

Richards Laura Elizabeth Howe

Rosin the Beau



Laura Richards

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**Richards Laura Elizabeth Howe
Rosin the Beau**

TO

My Sister Maud

CHAPTER I

Melody, My Dear Child:

I SIT down to write my story for you, the life-story of old Rosin the Beau, your friend and true lover. Some day, not far distant now, my fiddle and I shall be laid away, in the quiet spot you know and love; and then (for you will miss me, Melody, well I know that!) this writing will be read to you, and you will hear my voice still, and will learn to know me better even than you do now; though that is better than any one else living knows me.

When people ask me where I hail from, our good, neighbourly, down-east way, I answer "From the Androscoggin;" and that is true enough as far as it goes, for I have spent many years on and about the banks of that fine river; but I have told you more than that. You know something of the little village where I was born and brought up, far to the northeast of your own home village. You know something, too, of my second mother, as I call her, – Abby Rock; but of my own sweet mother I have spoken little. Now you shall hear.

The first thing I can remember is my mother's playing. She was a Frenchwoman, of remarkable beauty and sweetness. Her given name was Marie, but I have never known her maiden surname: I doubt if she knew it herself. She came, quite by accident, being at the time little more than a child, to the village where my father, Jacques De Arthenay, lived; he saw her, and loved her at the sight. She consented to marry him, and I was their only child. My father was a stern, silent man, with but one bright thing in his life, – his love for my mother. Whenever she came before his eyes, the sun rose in his face, but for me he had no great affection; he was incapable of dividing his heart. I have now and then seen a man with this defect; never a woman.

My first recollection, I said, is of my mother's playing. I see myself, sitting on a great black book, the family Bible. I must have been very small, and it was a large Bible, and lay on a table in the sitting-room. I see my mother standing before me, with her violin on her arm. She is light, young, and very graceful; beauty seems to flow from her face in a kind of dark brightness, if I may use such an expression; her eyes are soft and deep. I have seen no other eyes like my mother Marie's. She taps the violin with the bow; then she taps me under the chin.

"*Dis 'Bon jour!' petit Jacques!*" and I say "Bo' zour!" as well as I can, and duck my head, for a bow is expected of me. No bow, no music, and I am quivering with eagerness for the music. Now she draws the bow across the strings, softly, smoothly, – ah, my dear, you have heard only me play, all your life; if you could have heard my mother! As I see her and hear her, this day of my babyhood, the song she plays is the little French song that you love. If you could have heard her sing!

"A la claire fontaine M'en allant promener, J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle Que je m'y suis baigné. Il y a longtemps que je t'aime, Jamais je ne t'oublierai!"	As I went walking, walking, I found its waves so lovely, Beside the fountain fair, I stayed to bathe me there. 'Tis long and long I have loved thee, I'll ne'er forget thee more.
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It is the song of my life, Melody; I never told you that before, but it has always pleased me well that you cared for it.

As my mother sings the last words, she bends and kisses the violin, which was always a living personage to her. Her head moves like a bird's head, quickly and softly. I see her face all brightness, as I have told you; then suddenly a shadow falls on it. My back is towards the door, but she stands facing it. I feel myself snatched up by hands like quivering steel; I am set down – not roughly – on the floor. My father turns a terrible face on my mother.

"Mary!" he cried. "He was on the Bible! You – you set the child on the Holy Bible!"

I am too frightened to cry out or move, but my mother Marie lays down her violin in its box – as tenderly as she would lay me in my cradle – and goes to my father, and puts her arm round his neck, and speaks to him low and gently, stroking back his short, fair hair. Presently the frightful look goes out of his face; it softens into love and sadness; they go hand-in-hand into the inner room, and I hear their voices together speaking gravely, slowly. I do not know that they are praying, – I have known it since. I watch the flies on the window, and wish my father had not come.

