

CHAPTER V

THE HOME

CALVIN ROUGET was of Huguenot stock. He was a son of the manse. Old Dr. Rouget, his father, had been pastor of the little Protestant flock at Valetroi for thirty years.

When his parents died, which occurred when Calvin was sixteen years old, the father following the mother within a twelvemonth, the boy went to live with Pierre Leclair, an elder in his father's church. Leclair was a good man and a prosperous farmer, who lived with Annie, his daughter and housekeeper, in the cottage by the river. Calvin helped with the farm.

Annie was seventeen, a sweet but not strong girl; and the two, thrown daily into each other's company, proceeded to fall promptly in love. Pierre Leclair put no obstacle in the way of the match. The boy was poor, but the blood was good. So it happened that when Calvin was twenty and Annie a year older they were married.

Before old Pierre Leclair followed his pastor to the green meadows, two children came to the home, much to his inarticulate but deep pride. Jeanne was the older—a beautiful girl who resembled her mother in voice and features. There had been a boy, too, who had lived until he was nearly ten. He was the idol of both parents and the especial care of his sister, who was three years his senior. His death had been a severe test of their faith.

Calvin Rouget was a playful man. Often coming in from the field at noon, he would wash his hands and then for a romp. "Toss me up, *Père*, toss me up," little Pierre would cry. "Now me, now me," would be

the refrain from Jeanne, and this would continue until Annie called them to dinner. Or he would be their big charger, and, getting down on all fours so they could mount to his back by the aid of a chair, would go galloping about the room.

These children were like his right and left eye. How often Annie had stood in the doorway and watched them start off together, little Pierre perched on his father's shoulder and Jeanne holding him by the hand, and all calling, "*Au revoir, maman.*"

But for all his playfulness, Calvin Rouget was a serious-minded man. He came of a serious strain. Each Sunday morning saw the entire family dressed in their best, sitting in the Leclair pew.

On Sunday afternoon he liked to read from the enormous Bible which had been his father's and which with a few other books had become his. Dr. Rouget had been a scholar, and many of his books were too deep for the son; but the "*Institutes of John Calvin,*" after whom he had been named, was one he could read and enjoy. However, Jeanne had been raised on the simple Bible stories told with all the sanctified imagination he could summon. Deborah and Ruth, Hannah and Mary, were like her foster mothers.

Sunday was one of the happiest days of the week, for on that day the father did not have to go to work, and the whole family could be together. Sometimes old friends walked over from the village, and it was nice to have children to whom the wonders of the fairy wood could be displayed—mossy throne and ferny bowers, wild flowers and birds' nests.

At the close of the day they sang the hymns of the church—grand, soul-uplifting canticles which had sustained their forefathers in persecution and exile. Then, while they all knelt together, Calvin would pray a simple prayer, which brought all who heard into the presence of God. He inherited his father's spiritual gift of prayer.

And he inherited his father's courtesy. The old doctor had been a gracious as well as a godly man. "Love in little things," was the daily rule in this home. The children had never heard an angry word pass between husband and wife. If there had been differences, as doubtless there must have been, they were kept for the privacy of their own chamber.

How often of an evening Calvin Rouget, noting the tired lines under his wife's eyes, would gather her up in his arms and carry her, mildly protesting, to the great armchair with an injunction not to stir. Then girding himself in a great apron, and rolling up his sleeves, he would fall upon the dishpan, relating merry incidents the while, as he strode from the table to the cupboard, wiping a dish. And as, with love in her eyes, she watched him brandishing a plate in one hand and a dish towel in the other, she thought, "Was there ever a beloved like my beloved?"

On Monday mornings he insisted upon helping her with the hardest part of the washing; for she was never very strong, and the wringing of the clothes nearly exhausted her.

When Annie had her two babies, Calvin had become nurse, and no woman could have been tenderer or more thoughtful. She used to laugh to see him bathe the little red infant. "You see, I'm Jack-of-all-trades," he would say, "but what is a man good for if he can't share the burden as well as the joy of having babies?"

Jeanne was seventeen when the thunder of the Kaiser's legions was heard reverberating along the northern horizon. She had grown more beautiful each year and was just coming into the flower of womanhood. She was *petite* but well formed, with clear though dark complexion, due to her out-of-door life. Her liveness of body had been gained chasing butterflies through the meadows and the woods, climbing trees to watch bird families raise their springtime broods, and splashing

in the little stream which ran not far from their home. Jeanné's eyes were deep ultramarine, and at times looked gray; and her head was crowned with an abundance of chestnut-brown hair which she still wore in two long, thick braids.

When the war came, Calvin Rouget was thirty-eight, as fine a specimen of manhood, physical and otherwise, as France could produce. But war, like God, is no respecter of persons, and the call soon came. He looked very debonaire in his red trousers and sky-blue coat; and as Jeanne pinned a flower in his lapel and he put his arms about her and her mother, she said, "My handsome papa." "*Le bon Dieu* keep you, Calvin," was his wife's remark. "*Et vous, ma petite et ma chère,*" he rejoined, fervently.

He had sent them, soon after arriving in camp, a photograph of himself wearing the new helmet. How they had laughed at his "washbasin hat," as Jeanne called it! But Jacques Conte, the carpenter and cabinetmaker at the village, had been ordered to make a nice oak frame, which he did, carving thereon the lilies of France. And so, as they ate their lonely meals together, they had him smiling down upon them from the wall, the true *poilu*.

All had gone well for nearly a year when word came from the War Department that Calvin Rouget, soldier of France, in a self-effacing act of heroism, had given his life "*pour la patrie,*" and in recognition of his bravery and self-sacrifice the nation had granted a posthumous medal to his widow. It was very formal and gave them little solace at the time; but like many another suffering family they had recovered from their first grief and could look with some degree of pride and composure upon the medal which Madame Rouget kept in her treasure box, and with much comfort upon the still smiling *poilu* whose picture blessed their daily life.