

The Hand

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Focus

Anger can be a dangerous emotion. An angry outburst can hurt people we care for, or ourselves. Read this story to find out how uncontrolled anger changed a man's life.

Around the whole mountain nobody had a temper like Géron's.

This temper arose in him and lashed out from him like an August lightning bolt, and the explosion shook up all of the hamlet. During these explosions, Géron yelled with rage and everybody trembled as long as his angry temper lasted. But this anger would melt away as suddenly as it came; the whole fit of anger only took the time of two shouts, a menacing gesture, and a vicious grin which covered his whole face.

"He'll kill one day," Mourgan used to say. "One day somebody will be within reach of that wild swing and Géron will kill him."

Géron's wife always used to disagree with such statements: "He's gentle. What if he yells sometimes and has his fits of anger? Basically, he's gentle and good. He's a loving man."

She was regarded as an expert in these love matters, because she had been pining away from the anguish of unrequited love till she married her Géron.

She was just called by the simple name, Marie, and she was as simply beautiful as her name. (What I'm telling you happened one hundred years ago when the mountain was almost uninhabited, with only three hamlets clinging to its slopes. Further down, below the mountain, there was the shore of that sea which extends all the way to Africa).

"He's a mild man," Marie used to repeat, when Géron with his temper had shaken up all of the snow-covered mountain side.

Géron used to farm a long, narrow strip of land which bordered on the Gueuse, our stream. On this strip of land he grew those things which usually grow on yellowish, undernourished soil. Higher up, above the shore, he pastured a flock of sheep whose wool he sold to the peddlers who came every spring.

"At least," said Mourgan, who liked G eron and cared about him, "nobody can deny that he holds on to his Marie like the sky holds on to her stars. Both Marie and G eron are one, until death."

This was true, and it was beautiful in its truth. Their love was an example to those other couples in the three hamlets who felt little for each other and nagged each other all day long out of frustration, regret or contempt. When G eron and Marie walked down the road, he being big and strong as an animal and she being refined and discreet, an observer could easily and truthfully have said that over their heads there was a halo of pure love.

There was nothing in their life together which could ever have come between them except for G eron's frequent outbursts of temper. Marie did her share of the common chores. She was strong under that delicate exterior, and she could even be called sturdy. She was quite skillful and had agile, lively fingers, like those of a lacework-maker.

G eron, by himself, was able to take care of all that was necessary to keep the farm going.

The daily life of Marie and G eron was thus quite simple: a property that produced a living, a healthy flock, crops which were not worse than the others in the land, a peaceful life, and each other's quiet presence. This was a poor region, at the foot of mountains which were too steep, a region under the unforgiving hot summer sun which was inevitably followed by the cold winter winds. It was almost a miracle that there could be, in such a place, two people who loved each other so much and a farm which produced the necessities of life.

If only it weren't for those outbursts of temper . . . They were caused by everything and they were caused by nothing. G eron could be patient and sweet all week. However, if a rock surfaced in his field at the wrong moment, or the soup wasn't hot enough, or a lamb got lost on the

heights — then the anger came roaring out. The yelling, the vicious grin and the enormous crescendo of anger — all of the frightful symptoms were suddenly and terribly present. And then . . . came the quiet calm.

Mourgan, who was always listening nearby, shook his head and predicted: "One day he'll commit murder."

Géron didn't kill. However, he did do something terrible which came close to murder.

It happened on a Sunday, a Sunday full of flowers. Flowers are so rare in our region that three flowers are regarded as a gift from God, and if ten flowers appear at one time, then it can only mean that spring has arrived. So it was a beautiful Sunday, full of sunlight, and Géron came to the hamlet with his Marie. They came for no special purpose, only to chat, to stroll around, and to greet the neighbors.

They both came in their usual way, walking close together, side by side, arm in arm. They belonged so much together that Marie, during a conversation with others, could complete word for word Géron's unfinished sentences, and he could do the same with her talk. It was as if their thoughts, inextricably linked, came from only one brain.

For about an hour they strolled about the central square of the hamlet, chatting at one doorway, moving towards a group under the sycamore tree, coming back to still another threshold for more conversation. It was an enjoyable day filled with good company and pleasurable words which were exchanged with smiles.



And then the dog appeared. He was hardly more than a puppy, a nameless and ownerless mongrel who sprang up suddenly from the road leading to the valley. He ran here and there, barking vigorously. He threatened Mourgan, then mother Soubert, and then many others. When he moved towards Geron, he did more than simply threaten him: he jumped on the man's leg and, with a quick stroke of his jaws, bit him. Geron gave a mighty yell. First came a cry of pain which soon turned into a roar of rage.

Why did Marie have to burst out laughing at that moment, instead of comforting her Geron? Why did her laugh have to greet him just when his uncontrollable anger welled up?

Then Geron made his move — the terrible swing which all knew so well. His large, tough hand struck out viciously, and Marie received the punch, a powerful blow which blasted her cheek and sent her sprawling on the ground.

Then came the silence. Nobody moved. An air of sudden and profound shame hung over every corner of the hamlet. After all, Geron loved his Marie so much; she was the very last person in the world who should have been the target of his temper.

They both left the hamlet together. Without a moment's delay, he took the arm of the weeping woman who couldn't understand what had happened. He was almost pulling her along as if she were one of his sheep, and they headed up the road towards their farm.

Jasmin, who met them at the half-way point to the farm, said that Marie was crying, and Geron too was crying so much that the tears were almost flooding his cheeks.

After this incident, Geron never had another explosion of his famous temper. He became known for his mild and controlled nature, just as he once had been legendary for his anger. Whenever he was provoked by some unwelcome event or unpleasant incident, he quickly lifted his arm up before his eyes, and this rapidly restored his calm and quiet self-control.



Because something had happened the very evening of that day when he had punched Marie. To tame his temper forever, Geron, alone in the sheepfold, with only one swift, clean stroke of his axe, had cut off his hand.



Canadian Authors: Yves Thériault

Yves Thériault is one of Quebec's most well-known authors. Besides 30 major novels, he has written over 1300 scripts for radio and TV and has had more than 60 plays broadcast in Quebec City alone. His best-known and most successful novel is *Agaguk*, first published in 1958, a gripping story about an Inuit man in revolt against tribal life. It is an exciting and absorbing story, the background provided by Thériault's first hand knowledge of the Canadian north, where he travelled widely in his younger days.

Born in 1915, Thériault left school at the age of 16 and spent the next four years in a variety of occupations, from trapper and truck driver to nightclub host and tractor salesman. Hard work and hard living during these years resulted in an attack of tuberculosis and an eighteen month period spent in a sanatorium. It was after this period of rest and reflection that he started his career in radio and TV as announcer and script-writer. In addition, he began to write short stories and "ten cent thrillers", which were published under various names.

In 1970 he suffered a stroke which left him unable to use either pen or typewriter, but he continued to dictate books into a tape recorder. At present, he continues to produce novels, books for young people, and poetry on his farm beside the Richelieu River.