That, Melody, is the first thing I remember. It must have been after that, that my father made me a little chair, and my mother made a gay cushion for it, with scarlet frills, and I sat always in that. Our kitchen was a sunny room, full of bright things; Mother Marie kept everything shining. The floor was painted yellow, and the rugs were scarlet and blue; she dyed the cloth herself, and made them beautifully. There was always a fire – or so it seems now – in the great black gulf of a fireplace, and the crane hung over it, with pots and kettles. The firelight was thrown back from bright pewter and glass and copper all about the walls; I have never seen so gay a room. And always flowers in the window, and always a yellow cat on a red cushion. No canary bird; my mother Marie never would have a bird. "No prisoners!" she would say. Once a neighbour brought her a wounded sparrow; she nursed and tended it till spring, then set it loose and watched it fly away.

This neighbour was a boy, some years older than myself; he is one of the people I remember best. Petie we called him; Peter Brand; he died long ago. He had been a comfort to my mother Marie, in days of sadness, – before my birth, for she was never sad after I came, – and she loved him, and he clung to her. He was a round-faced boy, with hair almost white; awkward and shy, but very good to me.

As I grew older my mother taught me many French songs and games, and Petie often made a third with us. He made strange work of the French speech; to me it came like running water, but to Petie it was like pouring wine from a corked bottle. Mother Marie could not understand this, and tried always to teach him. I can hear her cry out, "Not thus, Petie! not! you break me the ears! Listen only!

'''Sur le pont d'Avignon,'

Encore! again, Petie! sing wiz p'tit Jacques!"

And Petie would drone out, all on one note (for the poor boy had no music either),

"Sooly pong d'Avinnong,"

And Mother Marie would put her hands to her ears and cry out, "Ah, *que non!* ah, *que non!* you keell me in my heart!" and poor Petie would be so ashamed! Then Mother Marie would be grieved for him, and would beat herself, and say that she was a demon, a monster of cruelty; and she would run to the cupboard and bring cakes and doughnuts (she always called them "dont's," I remember that), and make Petie eat till his eyes stood out. And it always ended in her taking out the violin, and playing and singing our hearts to heaven. Petie loved music, when Mother Marie made it.

I speak of cakes. There was no one in the village who could cook like my mother; every one acknowledged that. Whatever she put her hand to was done to perfection. And the prettiness of it all! A flower, a green leaf, a bunch of parsley, – there was some delicate, pretty touch to everything she did. I must have been still small when I began to notice how she arranged the dishes on our table. These matters can mean but little to you, my dear child; but the eyes of your mind are so quick, I know it is one of your delights to fancy the colours and lights that you cannot see. Some bright-coloured food, then, – fried fish, it might be, which should be of a golden brown shade, – would be always on a dark blue platter, while a dark dish, say beefsteak, would be on the creamy yellow crockery that had belonged to my father's mother; and with it a wreath of parsley or carrot, setting off the yellow still more. And always, winter and summer, some flower, if only a single geranium-bloom,

on the table. So that our table was always like a festival. I think this troubled my father, when his dark moods were on him. He thought it a snare of the flesh. Sometimes, if the meal were specially dainty, he would eat nothing but dry bread, and this grieved Mother Marie almost more than anything else. I remember one day, – it was my birthday, and I must have been quite a big boy by that time, – Mother Marie had made a pretty rose-feast for me. The table was strewn with rose-leaves, and there was a garland of roses round my plate, and they stood everywhere, in cups and bowls. There was a round cake, too, with rose-coloured frosting; I thought the angels might have such feasts on their birthdays, but was sure no one else could.

But when my father came in, – I can see now his look of pain and terror.

"You are tempting the Lord, Mary!" he cried. "You are teaching our child to love the lust of the flesh and the pride of the eye. It is sin, it is sin, my wife!"

I trembled, for I feared he would throw my beautiful cake into the fire, as I had once seen him throw a pretty salad. But my mother Marie took his arm. The door stood open, and the warm June was shining through. She led him to the doorway, and pointed to the sky.

"Look, *mon ami!*" she said, in her clear, soft voice. "See the day of gold that the good God has made for our little Jacques! He fills the garden with roses, – I bring His roses in the house. It is that He loves the roses, and the little child, and thee and me, my poor Jacques; for He made us all, is it not?"

And presently, with her soft hand on his arm, the pain went from my poor father, and he came in and sat down with us, and even patted my head and tasted the cake. I recall many such scenes as this, my dear child. And perhaps I should say that my mind was, and has always remained, with my mother on such matters. If God gives food for the use of His creatures, it is to His honour and glory to serve it handsomely, so far as may be; and I see little religion in a slovenly piece of meat, or a shapeless hunch of butter on a dingy plate.

