

### JACQUES

The third floor of the Commerce building housed a sizable reception room and half a dozen small offices in which carefully selected executives and their staffs did their work. Our office was in the far corner. There was a private door which opened from the outside hall. Our office was part of the sales analysis branch of a packing house. Most of the executives were English-Canadians. On the other hand, the clerks, switchboard operators, typists, stenographers, and secretaries were French-Canadians almost to the last person.

"Let's go to lunch", said Jacques who worked at the desk next to mine.

Jacques Lapointe was a Montreal-born French-Canadian. He was twenty-two years old, rather good-looking, a stylish dresser and possessor of a quick wit. Jacques had joined the firm following his graduation from high school. He started as a mail clerk, and now four years later he was an understudy to a salesman. His one great ambition, the fulfillment of his aspiration, was to become a full-fledged salesman. Commerce to Jacques was a means by which he could earn his livelihood. It did not go beyond this. He wanted to become a salesman because it offered him a chance to add a human element to his work. He had two bosom pals, Guy Pepin and Andre Charlebois, both of whom lacked Jacques' grace and deportment.

The cafeteria was in the basement. We walked out into the atrium. Office girls were fluttering about in all directions, making a mad rush for both the stairs and the elevator. A group had already gathered at the far end of the atrium. The girls kept pushing the button for the elevator. The same scene was enacted on every floor of the building.

"Wait a minute Jacques," I said, "you are likely to get killed in that mad scramble".

Jacques had a ken for slang words.

"Scramble? What's that?"

"Ahem! Well, it means that everybody tries to get the same thing at the same time and all they get is mixed-up".

"Oh! I see", exclaimed Jacques, "like a nylon sale!"

We stepped into the elevator, shot a few discreet glances about us as though to measure-up our fellow companions and then stared straight ahead as the cage moved downward.

We sat down at our accustomed table in the cafeteria, which was situated near the entrance of the elevator. Jacques and his companions choose this table because it afforded them the greatest advantage to spy the office girls who



used the elevator.

"Excellent! Excellent!" exclaimed Jacques.

"What's excellent?" I queried.

Oh, monsieur, you should have seen Louise just now. In pelvic semaphore she's perfect; make very happy the eyes."

The hubub of voices was as deafening as ever, and the occupants of the cafeteria were ever on the move. They plied to and from the lunch counter incessantly. It made one's head reel to watch them.

"Hey! Guy, over here," beckoned Jacques.

Guy advanced lackadaisically toward our table with Andre following in his wake.

"Salut!" beamed our new arrival.

"How is our dear traitor today?" They directed this address to me. You see, I was the traitor. I was part French-Canadian and had a French surname, but I spoke English only and followed the English-Canadian tradition. This made me a derachine, a traitor. They did not spurn me for this; on the contrary, they were sorry for me.

They began talking amongst themselves in their mother tongue with a vivacity common only to Latin people. They were no longer aware of my presence. I just sat there munching my sandwiches and drinking my coffee and watched them talk. They talked with much gesticulating and with great fervour.

I knew these three young men. I knew them quite well. They did not hide their secrets, their hopes, their aspirations and their wishes. These three young men were men of the world. They lived with it and for it. Their lives consisted in an earnest pursuit of the illusionary and capricious standards of changing fashions. They had been caught in the stream of worldiness without an anchor and had drifted aimlessly along. Their character had become unstable and they could no longer face reality. Pleasure with its false facade offered them an easy escape. The trouble was that pleasure did not offer them a permanent escape. The second state of these men was worse than the first and it grew progressively worse until now all three were in a state of frustration.

"Hey Jim!" exclaimed Jacques, "Andre has a great plan. He wants us to go to the country for the weekend".

"That's fine, Jacques. Where?"

"Oh! He suggests we go to Ste. Rose, but we can go to Ste. Agathe, Ile Perrot, or any place, of course, as long as it has one special character."

"And, what's that?"

"Easy—wine, women and song, C'est bon, eh!"



I did not answer.

"Hey! You'll come, eh?"

"Oh, — Yes, I guess I will, Jacques".

Good".

They began chatting in French once more. Wine, women and song. I mused over the words. Wine, the inebriation; women, the conquest; and song when there wasn't anything else left. It was the same old story. It was all they ever thought of. I looked at them again. They were in a huddle now. I supposed they were making their plans of seduction. I got up to walk over to a table nearby at which sat Mr. North, a top executive. He had a heavily hard body, was square in the head, face, jaws and shoulders, and always kept his hair neatly parted. Even in a picture his neck was ridged with muscles acquired from a life-long habit of stiffening his jaw and pushing it forward during all business conversations. He was dressed in a dark suit, a dark blue tie very large in a winged collar. In the tie he wore a pearl pin.

