. The water was broken and curled, and came turning the sudden bend with foam-topped waves that were bright now in the afternoon sun. He looked steadily for a moment ; then, as he saw something drift into sight other than the dipping logs, he pulled off his heavy boots, threw down his hat, and watched again. There was a rush of men on the river road, with waving of arms and confused cries. But Ducharme ever watched the speck in the swift water, that drew near to him and took the shape of a white face drawn with pain and rocked to and fro in the current. They were shouting from the bank : “Dont go in !” – “You’ll both go over !” – “François !” – “Octave !” – shouts – groans – wild jostling of men, and waving of arms. But he stood as calmly as if he were watching a musk-rat cleave the brown waters of some quiet lake in an ever-widening wedge. Suddenly he drew himself up and plunged just in front of the floating face. The two men spoke to one another quickly as they were drifted swiftly together.

“Oh ! Octave, my leg, my leg !”

“Never mind, little brother ; put your hand on my shoulder.”

The strong arms were making new eddies in the torn water. The crowd ran along the bank shouting wildly : “Get into the eddy !” – “Ducharme !” – “Ducharme !” – “Strike into the eddy, or you’ll go over !” – “My God !” – “Catch the boom !” – “Strike in !” – “We’ll pull you out !”

They ran out on the boom where it was swinging dangerously at the mouth of the chute. The water there was curved in a great glassy heap with long wiry streaks. Above was the eddy, wheeling and turning. To get into its power was safety. The swimmer kept edging in. In a few moments he would be abreast of it. He was muttering, under his breath : Keep up, little brother ; keep up, little brother.”

The men on the shore strained forward, struck in the air as if swimming, stamped with their feet, and reached out over the river.

“My God ! he’s safe !” – “No ! he’s missed it !” One huge fellow sank on his knees and hid his face. “No ! boys, he’s in !” – “They’ll get him !” – “They’re against the boom !” – “Baptiste has him !” – “They’re safe !” – and a wild yell of joy tore through the air.

“Take him first,” Octave was saying ; “two of you hang on – the water will carry him under – I’m all right – pull him along out of the current – there now.”

The men stood around as they strove to bring François to, and when he opened his eyes they went back to their work and left him with Octave and the three who had taken him out of the water. His leg was broken in two places and his head was gashed ; but he was all right, he said, and they carried him into the shanty.

That was almost the first year they were on the river together, and all the dangers that crowded thickly about them in the years of toil that followed were warded off by the strength of four arms ; for one Ducharme was never alone, and it was always “The Ducharmes,” not “François” or “Octave”, but “The Ducharmes,” “The Ducharmes of the Baskatonge.” Whether hunting, or logging, or driving, or running the rafts down to the St. Lawrence, or at home on the Baskatonge, it was always the same. “Have you the Ducharmes ?” one foreman would say to another ; “then you’re all right.”

How the work went when there was Octave to sing and François to lead the musical cry, when all arms strained together ! And they never seemed to think of one another. They went along unconsciously, working together, and when François was hurt it was Octave who stayed with him until he was better.

“Octave, Octave,” François would say, but in return

it was always "Little brother." No one could tell why. One was as tall as the other, and as strong. They were like two stalwart young pines, straight and towering ; only, if you watched them closely, François never even lit his pipe until he saw the smoke part Octave's lips and curl about his face. Octave was always first. They did not know it themselves, but François always followed.

Their little house back on the Baskatonge was heaped round with snow in the winter, and the frosty wind blew no wreaths of smoke from the chimney into the pines. But that had not always been so ; there had been a time when there were four Ducharmes instead of two, and when the frost drew curtains across the windows of the happiest home in the north.

Hypolite Ducharme was a trapper and hunter who sold his furs to the traders, and never swung an axe except to cut his own firewood. He had lived for some years on the Baskatonge, and did not find himself lonely until one day, when he took his winter's haul of furs down the Gatineau, he saw a pair of brown eyes that told him plainly that he could not visit his traps day after day, and hear the sound of the wild fowl driving in a wedge southward to the sunlit sweeps of reeds and curved reaches of moving marsh grass, without seeing that house, back from the river about the flight of a

wounded partridge, and the girl with the plaited hair working to the music of her own voice.

At noon the next day many were the bends and rapids between him and the three logs where he had landed the night before ; but, as his canoe steadied and swung out into the current, he was watched from the bushes, and until the river hid behind the stony spur of the hill, that never before looked as cold and hopeless, the dark eyes under the arch of brown hands timed the flashing paddle, and when the sun burned red for a moment on the canoe, as it turned behind the hill – would it ever come back ? – the November mists came into that May day, and the wind kept turning the dead leaves in the forest.