My mother having this gift of grace, it was not strange that the neighbours often called on her for some service of making beautiful. At a wedding or a merrymaking of any kind she would be sent for, and the neighbours, who were plain people, thought her gift more than natural. People still speak of her in all that part of the country, though she has been dead sixty odd years, little Mother Marie. She would have liked to make the meeting-house beautiful each Sabbath with flowers, but this my father could not hear of, and she never urged it after the first time. At a funeral, too, she must arrange the white blossoms, and lay the pale hands together. Abby Rock has told me many stories of the comfort she brought to sorrowing homes, with her sweet, light, quiet ways. Abby loved her as her own child.

As I grew older, my mother taught me the violin. I learned eagerly. I need not say much about that, Melody; my best playing has been for you, and you know all I could tell you; I learned, and it became the breath of life to me. My lessons were in the morning always, so that my father might not hear the sound; but this was not because he did not love the violin. Far otherwise! In the long winter evenings my mother Marie would play for him, after I was tucked up in my trundle-bed; music of religious quality, which stirred his deep, silent nature strongly. She had learned all the psalm-tunes that he loved, stern old Huguenot melodies, many of them, that had come over from France with his ancestor, and been sung down through the generations since. And with these she played soft, tender airs, – I never knew what they were, but they could wile the heart out of one's breast. I sometimes would lift my head from my pillow, and look through the open door at the warm, light kitchen beyond (for my mother Marie could not bear to shut me into the cold, dark little bedroom; my door stood open all night, and if I woke in the night, the coals would always wink me a friendly greeting, and I could hear the cat purring on her cushion). I would look, I say, through the open door. There would my mother stand, with the light, swaying way she had, like a flower or a young white birch in the wind; her cheek resting on the violin, her eyelids dropped, as they mostly were when she played, and the long lashes black against her soft, clear paleness. And my father Jacques sitting by the fire, his chin in his hand, still as a carved image, looking at her with his heart in his eyes. That is the way I

think of them oftenest, Melody, my dear, as I look back to the days long ago; this is the way I mostly see my father and mother, Jacques and Marie De Arthenay, a faithful husband and wife.

CHAPTER II

OUR village was not far from the sea, and my mother often took me down to the beach. It was a curving beach of fine sand, bright and warm, and the rocks that shut it in were warm, too, brown and yellow; it was a sunny, heartsome place as ever I saw. I remember one day, – many days, and this one of them, – when the three of us went down to the beach, Mother Marie and Petie Brand and I. The Lady, the violin, went too, of course, and we had our music, and it left us heartened through and through, and friends with all the world. Then we began to skip stones, three children together. Petie and I were only learning, and Mother Marie laughed at our stones, which would go flopping and tumbling a little way, then sink with a splash.

"They are ducks!" she said. (She called it "docks," Melody; you cannot think how soft her speech was.) "Poor leetle docks, that go flap, flap; not yet zey have learned to swim, no! But here now, see a bird of ze water, a sea-bird what you call." She turned her wrist and sent the flat pebble flying; it skimmed along like a live thing, flipping the little crests of the ripples, going miles, it seemed to Petie and me, till at length we lost sight of it altogether.

"Where did it go?" I asked. "I didn't hear it splash."

"It went – to France!" said Mother Marie. "It make a voyage, it goes, goes, – at last it arrives. '*Voilà la France!*' it say. 'That I go ashore, to ask of things for Marie, and for *petit Jacques*, and for Petie too, good Petie, who bring the apples.'"

There were red apples in a basket, and I can see now the bright whiteness of her teeth as she set them into one.

"What will the stone see?" I asked again; for I loved to make my mother tell me of the things she remembered in France, the country she always loved. She loved to tell, too; and a dreamy look would come into her eyes at such times, as if she did not see us near at hand, but only things far off and dim. We listened, Petie and I, as if for a fairy tale.