"Jim! Where are you going?" cried Jacques.

"I am going over to speak to Mr. North for a few minutes".

They frowned.

"But, you are leaving too soon. We are just making the plans."

"I know. Tell them to me later."

They seemed perplexed by my lack of enthusiasm. To them this was something extraordinary, something great, a chance to show their mettle as men about town. This was an excellent opportunity for freedom, the freedom of license.

Good-day, Mr. North".

"Oh! Good-day, Jim."

"How's the market?" I asked as a means of starting a conversation with Mr. North. He was a busy man, a robot of finance. Commerce was his only aspiration. He was a worrying man who carried in his head the essential statistics on a large packing house firm. He had a reputation for dominating every board he sat on, and a great talent for keeping his mouth shut. He was Presbyterian who went to church regularly and was known to believe quite literally in predestination.

He answered my question.

"Fine. fine; went up two points since yesterday. The prospects look good."

"That's great." I responded. "Your new advertising program appears to be a success."



"Yes," he answered rather distractedly, and that was all. He became pensive and made me feel as though my presence was unrequested. Apparently the statement about the advertising had aroused his mind to think about his work again. I was at a loss. I moved away.

It was five o'clock and I was standing in a queue half a block long waiting for a tram. Jacques strolled up.

"Don't forget, Jim. We'll be around to pick you up tomorrow afternoon."

"I won't forget it."

"Bonjour," he beamed and was gone.

So, tomorrow they plant on going to Ste. Rose. Nice resort town, I thought to myself. Swimming, boating, surfing, a nice beach, fishing and sun-tanning, all these can be had there in an atmosphere of sunshine and fresh air. It was an ideal place to spend a holiday. Unlimited outdoor activities were offered to the tourist and relaxation in its full grandeur was there for the taking. This was its garb in the daytime, a white dress of wholesome fun and relaxation. Its night garb had a different shade. It had a rather lusty lustre when seen under the gleam of a myriad of colored electric light bulbs.

What did Jacques and his pals anticipate? What did they foresee? Swimming? No. Andre wasn't even taking his bathing suit. Boating? I hardly think so. Fishing? No. They would never even think of it. Why, then, were they going? They were going to Ste. Rose because they knew that Saturday evening Ste. Rose would be swamped with tourists, people who, like themselves, were out to escape the druggery and heat of the city for a few days, people who would be out for what they called a good-time. Jacques foresaw Ste. Rose as a place where liberality would reign supreme, a place where pleasure would be god. His conscience did not protest, it was dead.

Nice resort town, Jacques thought to himself. Hotels, motels, taverns, cafes, dance palaces and women, beautiful women, all for the taking. You see, I know he thought these things because he told me so. He spent all Friday afternoon telling them to me.

Jacques had it all figured out. First, we go to the tavern. We have two shots each, no more. Just a glow-on is all we need. Then, we go to the dance hall. Sapristi! Will there be glamour there. Dazzling young women from the city out to enjoy life. Girls like to be daring where there is little probability of humiliation. Dizzy dames like them fall for any line. They are like coureurs des bois, they have the heart of an adventurer. Then, we look over the field and



pick the ones we like. We dance for a little while and then we'll ask them if they would like to go for a drive in the night air. Just to get acquainted, you know. The Rialto comes next. Double order, and I'll have mine straight. Drink it through a straw, sister, it becomes you better. She smiles. It always happens; midnight, and stars in their eyes. From then on Jacques is the captain of the ship.

To Jacques this was a magnificent obsession. He could see his happiness becoming greater and greater until it culminated in a perfect happiness. The world was at his fingertips and they were grasping out for Ste. Rose.

It is now Monday afternoon. Jacques does not feel so well. He has a terrific headache, but his worse ailment is a psychological one; he is disillusioned. The whole affair did not pan out as scheduled and the results were far from satisfactory. Jacques' faith in his own power of conquest has receded. In fact, he considers himself a miserable failure. His countenance has a haggard expression on it, and his work looms before him as a druggery to torture him. You see, I know these things are true because he told me so. He spent all morning relating them to me.

Jacques had his two shots Saturday evening. He also went to the dance hall.

"Jim, see that beauty over there? That's for me."