The way had never seemed so long before ; the canoe was never so heavy, and one season he had twice as many furs. But when he turned north again it was a short road he had to travel ; and when he reached the rocky point the current bore him a white wood-lily, which he took out of the water as it grazed the canoe-side.

He travelled north again, but not alone, and many were the thickets that trembled to the unknown sound of a woman's voice. For it was a little matter whether it was on the Baskatonge or the Gatineau that Marie Delorme lived so long as she was with the man she

loved.

But that was long ago ; and all the marks which Hypolite Ducharme blazed on the trees have grown over in ridges, and when an otter is caught he is always the finest the trapper ever saw.

Before Hypolite was killed by the bear, and before Marie died, the boys had learned all their father could teach them of hunting and trapping ; but when they were left to themselves they chose to go to the shanties, where there was company and better pay. But in the summer, when the season's work was over, they went back to their old home and hunted and fished until the autumn came again.

When they were there alone they would often talk of their father and mother. Octave always remembered his father as he saw him striding through the bushes with a young doe across his shoulders ; but François always remembered him as he found him, that night, dead under the bear. Their mother, too – whenever Octave spoke her name a cheery face looked out into the night to welcome the tired trappers ; but François saw her pale, and heard the thin voice, “François, François, I am dying !” And now they were not so much alone as they had been. Gradually the settlement had crept boldly from the Desert, up the river and back into the country, and now in a day's journey there were many families ;

on the Bras d'Or, Dubois and Granden ; on the Claire, Charbonneau and Faubert ; and on the Castor, McMorrان – White McMorrان, to distinguish him from his brother, who, however, was never called Black McMorrان – and the Phelans and O'Dohertys.

The Castor, where there were no beavers, but only broken dams, was five miles from the Baskatonge. There was a path through the woods, and an hour and a quarter would take a good walker from the Baskatonge to the McMorrان's. Octave Ducharme could walk that distance easily in an hour, but then few could walk as fast as Octave.

Already the McMorrان's place began to look like a farm ; there were always fires eating into the bush, and the small barn was getting too small.

The Ducharmes were favorites with their neighbors. Octave always did most of the talking ; and as François was quick-tempered, he had sometimes to step forward and take the lead in a conversation that would have surely ended in blows. It was seldom that this last ever happened, as the general saying was, "fight one Ducharme, fight two," and so François's hot words usually passed unnoticed. But Octave was so good-tempered that the balance was kept even.

The brothers seemed so entirely at one that the people were not surprised when they learned in after

years that they had both fallen in love with the same girl. It seemed quite natural ; and then, “you couldn’t blame them, for everyone was in love with Keila McMorrان.”

There were some things about it, though, that nobody could understand.

“One of them didn’t know the other was in love with her.”

“Well, I used to see them down there together, and they’d walk off home like two lambs.”

“That couldn’t last you know.”

“No, and it didn’t last.”

This was the general drift of the remarks the neighbors made when they commenced to talk on the subject. It was an ever-recurring topic of conversation, and never was settled to the satisfaction of everyone, although some had decided for themselves.

However these talks commenced, they always ended in one way. There would be a pause, then the words would come slowly, as if the speakers were dreaming of a form they could not forget.

“Strong ? I believe he could lift an ox.”

“Yes ; and he was the best chopper on the river.”

“And what a man on the drive !”

“And kind-hearted !”

“Humph !”

“Poor Octave !”

It was a bright August morning, and François was sitting at his door smoking. He was watching a squirrel that was seated at the root of a tree, twirling something between his front feet, when a small, tattered boy, with wide, frightened eyes that turned to all sides as if he expected to be pounced on by some hidden enemy, came toward him from the bush. François turned and spoke to him. He answered :

“I – I – want Octave.”

“Gone away.”

“But I must see Octave.”

“Can’t.”

“But I *must*.”

“Can’t ; gone away.”

“Is he going to come back ?”

“To-night.”

“But I must see him before to-night. I have to tell him something.”

“Can’t ; home to-night. Tell me.”

It was the youngest of the McMorrans boys – Tim. He could not understand François’s French, and François could speak but little English.

“I can’t tell you. Will you tell Octave ?”

“Yes.”

“Well, when I was fishing last night, down by the bank, two fellows came and talked near where I was, and I heard them, and one of the Phelan boys is going to shoot Octave to-night.”

“To shoot Octave !” François jumped to his feet. “Why ?”