"He come, zat leetle – non! *that lit-tel* stone." (Mother Marie could often pronounce our English "th" quite well; it was only when she forgot that she slipped back to the soft "z" which I liked much better.) "He come to the shore! It is not as this shore, no! White is the sand, the rocks black, black. All about are nets, very great, and boats. The men are great and brown; and their beards – Holy Cric! their beards are a bush for owls; and striped their shirt, jersey, what you call, and blue trousers. Zey come in from sea, their sails are brown and red; the boats are full wiz fish, that shine like silver; they are the herring, *petit Jacques*, it is of those that we live a great deal. Down zen come ze women to ze shore and zey —*they*– are dressed beautiful, ah! so beautiful! A red petticoat, – sometimes a blue, but I love best the red, striped wiz white, and over this the dress turned up, *à la blanchisseuse*. A handkerchief round their neck, and gold earrings, – ah! long ones, to touch their neck; and gold beads, most beautiful! and then the cap! *P'tit Jacques*, thou hast not seen caps, because here they have not the understanding. But! white, like snow in ze sun; the muslin clear, you understand, and stiff that it cracks, – ah! of a beauty! and standing out like wings here, and here – you do not listen! you make not attention, bad children that you are! Go! I tell you no more!"

It was true, Melody, my dear, that Petie and I did not care so much about the descriptions of dress as if we had been little girls; my mother was never weary of telling about the caps and earrings; I think she often longed for them, poor little Mother Marie! But now Petie and I clung about her, and begged her to go on, and she never could keep her vexation for two minutes.

"Tell how they go up the street!" said Petie.

"Play we went, too!" cried I. "Play the stone was a boat, Mère Marie." (I said it as one word, Melody; it makes a pretty name, "Mère-Marie," when the pronunciation is good. To hear our people say "M'ree" or "Marry," breaks the heart, as my mother used to say.)

She nodded, pleased enough to play, – for she was a child, as I have told you, in many, many ways, though with a woman's heart and understanding, – and clapped our hands softly together, as she held them in hers.

"We, then, yes! we three, Mère-Marie, *p'tit Jacques*, and Petie, we go up from the beach, up the street that goes tic tac, zic zac, here and there, up the hill; very steep in zose parts. We come to one place, it is steps – "

"Steps in the street?"

"Steps that make the street, but yes! and on them (white steps, clean! ah! of a cleanness!), in the sun, sit the old women, and spin, and sing, and tell stories. Ah! the fine steps. They, too, have caps, but they are brown in the faces, and striped – "

"Striped, Mère-Marie? painted, do you mean?"

"She said the steps had caps!" whispered Petie, incredulous, but too eager for the story to interrupt the teller.

"Painted? wat you mean of foolishness, *p'tit Jacques*? Ah! I was wrong! not striped; wreenkled, you say? all up togezzer like a brown apple when he is dry up, – like zis way!" and Mother Marie drew her pretty face all together in a knot, and looked so comical that we went into fits of laughter.

"So! zey sit, ze old women, and talk, talk, wiz ze heads together; but one sit alone, away from those others, and she sing. Her voice go up, thin, thin, like a little cold wind in ze boat-ropes.

"Il était trois mat'lots de Groix,
Il était trois mat'lots de Groix,
Embarqués sur le Saint François,
Tra la derira, la la la,
Tra la derira la laire!"¹

"I make learn you that song, *petit Jacques*, one time! So we come, – now, *mes enfants*, we come! and all the old women point the nose, and say, 'Who is it comes there?' But that one old – but Mère Jeanne, she cry out loud, loud. 'Marie! *petite Marie*, where hast thou been so long, so long?' She opens the arms – I fall into zem, on my knees; I cry – but hush, *p'tit Jacques*! I cry now only in ze story, only – to – to show thee how it would be! I say, 'It is me, Marie, Mère Jeanne! I come to show thee my little son, to take thy blessing. And my little friend, too!'" She turned to pat Petie's head; she would not let the motherless boy feel left out, even from a world in which he had no part.

"My good friend Petie, whose mother is with the saints. Then Mère Jeanne, she take all our hands, after she has her weep; she say 'Come!' and we go up ze street, up, up, till we come to Mère Jeanne's house."

"Tell about the house!" I cried.