She was both elegant and pleasant looking. She danced with Jacques. Jacques was all politeness, a gay debonnair, and together they made a gracious couple. They danced till twelve o'clock. At this point Jacques thought the time was ripe so he suggested that they go for a car-ride in the cool night air; it was so warm inside dancing. She only laughed at him. He was confused for a few minutes but regained his composure. Once more he suggested it, only this time a little more forward. She probably misunderstood the first time, he thought to himself. She pretended not to hear. He was sunk. She had called the pitches and he had struck out.

Did she do this to tease Jacques? Hardly. She knew Jacques better than he did himself. She perceived that basically Jacques was good, the trouble was that he wasn't true to himself. She liked him. She recognized that beneath his false mien he was a man of character. His set of values had become twisted, he only needed someone to straighten them out. She knew she could do this.

That night in his cabin, Jacques was a very lonely and bewildered man. Something was wrong. She's lovely, he thought to himself, and so gentle. Then the rebuff would loom up and the gentleness would fade away. She would stand there looking as impersonal as a mausoleum. They



did not tread common ground for his outlook and hers were opposed. Someone's outlook was wrong. Could it be mine? he thought. I must talk to Guy and Andre tomorrow. He fell asleep. ..He talked to Guy and Andre all right. They laughed him to scorn. They told him his conscience was playing tricks on him. He felt ashamed. Today I must redeem myself. Today I prove that Jacques is right, not Gabrielle.

Jacques and Gabrielle went boating together that afternoon. It was a small boat without a sail or engine. Jacques rowed out into mid-stream and from there they let the boat drift with the current. They sat together on the seat in the stern. The cool breeze blew directly into their faces and they loved it for doing so. It was the first time Jacques had ever perceived the beauty of nature. He was awed by its grandeur. Gabrielle, at his side, outshone the splendor of all, and he thought of the Goodness of God.

They came ashore and we all went to supper. Jacques' spirits were elated. His happiness was overflowing. He wanted all of us to share it. But, Jacques thinking had become stereotyped. His intentions were good but the means were lacking. He did not know how to share his happiness. How will I do it? He could only think of the cafe but he knew that this was not quite the appropriate means. We finished supper. Jacques and Gabrielle got up to leave. Before Jacques knew it he had said it.

"We'll see you at the cafe at eight."

He could not retract now with Guy and Andre there. It was too late; he would have to hope for the best.

It is eight o'clock and a man has just entered the cafe. He is alone.

"Jacques! Over here."

He moved dejectedly over to my table and sat down.

"Where's Gabrielle?"

"She doesn't drink," he muttered.

He was silent for a few minutes then he asked. "Where are Guy and Andre?"

"They went for a drive."

"Alone?"

"No."

He became moody. A conflict was going on in his mind. We sat and watched TV. for a while.

"I'm leaving. Coming?"

"No, Jim. I am staying for awhile."

Jacques did stay for a while. He has a headache to prove it. .

It is now Thursday. Jacques feels much better now. He



threw a kiss to the switchboard operator, the steno and secretary on the way in. His geniality this morning is par excellence. This is good for a man who suffered much unrest the last few days. It is now the new Jacques, the true Jacques. It was not easy to give up the old. Several times he had nearly despaired. Gabrielle possessed that peace of mind which he so longed for. He knew why Gabrielle possessed it. Her way of thinking, her way of living did it. He must uproot his worldiness. He knew she had dignity; it was her decency and honesty and virtue that gave it to her. Last night he had a date with Gabrielle. He wanted to prove to himself for once and for all that what he was doing was right, that the whole thing was not a mere dilemma. You see, I know these things for he has just finished telling them to me.

"Jim, I have a date for tonight. Guess who?"

"Who?" I answered in a tone of astonishment, but I knew who it was.

"Gabrielle," beamed Jacques.

"But, Guy and Andre were expecting you to go with them tonight," I jested.

"Listen. No more Guy and Andre—they are nothing to me—they are drifters. From now on it is Jacques and Gabrielle."

RALPH GAUDET '55.

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### A STORM AT SEA

The wind was stiff as down the bay,  
The little vessel plowed its way,  
The sails were full, the rudder true  
And happy was the care-free crew:  
Little John, an orphan boy,  
But ten years old, the pride and joy  
Of both his parents, old and grey,  
Who fostered him; but on this day  
He sea-bred father, Dick the Tall,  
Who plied his trade through drifts and squall  
Against the wishes of his wife  
Brought John to sea (his chosen life).  
Besides those two who manned that boat,  
Another man helped it to float,  
Dick's brother Tom, a quiet man,  
Of no mean strength, who chose his span  
Of life to tell the sea.