“Because our Keila won’t marry him, and he thinks she’s going to marry Octave.”

“When ?”

“I don’t know.”

“To shoot Octave – when ?”

“To-night, down at the old road.”

“To shoot Octave – to-night – one of the Phelan boys – old road.”

“Will you tell Octave ?”

“No !” – in a tone that set Tim’s teeth chattering – “Yes, yes, yes ; go home.” The small boy ran away, but

was soon stealing back. “Will – will – you tell Octave ?”

“Yes ; go home.”

François thought a long time, and then began to throw chips at the squirrel that was hanging head downward half way up the tree.

It was twilight ; and down where the path from the Ducharmes’ joined the old road a figure crouching in the bushes held a gun, steadied in the low crotch of a shrub and pointed right across the path. His jaws were tightly locked, and whenever he chanced to open them his teeth chattered as if the warm evening breeze that just stirred the bushes was a blast from the north. Every now and then his whole body shook convulsively, and the gun rattled in the forked branch. He was listening for a step in the path. Now he thought he heard it, and drew himself together with a great effort ; but it was some other sound in the woods. He noticed nothing stirring behind him ; and when a collie, with an angry growl, jumped out into the path and ran away, with its tail between its legs, the cold sweat burst out on his face and hands. But now he could make no mistake – there was someone coming, and he huddled over the gun. The twigs were cracking in the still air, and he thought he could hear the bushes sway ; but before he could be

sure, there was a grip on his neck like a vice, and his hands left the gun to grasp a pair of iron wrists. He turned slowly over on the ground, and a figure knelt on his chest, choking him until his eyes glared whitely in the darkness and his tongue shot out between his teeth, and held him among the little ferns and mosses so tightly that he could not even have stirred them with his breath. And now the twigs commenced to break, the rustle of leaves grew louder, and someone passed with long, swinging strides. They could hear him breathe, and it seemed like a century before the air was quiet again. Then the hands relaxed and an arm reached for the gun. The figure rose slowly, but the other did not stir. He drew in his tongue, grasped his throat with his hands, and continued glaring with white, distended eyes into the face of the form above him. The hands had grasped the gun, and had torn the stock from the barrel and thrown each in a different direction. Then the foot stirred the man who was struggling for breath on the ground. He turned over slowly and lay still for a moment ; then he rose on his hands and knees and crawled, like a wounded snake, into the low, uncertain cedar shadows. Watching for a while where the darkness had swallowed up that cringing form, parting the bushes and standing on the path, where the first trembling star of evening was shining, François Ducharme stepped homeward to the Baskatonge.

Octave had walked steadily until he came to where the path turned along the lake-side. There was a thin screen of bushes between the path and the shore, but where the ground rose suddenly the point that jutted into the water was bare of trees, save a maple or two. As he approached this point the sound of singing reached his ears, and he almost knelt as he stretched himself at full length to listen.

From where the shore line shone like silver against the clear, black shades, from where the night was bending earth-ward, violet-shadowed, from where the night wind waited in the sedges ; stilling the distant trilling and whirring, floating into the rocking reeds, trembling about the dreaming arrow-heads, waking evasive echoes from sleep-shrouded thickets, calling out the wondering stars – the voice floated on the lake to where the listener lay with hidden face and stilled breath.

All the grass seemed stirring about him, and a leaf, withered before its time, dropped lightly on his head. How far away the singing sounded ; and now he seemed not to hear it at all.

The past years – the wide silence of the woods – the far-away fall of trees – the call of some moss-mantled stream – the mother's quiet ways – the future, the future – a home somewhere – and Keila McMorran singing in

the evening – until a wilful wind sprang up and caught the unfinished strain and bore it away up the hills, where the young birds just heard it and opened their wings and slept again. And the years that passed him slowly found him, with the unfinished song in his ears, waiting for the strain that went with the wind over the hill-tops.

He rose and walked on to the McMorrans', and when his face was set again toward the Baskatonge, and the moon was half way up the sky, there was a song in the air which the trees had never heard before.

The house was dark. He opened the door quietly, and went softly to where François was sleeping on the low bed built against the wall. He sat down beside him and passed his hand gently over his face. Then François awoke, and the brothers talked for a long time in low tones.

“It is all right. I have asked her.”

“And ?”

“And she has said ‘Yes – Yes ;’ Keila herself said ‘Yes.’ I am happy, little brother.”

François's face was white in the dimness.

“And now what will you do ?”

“I will have a farm, and you will live with me.”

“Not here ?”