"Holy Cric! what a house!" cried Mère-Marie, clapping her hands together. "It is stone, painted white, clean, like new cheese; the roof beautiful, straw, warm, thick, – ah! what roofs! I have tried to teach thy father to make them, but no! Inside, it is dark and warm, and full wiz good smells. Now it is the *pot-au-feu*, but not every day zis, for Mère Jeanne is poor; but always somesing, fish to fry, or pancakes, or apples. But zis time, Mère Jeanne make me a *fête*; she say, 'It is the *Fête Marie*!'"

"She make the fire bright, bright; and she bring big chestnuts, two handfuls of zem, and set zem on ze shovel to roast; and zen she put ze greedle, and she mixed ze batter in a great bowl – it is yellow, that bowl, and the spoon, it is horn. She show it to me, she say, 'Wat leetle child was eat wiz this spoon, Marie? hein?' and I – I kiss the spoon; I say, '*Tite Marie, Mère Jeanne! Tite Marie qui t'aime!*'² It is the first words I could say of my life, *mes enfants*!"

¹ There were three sailor-lads of Groix, There were three sailor-lads of Groix, They sailèd in the Saint François, Tra la derira, etc.

² Little Marie, Mother Jeanne! Little Marie who loves you.

"Zen she laugh, and nod her head, and she stir, stir, stir till ze bobbles come – "

"The way they do when you make griddle-cakes, Mère-Marie?"

"Ah! no! much, much, thousand time better, Mère Jeanne make zem! She toss them – so! wiz ze spoon, and they shine like gold, and when they come down – hop! – they say 'Ssssssssss!' that they like to fry for Mère Jeanne, and for Marie, and *p'tit Jacques*, and good Petie. Then I bring out the black table, and I know where the bread live, and the cheese, and while the cakes fry, I go to milk the cow – ah! the pearl of cows, children, white like her own cream, fat like a boiled chestnut, good like an angel! She has not forgotten Marie, she rub her nose in my heart, she sing to me. I take her wiz both my arms, I weep – ah! but it is joy, *p'tit Jacques!* it is wiz joy I weep! Zen, again in ze house, and round ze table, we all sit, and we eat, and eat, that we can eat no more. And Mère Jeanne say:

"Tell me of thy home, Marie!" and I tell all, all; of thy father Jacques, how he good, and great, and handsome as Saint Michael; and how my house is fine, fine, and how Abiroc is good. And Mère Jeanne, she make the great eyes; she cry, 'Ah! the good fortune! Ah, Marie, that thou art fortunate, that thou art happy!'

"Then she tell thee, *p'tit Jacques*, how I was little, little, in a blue frock, wiz the cap tie under my chin; and how I dance and sing in the street, and how *Madame la Comtesse* see me, and take me to ze castle, and make teach me the violin, and give me Madame for my friend. I have told thee all, many, many times. Then she tell, Mère Jeanne, – oh! she is good, good, and all ze time she fill thee wiz chestnuts that I cry out lest thou die, – she tell how one day she come home from market, and I am gone. No Marie! She look, she run here and there, she cry, "Tite Marie, where art thou?" No Marie come. She run to the neighbours, she search, she tear her cap; they tell her, 'Demand of thy son's wife! The strange ship sailed this morning; we heard child cry; what do we know?'

"For the wife of Mère Jeanne's Jeannot, she was a devil, as I have told thee, a devil with both the eyes evil; and none dare say what she had done, for fear of their children and their cows to die. And then, Mère Jeanne she tell how she run to Jeannot's house, – she fear nossing, Mère Jeanne! the good God protect her always. She cry, 'Where is Marie? where is my child?' And Jeannot's Manon, she laugh, she say, 'Cross the sea after her, old witch! Who keeps thee?' Then – see, *p'tit Jacques!* see, Petie! I have not seen this wiz my eyes, no! but in my heart I have seen, I know! Then Mère Jeanne run at that woman, that devil; and she pull off her cap and tread it wiz her foot; and she pull out her hair, – never she had much, but since this day none! – and she scratch her face and tear the clothes – ah! Mère Jeanne is mild like a cherub till she is angry, but then – And that devil scream, scream, but no one come, no one care; they are all glad, they laugh to hear. Till Jeannot run in, and catch his mother and hold her hands, and take her home to her house. She tell me all this, Mère Jeanne, and it is true, and I know it in my heart. But now she is dead, that witch, and the great devil has her, and that is well." (I think my father would have lost his wits, Melody, if he had heard the way my mother talked to me sometimes; but it was a child's talk, my dear, and there was no harm. A child who had been brought up among ignorant peasants; how should she know better, poor little Mother Marie?)

