

no claim to the first word, and after five leaden minutes he began to fear she did not want to talk to him at all. This would be a calamity, and, moreover, a waste of the commandant's time. It seemed that Jacques must himself put forth the first word, and he suffered in the act of creating something to say. But out of this chaotic darkness a luminous thought streamed across his brain like the silent flash of the northern aurora.

"Mademoiselle, you like cabbage, is it not so?"

"Yes, monsieur," responded Louise, without lifting her eyes.

"Cabbage is a very good vegetable.—My seignior is in somewhat of a hurry. We must be married and start back to Montreal directly. Do you wish to be married?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I, in fact, wish it myself. When you go as a soldier you don't want a wife. But when you settle down en censive, then, mademoiselle, it is convenient to have a woman to work and help dig."

"Have you a house and farm, monsieur?" murmured Louise.

Jacques spread his hands, the cap pendant from one of them.

"I have the island of St. Bernard under my seignior, mademoiselle. It is a vast estate, almost a league in extent. The house is a mansion of stone,

mademoiselle, strong as a fort, and equal to some castles in Rouen. You come from Rouen, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And there is Mademoiselle de Granville, my lord's half-sister, but nobody else to wait upon. For Sieur des Ormeaux, when not at his fortress, may go on expeditions. We never yet took refuge at Montreal from the Indians, so strong is St. Bernard. The house is of rock cemented together and built against a rock. Do you ever drink brandy, mademoiselle?"

"I, monsieur! Never in my life!"

"That must be a good thing in a woman," commented Jacques, with a nod of satisfaction.

"Are you at all thriftless or lazy, monsieur?" the demure girl took her turn to inquire.

"No, mademoiselle; I make my clothes do year after year. And had you seen the frozen fish and eels, the venison, the cabbage, beets, and onions I stored in our cellar for winter, you would not ask if I am lazy."

Louise smiled her bashful approval upon him, and said in explanation:

"I should not like a thriftless, lazy husband."

"Mademoiselle, we are cut out of the same caribou-skin, and match like a pair of moccasins. Shall we go to the notary?"

"If you wish, monsieur."

"You accept me as your husband?"

"If you please, monsieur."

"Then let us get married. I forget your name."

"Louis Bibelot."

"My name is Jacques Goffinet. When we are married we can get better acquainted."

Flushed with success, Jacques turned to display a signal of victory to his seignior, and was astounded to see Dollard standing by the fire-place in earnest conversation with a beautiful girl. It was evident that no further countenance and support could be expected from Dollard. So Jacques took his bride in tow as a tug may now be seen guiding some yacht of goodly proportions through a crowded harbor, and set out to find the notary.

When Dollard fell into an easy posture to enjoy his man's courtship, he cast a preliminary glance about the hall, that other amusing things might not escape him. At once his attitude became tense, his ears buzzed, and the blood rose like wine to his head. The woman of his constant thoughts was warming her hand at the fire. He could not be mistaken; there was nothing else like the glory of her youthful white hair in either hemisphere; and without an instant's hesitation he brought himself before her, bowing, hat in hand, until his plume lay on the floor.

The demoiselle made a like stately obeisance.

Dumb, then, they stood, just as the peasant couple had done; but in this case too bounteous speech choked itself. It seemed to both that their hearts beat aloud. Dollard felt himself vibrate from head to foot with the action of his blood-valves. The pair looked up and stammered to cover such noise within, speaking together, and instantly begged each other's pardon, then looked down and were silent again.

"How is it possible," said Dollard, carefully modulating his voice, "that I see you here, Mademoiselle Laval!"

"The Sieur des Ormeaux takes me for a king's girl! How is it possible I see *you* here, monsieur?"

"I came to keep my man in countenance, while he picked himself a wife. This instant is a drop from Paradise!"

"Monsieur is easily satisfied if he can call such surroundings a paradise," said Claire, smiling at the grim hall.

"Mademoiselle, when did you come from France?"

"Yesterday we arrived, Sieur des Ormeaux."

"Then you came in the king's ship?"

"Without a doubt."

"This is wonderful! I thought you three thousand miles away from me."

"Did you honor me with a thought at the other extremity of that distance?" she asked carelessly,

pushing towards the fire with the point of her foot a bit of bark which its own steam had burst off a log.

"Claire!" he said, pressing his hand on his eyes.

"Monsieur, the abbess is near," the young lady responded in tremor.

"You are not here to be a nun?"

"Why not?"

"But are you?"

"Monsieur, you have penetration. That is said to be my errand."

"But why do you come to New France?"

"That is what the bishop said. I hope we may choose our convents, we poor nuns."

"O Claire! I cannot endure this," Dollard sobbed in his throat. It was a hoarse note of masculine anguish, but the girl observed him with radiant eyes.

"I never was a man fit to touch the tip of your white finger. Mademoiselle, have you forgotten those messages that I sent you by my cousin when she was with you at the convent?"

"It was very improper, *Sieur des Ormeaux*. Yes, indeed, I have forgotten every one of them."

"You have not thought of me, and I have lived on thoughts of you. I hoped to ennoble myself in your eyes—and you are thrown in my way to turn me mad at the last instant!"

"Forgive my misfortune which throws me in your way, monsieur," she said sedately. "I am driven here a fugitive."

"From what?" Dollard's hand caught the hilt of his sword.

"From something very unpleasant. In fact, from marriage."

His face cleared, and he laughed aloud with satisfaction.

"Do you hate marriage?"

"I detest it."

"You came to live under the bishop's protection?"

"His penance and discipline, you mean."

"This is a rude country for you. How often have I presumed to plan your life and mine together, arranging the minutest points of our perfect happiness! I have loved you and been yours since the first moment I saw you. And how I have followed your abbess's carriage when it contained you! I was to distinguish myself in military service, and become able to demand your hand of your guardian. But that takes so long! There was a rumor that you were to be married. Angel! I could throw myself on the floor with my cheek against your foot!"

"O *Sieur des Ormeaux*! do not say that. It is a surprise to find you in this country, though it is very natural that you should be here. I must now go back to the convent."

"Wait. Do not go for a moment. Let me speak to you. Remember how long I have done without seeing you."

"Oh, I only came in a moment because I was curious."

"Then stay a moment because you are merciful."

"But I must go back to the convent, *Sieur des Ormeaux*," she urged, her throat swelling, her face filling with blood. "Because ——"

"Because what?"

"Because I must go back to the convent. It is the best place for me, *monsieur*. And you will soon forget."

The two poor things stood trembling, though *Dollard's* face gathered splendor.

"*Claire*, you are mine. You know that you are mine! This is love! O saints!"

He threw himself on his knees before her without a thought of any spectator, his sword clanking against the flags of the hearth.

"*Monsieur* ——"

"Say 'My husband!'"

"My husband," she did whisper; and at that word he rose up and took her in his arms.

V.

JACQUES HAS SCRUPLES.



ALL other business in the hall was suspended. Perhaps the fire and success of *Dollard's* courtship kindled envy in ruder breasts; but in *Mother Mary's* it kindled that beacon which a vestal keeps ready against the inroads of the cloister's despoilers.

Pallid and stately she placed herself before the pair. And during this conference she made dabs forward with her head, as a poor hen may be seen to do when the hawk has stolen her chicken.

"We did not understand, *monsieur*, that the commandant of *Montreal* sought a wife."

"Reverend mother," said *Dollard*, shielding the side of *Claire's* face with his hand as he held her head against him, "I never dared seek such a blessing as this. The saints have given it to me."