“No, not here ; down by the Castor, when I get money enough.”

“You will have the money.”

“No ; it is yours too.”

“But I don’t want it. I will live here just the same – only you, Octave, you will not be here.”

“No, little brother, you will live with me. Keila said so.”

“Did she say that, Octave ?” his voice trembled.

“Yes ; Keila said so.”

Then there was a long silence, and the cry of the loons came from the lake, through the open door, across the strip of moonlight.

“Will you come to bed, Octave ?”

“No, not yet.”

He rose and closed the door behind him, shutting out the light, and walked up and down the beach until the sun drove the last laggard star out of the sky.

Aside from the path, near to the Castor, in the dense forest, was a little oval plot of the greenest grass. The flowers never bloomed there, but hovered about the

silver stems of the poplars that circled the spot, and when they commenced to die the wind carried their petals inside the close and strewed them on the grass. At one side a large stone had thrust itself for a foot or so into the space, and its moss-covered ledge formed a low bench.

It was a June evening of the next year. The darkness had closed in early, and the poplars were the only trees that answered to the faint breeze. Octave was walking, almost as quickly as usual, in the direction of the Castor. The path was familiar to him, and even in the darkness he stepped over the logs and avoided the low branches. He was whistling to himself so softly that the breath just vibrated on his lips.

As he approached the line of underbrush that separated the path from the little circle of grass, he heard the sound of voices. He went on, without slacking his pace, until he came to a place where the hazels were less thick. Then he stopped suddenly, as if he had stepped against a stone wall, and put his hand to his head.

A voice was saying : “We should not have come here ; we must go away.” He could make no mistake. That was Keila’s voice.

“No ; I have something to say.” It was when he heard these words that he put his hand to his head. That

was, it must be, he knew it was François.

He stepped off the path on the opposite side from where they were talking, and leaned against a young tree, twining his arms through the low branches. The words came very distinctly to him, mingled with the light shivering rustle of the poplars.

“I know that you love me, Keila,” François was saying.

“You must not say so.”

“But I cannot live without you.”

“You must. We must think of Octave ; he is so good.”

“Yes ; but I wish he had never seen you. Why did you ever tell him you loved him ?”

“I did love him, François – only – only, you should never have come near me, then I would always have loved him the best.”

“But now, Keila ?”

“Oh ! François, you must not talk to me ; you don’t know how Octave loves me.”

“And you don’t know how I love you.”

“Yes ; but think of Octave. How many times he has fought for you, and saved your life.”

“Yes ; it is true. But what can we do ?”

“We can both be true to Octave. Yes, François, I must be true to Octave.”

“Why can’t you go away with me down the river and never come back ?”

“You must go away alone, and never see me again.”

“Keila, I cannot leave you.”

“You must. Do promise me, François ! Think of poor Octave.”

There was a long silence. The wind had risen and all the trees were sighing softly.

“Do promise me !”

“Yes, Keila, I will promise you ; but I must go away. I can never come back. Only let me see you once again, here, tomorrow night, and I will promise you anything.”

“Well, François, I will come for a little while. You must not come home with me. Octave will come to-night. Good-by !”

“Good-by !”

They came out onto the path and walked in opposite directions.

Octave seemed to be thinking the words as they

came to him so slowly. It could never be that they were there talking ; but François passed quite close to him, and he could have no doubt.

The words kept recurring as he had heard them, only the rustle of the trees was still, and from about his feet rose the smell of crushed moss and wet leaves. Very near him were a few large white lilies that shone through the darkness dimly, like shrouded stars. He hung there, like a stag caught by the antlers, waiting for death, until the dark forest pools commenced to brighten with the dawn, and the birds near him began to wake ; then he drew himself up and walked away.

He went, by paths through the tangled forest, toward the lake that was lying silvered somewhere in the north. He passed the spots where they used to set their traps when his father was alive. He seemed to be back in that faded time again, and paused often to wait for the little brother who would always lag behind.

The lake was reached at last. He threw himself down where a group of poplars and a few maples made a shady place, where the shore was high and the water stretched away to the island, where the wrecked cedars lay blanched, like the bones of giants, on the broken shore.

The day wore on. Now and then a small, shadowy cloud drifted dreamily out of the west and vanished like

a vision. The winds touched the water lightly, making ripples that never reached the shore.

All day long he lay quietly, as if asleep, and the shadows of leaves kept fluttering over him with countless soothing hands. The sun sank, leaving no color in the sky, and already the twilight was falling.