"But now, see, *mes enfants!* We must come back across the sea, for ze sun, he begin to go away down. So I tell zis, and Mère Jeanne she cry, she take us wiz her arms, she cannot let us go. But I take Madame on my arm, I go out in ze street, I begin to play wiz my hand. Then all come, all run, all cry, 'Marie! Marie is here wiz her *violon!*' And I play, play and sing, and the little children dance, dance, and *p'tit Jacques* and Petie take them the hands and dance wiz —

"Eh! gai, Coco,
Eh! gai, Coco,
Eh! venez voir la danse
Du petit marmot!
Eh! venez voir la danse
Du petit marmot!"

"Adieu, adieu, Mère Jeanne! adieu, la France! but you, *mes enfants*; why do *you* cry?"

CHAPTER III

I WAS twelve years old when my mother died. She had no illness, or none that we had known of; the sweet soul of her slipped away in the night like a bird, and left the body smiling asleep. We never knew what ailed her; people did not torment themselves in those days with the "how" of a thing. There may have been talk behind the village doors, but my father never asked. She was gone, and his heart was gone with her, my poor father. She was all the joy of his life, and he never had any more; I never remember seeing him smile after that time. What gave him the best comfort was trying to keep things pretty and bright, as she liked to see them. He was neat as a woman, and he never allowed a speck of dust on the chairs, or a withered leaf on the geraniums. He never would let me touch her flowers, but I was set to polish the pewter and copper, – indeed, my mother had taught me that, – and he watched jealously lest any dimness come on them. I sometimes wondered at all this, as he had so lately counted these matters of adornment and prettiness and such as less than nothing, and vanity, as the preacher has it. But I think his great grief put a sacredness, as it were, over everything that had been hers, and all her ways seemed heavenly to him now, even though he had frowned at them (never at her, Melody, my dear! never at her!) when she was still with him.

My father wished me to help him in the farm work, but I had no turn for that. I was growing up tall and weedy, and most like my strength went into that. However it was, there was little of it for farming, and less liking. Father Jacques made up his mind that I was no good for anything, but Abby Rock stood up for me.

"The boy is not strong enough for farming, Jacques!" she said. "He's near as tall as you, now, and not fifteen yet. Put him to learn a trade, and he'll be a credit to you."

So I was put to learn shoemaking, and a good trade it has been to me all my life. The shoemaker was a kind old man, who had known me from a baby, and he contrived to make my work easy for me, – seeing I took kindly to it, – and often let me have the afternoon to myself. My lungs were weak, or Abby thought they were, and the doctor had told her I must not sit too long over my bench, but must be out in the air as much as might be, though not at hard labour. Then, – those afternoons, I am saying, – I would be off like a flash with my fiddle, – off to the yellow sand beach where the round pebbles lay. I could never let my poor father hear me play; it was a knife in his heart even to see the Lady; and these hours on the beach were my comfort, and kept the spirit alive in me. Looking out to sea, I could still feel my mother Marie beside me, still hear her voice singing, so gay, so sad, – singing all ways, as the wind blows. She had no voice like yours, Melody, my dear, but it was small and sweet as a bird's; sweet as a bird's! It was there, on the yellow sand beach, that I first met Father L'Homme-Dieu, the priest.

I have told you a great deal about this good man, Melody. He came of old French stock, like ourselves, – like most of the people in our village; only his people had always been Catholics. His village, where he had a little wooden church, was ten or twelve miles from ours, but he was the only priest for twenty miles round, and he rode or walked long distances, visiting the scattered families that belonged to his following. He chanced to come to the beach one day when I was there, and stayed to hear me play. I never knew he was there till I turned to go home; but then he spoke to me, and asked about my music and my home, and talked so kindly and wisely that my heart went out to him that very hour. He took to me, too; he was a lonely man, and there was none in his own neighbourhood that he cared to make his friend; and seldom a week passed that he did not find his way to the beach, for an hour of music and talk. Talk! How we did talk! There was always a book in his pocket, too, and he would read some fine passage aloud, and then we would discuss it, and turn it over and over, and let it draw our own thoughts like a magnet. It was a rare chance for a country boy, Melody! Here was a scholar, and as fine a gentleman as ever I met, and the heart of a child and a wise man melted into one; and I like his own son for the kindness he gave me. Sometimes I went to his house, but not

often, for I could not take so long a time away from my work. He lived in a little house like a bird's house, and the little brown woman who did for him was like a bird, and of all curious things, her name was Sparrow, – the widow Sparrow.

