

'This Father Angell? Is he your Catholic priest?' he questioned the child.

'He ees the Father,' the boy answered, smiling up to him with confident eyes. 'He has beeg garden—so!' He made his arms wide.

'Yes, yes. Well, you take the berries, son. I do not care for them.'

He pushed the salver back into the child's hands. Ambrose's cheeks were scarlet. He laughed in an embarrassed sort of a way.

'Pardon, Monsieur,' he said, making a little bow at the door.

On that Sunday when John Garth had made ready to begin his holy crusade, he sought out Madame LaCoste.

'I want to invite all of you to come with me to my chapel where I am going to preach this Sabbath. I want to make some reforms that will do you good. I am going to preach about them to-day. I want all of you to come and hear me.'

'Oh, dat ees kind,' Madame LaCoste made answer. She made her pretty gesture with her hands. 'Felicite it ees she who will go with Monsieur to-day. We have not Mass dees Sunday. It ees at Bienville Father Angell will be. And Ambrose he will go. Me, I go to carry wine to one sick, oh, very sick and poor. Ah! Monsieur, it gives me the bleeding heart.' Her soft eyes were full of tears. 'But so kind to ask.'

The little country road wound about along the edge of the Bayou where the tall grasses grew. Ambrose ran whistling ahead, kicking up the dust with his bare feet. Garth wished he were a boy like Ambrose and could think it no sin to go whistling and frisking about like a young colt on the Sabbath morn. He had been taught it was a sin and he still thought so. Some day he meant to tell Ambrose, but not to-day. To-day was too sweet, and the child kept running back, slipping his hand into his own, and looking up at him with such confident eyes. He could not bear to bring back into them that look of pain that he remembered there when he pushed the Father's berries back into his hands. Felicite, the fawn-eyed, the shy-footed, was walking by his side. If one should reprimand the boy, she would dart away like a bird.

He had his sermon in his pocket. He had meant to read it aloud to himself on his solitary way to church. Since that was impossible, he tried to go over it in his mind—all the rigid tenets of his creed, all the stern laws that must discipline life, all the fearful denunciations he meant to hurl at this slack, lazy, thriftless people sunk in the easy ignorance of Catholicism. But somehow stern dogma and rigid discipline seemed way back in Vermont. He could not make them here. He could not make them tune with the dreamy, beating of the wind, with the swaying of those lofty banners of gray moss—aye, even with the swish of that indescribable peach-bloom garment that made Felicite seem like a flower in the landscape. As the spire of the church rose before him he shook himself together. He hated this languor of the climate that stole like a thief into his brain, or rather he felt that he ought to hate it. He hated the indolence of the people, their slow speech, their intolerable shiftlessness. More than all he hated their Catholicism. He expected antagonism. He was ready to fight.

Inside his chapel a little handful of people gathered about him, smiling and friendly and humbly attentive. Some children like Ambrose made the sign of the cross as they entered, then sat quietly staring at him through his long discourse.

Garth went and lay in the hammock at the shady end of the gallery when he got back to the house. He was much exhausted. The strain of his sermon had been great. Madame LaCoste and Felicite sat in the parlor talking. He could hear the hum of their voices through the window. He did not heed the words. He was so weary. Then Felicite said—she had moved nearer the window and was rocking as she talked—drawing her words,

'Yes, he said he gwine re-form him.'

'What you call dees re-form, Felicite?'

'Oh! re-form? It ees, if it's a wrong one does, an' you make him all right, dat ees re-form.'

'Ah! I spec somebody been tell him 'bout nigger Pete what stole dat shoat from yo' grandpa las' year. But dat ees kind, re-form him.'

Garth groaned.

Madame LaCoste hurried out to him.

'Le pauvre!' she said, holding a tiny glass to his lips with a drop or two of cordial to refresh him. Then she sat by his side fanning him while she ran her cool, soft fingers through his hair. How could he tell her what reform meant?

The day after Father Angell returned from Bienville, Garth was busy at his desk. He heard the children shouting and crowding about him. Ambrose climbed on his knee. Madame LaCoste and Felicite ran out and sat on either side of him. There was much laughter and talking. Then Madame LaCoste came to his door.

'It ees Father Angell,' she said. 'He comes to make his devoirs to you.'

Garth did not look up.

'Will you tell Father Angell I am very busy this morning?'

The soft eyes looked at him a moment with embarrassment.

'Pardon, Monsieur, pardon!' she said gently as she closed his door.

He heard her give his message. Then all of them got up and moved carefully away to the farther end of the gallery, talking softly that he might not be disturbed. Felicite made her famous sangaree, Ambrose and the Father had a game of cards. Felicite and her mother sat near, rocking, with their needlework in their hands. There was much joking and laughter, but all subdued that no sound might annoy him. Garth sat with his face buried in his hands.

Garth took to fasting more and more often, and longer he remained upon his knees. He felt that he had maintained an impregnable front towards Catholicism, but everywhere else he seemed to have slipped away from his duty. His foes had been too insidious. They had woven about him a silken web whose meshes tangled and tripped him. There is no weapon made that can war against tenderness and kindness and that delicate tissue of politeness that everywhere enveloped him. He had never found that day when he could chide the little Ambrose for his whistling and his coltish antics on the Sabbath. The whole family with the priest at their head had gone picnicking on the holy day, and yet he had been dumb. They had stopped at a neighbor's, desperately poor, and taken a sick and suffering child with them. The priest had carried the little fellow in his arms to the wagon. Felicite had held the child on her knees.

Garth had found it impossible to use his own chamber for undisturbed devotions. Madame LaCoste came to serve him a hot and delicate broth if he had tasted no breakfast. Ambrose brought him the heart of a melon, or a platter of fresh figs. A messenger from Father Angell tapped at his door to leave a basket of early grapes with the Father's compliments. So, following one of those dim vistas of the forests, he had come upon a retreat, mystical with soft, green shadows, that became to him a sort of temple for prayer and devotion.

It was one of those Sabbaths when Father Angell held his Catholic service, and Garth knew it was no use to preach, that he came out at daylight to his place of devotion. It was late September. The dawn was chill, for the dew was heavy. Garth was wet to his knees walking through the tall grass. The blue light of the morning lent its own ghastliness to his pale, pinched face. He fell forward upon his knees with an audible cry for help, for he felt himself sinking. He had not slept the night before. Self-accusation and remorse and shame do not make good bed-fellows. In this deep solitude he poured out his soul in bitter tears and prayers, calling aloud upon God to forgive his faithlessness. By and by when his passion had spent itself he fell wearied out upon his face and lay still. Only now and then a sob shook his delicate frame like the throb of a spent wave. He stretched out his cold, cramped limbs into the grateful warmth of the sun. He thought he had never seen the sky so soft, or the water-oaks so darkly green, or those lofty banners of moss so delicate a pearl. With the warmth and the greater physical comfort it seemed to him a divine, spiritual blessing had come also from the skies and brooded alike over the world and over his soul. Then Nature sent her sudden balm of sleep.

The sun grew hotter and a steam from the damnness made a sickliness in the air around him. The Bayou, a long, green, slimy serpent crawling in its own filth, sent its poisoned breath coiling and curling about him. Garth's sleep was so heavy, the creeping things of the wood went about their business. The squirrels held their ribald play. The birds flew heavily in the sleepy air.

At noon when the shadows changed, Garth sat up suddenly. He thought his father had called him. He could not account for his whereabouts. He thought to see high, narrow windows of his Vermont home, and all this wide expanse of shining light blinded him. He got up and groped his way to a tree and took hold of it, feeling about its trunk like a child. After