The water was very quiet, and seemed to be heaving toward him as he gazed at it. He folded his arms, and a great calm stole over him, as he looked past the island where the lake seemed shoreless. And when it was dark he rose and went back by the track that he had followed in the morning, and stood at last very near to the place where he had paused the night before.

There was a low talking in the bushes. He waited for a moment, and then parted the branches and stood just within the little circle.

“François !” he said. His voice was very clear. They were seated on the low stone, and had not heard him. They started. François stood up and looked at Octave standing in among the ghostly white poplars.

“François, do not speak. Last night I heard you. You need not go away, you and Keila. She loves you, and I – I love you both. I am older than you, little brother. And do you remember when I gave you the little doe I caught back by the Ruisseau ? – so long ago ; and now

– now it is Keila that I give you. You need not go away, and I will come and see you sometimes.

Keila had hidden her face and was trembling, and François had turned away. When the voice ceased he came forward, but Octave said : “No, little brother, do not come near me – you will see me often – but I will go home now,” and the bushes closed behind him.

The sun was setting one October evening, and under a steep ridge of rock, that rose in steps and made a jagged outline against the sky, two men were talking.

“Where are you going, Octave ?”

“Home.”

“To-night ?”

“Yes, to-night. You will stay here ?”

“Yes. Will you be down in the morning ?”

“I dont know.”

“You will come down for the wedding ?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“You must come, Octave.”

“Yes, I must come.”

“Are you going now ?”

“Yes.”

It was growing dark rapidly. The sun had set and the sky was flushed and knotted like the forehead of an angry god. François turned his back to the hill, but lingered to look after Octave. He could not see him leaping up from ledge to ledge, but suddenly he sprang from the low brow of the hill and stood for a moment outlined firmly against the sky, then as suddenly vanished. Into the gloom, François thought ; but all the little hollow was filled with clear light, and away where the low bushes crouched along the stream a wakeful bird was uttering a few long-drawn, passionate notes. The night that followed was dark and starless, and the wind, searching for forgotten paths among the trees, heaved long, low, tremulous sighs.

On the morrow there was a wedding at the Mission ; but hearts would have been happier for the presence of one who never came, and eyes would have been brighter for the sight of one they never saw again.

Years have passed. On many silent hills and in many lonely valleys the stumps of pines stand where the sun used to touch the green tops a hundred feet above them. The stalwart trunks have gone to cover

homes in the south, and to shelter the heads of happy children from the storms which they learned to resist on their native hills in the north.

But greater changes have taken place at the Castor. The lake seems wider now, but that is because there is only one little strip of forest on the west side. The fields rise gradually on the rounded hill, and the sun, which used to cast gloomy shadows into the lake, has to smile now across golden fields of ripe oats and barley.

The rocky eastern shore remains unchanged ; but on the west there are two houses, with their barns and low outbuildings.

In the evening the collie drives home the cows, and the bells clang wildly through the bushes. A young voice keeps calling to him, and he answers with sharp yelps. Soon a stalwart lad bursts through the underbrush into the path, and goes singing after the cows. He hears a voice calling from the bars. "Octave ! Octave ! Octave !" His brother waits there for him to pass, and they put up the bars and go home together.

Then there is often singing in the evening, and laughter ; and White McMorrان loves to come over and smoke, and listen to his grandchildren talk, and hold the youngest on his knees. But now it is always the Ducharmes of the Castor ; no more the Ducharmes of the Baskatonge.

In the heart of a northern wilderness, on the shore of an unnamed lake, stands the ruin of a small hut. Half the roof has fallen in. The logs are rotted and covered with moss. In the dark corners spectral weeds and ferns die longing for the sun. The spring winds, touching the water lightly, make ripples that never reach the shore. In early summer the small, shadowy clouds drift dreamily out of the west and vanish like a vision. In autumn the sky is flushed and knotted, like the forehead of an angry god ; a wakeful bird, somewhere in the bushes, utters a few long-drawn, passionate notes ; the night that follows is dark and starless, and the wind, searching for forgotten paths among the trees, heaves long, low, tremulous sighs. The winter wind, untamed out of the north, drives the sifted snow, hissing like steam, across the surface of the lake. The haunts of men seem as far away as the stars that throb faintly in the lonely vastness of the summer sky. The silence that dwells forever in the waste places of the world is shaken by unheeded storms and the muffled cries of life in the gloom of the immense forests that darken beneath her brooding wings.

Scribner's magazine. /

Volume 1, Issue 2, February, 1887.

Table of contents

The Triumph of Marie Laviolette.....	5
The Ducharmes of The Baskatonge	28

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