There was a little study, where he sat at a desk in the middle, and could pull down any book, almost, with no more than tilting his chair; and there was a little dining-room, and a closet with a window in it, where his bed stood. All these rooms were lined with books, most of them works of theology and religion, but plenty of others, too: poetry, and romances, and plays, – he was a great reader, and his books were all the friends he had, he used to say, till he found me. I should have been his son, he would say; and then lay his hand on my head and bid me be good, and say my prayers, and keep my heart true and clean. He never talked much to me of his own church (knowing my father by name and reputation), only made plain to me the love of God, and taught me to seek it through loving man.

I used to wonder how he came to be there, in the wilderness, as it must often have seemed to him, for he had travelled much, and was city-bred, his people having left the seacoast and settled inland in his grandfather's time. One day, as I stood by his desk waiting for him, I saw a box that always lay there, set open; and in it was a portrait of a most beautiful lady in a rich dress. The portrait was in a gold frame set with red stones, – rubies, they may have been, – and was a rich jewel indeed. While I stood looking at it, Father L'Homme-Dieu came in; and at sight of the open box, and me looking at it, his face, that was like old ivory in its ordinary look, flushed dark red as the stones themselves. I was sorely vexed at myself, and frightened too, maybe; but the change passed from him, and he spoke in his own quiet voice. "That is the first half of my life, Jacques!" he said. "It is set in heart's blood, my son." And told me that this was his sweetheart who was drowned at sea, and it was after her death that he became a priest, and came to find some few sheep in the wilderness, near the spot where his fathers had lived. Then he bade me look well at the sweet face, and when my time should come to love, seek out one, if not so fair (as he thought there were none such), still one as true, and pure, and tender, and loving once, let it last till death; and so closed the box, and I never saw it open again.

All this time I never let my father know about Father L'Homme-Dieu. It would have seemed to him a terrible thing that his son should be friends with a priest of the Roman Church, which he held a thing accursed. I thought it no sin to keep his mind at peace, and clear of this thing, for a cloud was gathering over him, my poor father. I told Abby, however, good Abby Rock; and though it shocked her at first, she was soon convinced that I brought home good instead of harm from my talks with Father L'Homme-Dieu. She it was who begged me not to tell my father, and she knew him better than any one else did, now that my mother Marie was gone. She told me, too, of the danger that hung over my poor father. The dark moods, since my mother's death, came over him more and more often; it seemed, when he was in one of them, that his mind was not itself. He never slighted his work, – that was like the breath he drew, – but when it was done, he would sit for hours brooding by the fireplace, looking at the little empty chair where my mother used to sit and sing at her sewing. And sitting so and brooding, now and again there would come over him as it were a blindness, and a forgetting of all about him, so that when he came out of it he would cry out, asking where he was, and what had been done to him. He would forget, too, that my mother was gone, and would call her, "Mary! Mary!" so that one's heart ached to hear him; and then Abby or I must make it clear to him again, and see the dumb suffering of him, like a creature that had not the power of speech, and knew nothing but pain and remembrance.

I might have been seventeen or eighteen at this time; I do not recall the precise year. I was doing well with my shoemaking, and when this trouble grew on my poor father I brought my bench into the kitchen, so that I might have him always in sight. This was well enough for every day, but already I was beginning to be sent for here and there, among the neighbouring villages, to play the fiddle. The people of my father's kind were passing away, those who thought music a device of the

devil, and believed that dancing feet were treading the road to hell. He was still a power in our own village; but in the country round about the young folks were learning the use of their feet, and none could hinder them, being the course of nature, since young lambs first skipped in the meadows. It was an old farmer, a good, jolly kind of man, who first gave me the name of "Rosin." He sent for me to play at his barn-raising, and a pretty sight it was; a fine new barn, Melody, all smelling sweet of fresh wood, and hung with lanterns, and a vast quantity of fruits and vegetables and late flowers set all about. Pretty, pretty! I have never seen a prettier barn-raising than that, and I have fiddled at a many since then. Well, this old gentleman calls to me across the floor, "Come here, young Rosin!" I remember his very words. "Come here, young Rosin! I can't get my tongue round your outlandish name, but Rosin'll do well enough for you." Well, it stuck to me, the name did, and I was never sorry, for I did not like to carry my father's name about overmuch, he misliking the dancing as he did. The young folks caught up an old song, and tagged that name on too, and called me Rosin the Bow. So it was first, Melody; but there are two songs, as you know, my dear, to the one tune (or one tune is all I know, and fits both sets of words), and the second song spells the word "Beau," and so some merry girls in a house where I often went to play, they vowed I should be Rosin the Beau. I suppose I may have been rather a good-looking lad, from what they used to say; and to make a long story short, it was by that name that I came to be known through the country, and shall be known till I die. An old beau enough now, my little girl; eighty years old your Rosin will be, if he lives till next September. I took to playing the air whenever I entered a room; it made a little effect, a little stir, – I was young and foolish, and it took little to please me in those days. But I have always thought, and think still, that a man, as well as a woman, should make the best of the mortal part of him; and I do not know why we should not be thankful for a well-looking body as for a well-ordered mind. I cannot abide to see a man shamle or slouch, or throw his arms and legs about as if they were timber logs. Many is the time I have said to my scholars, when I was teaching dancing-school, – great lumbering fellows, hulking through a quadrille as if they were pacing a raft in log-running, – "Don't insult your Creator by making a scarecrow of the body He has seen fit to give you. With reverence, He might have given it to one of better understanding; but since you have it, for piety's sake hold up your head, square your shoulders, and put your feet in the first position!"

But I wander from the thread of my story, as old folks will do. After all, it is only a small story, of a small life; not every man is born to be great, my dear. Yet, while I sat on my shoemaker's bench, stitching away, I thought of greatness, as I suppose most boys do. I thought of a scholar's life, like that of Father L'Homme-Dieu before his sorrow came to him; a life spent in cities, among libraries and learned, brilliant people, men and women. I thought of a musician's life, and dreamed of the concerts and operas that I had never heard. The poet Wordsworth, my dear, has written immortal words about the dreams of a boy, and my dreams were fair enough. It seemed as if all the world outside were clouded in a golden glory, if I may put it so, and as if I had only to run forth and put aside this shining veil, to find myself famous, and happy, and blessed. And when I came down from the clouds, and saw my little black bench, and the tools and scraps of leather, and my poor father sitting brooding over the fire, my heart would sink down within me, and the longing would come strong upon me to throw down hammer and last, and run away, out into that great world that was calling for me. And so the days went by, and the months, and the years.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS twenty years old when the change came in my life. I remember the day was cold and bleak, an early spring day. My father had had an accident a few days before. In one of his unconscious fits he had fallen forward – I had left the room but for a moment – and struck his head sharply against one of the fire-irons. He came to himself quite wild, and seeing the blood, thought he had killed some one, and cried to us to take him to prison as a murderer. It took Abby and me a long time to quiet him. The shock and the pain of it all had shaken me more than I knew, and I felt sick, and did not know what ailed me; but Abby knew, and she sent me to see Father L'Homme-Dieu, while she sat with my father. I was glad enough to go, more glad than my duty allowed, I fear; yet I knew that Abby was better than I at caring for my father.

As I walked across the brown fields, where the green was beginning to prick in little points here and there, I began to feel the life strong in me once more. The dull cloud of depression seemed to drop away, and instead of seeing always that sad, set face of my poor father's, I could look up and around, and whistle to the squirrels, and note the woodpecker running round the tree near me. It has remained a mystery to me all my life, Melody, that this bird's brains are not constantly addled in his head, from the violence of his rapping. When I was a little boy, I tried, I remember, to nod my head as fast as his went nodding: with the effect that I grew dizzy and sick, and Mother Marie thought I was going to die, and said the White Paternoster over me five times.

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