

"Now, if she be well contented with the commandant's change of mind, all will go right. But if she turns rebellious at these new orders, threatening to desert, and wanting the entire earth with the seigniority thrown in, there'll be only one thing for me to do. I'll whip her!"

VI.

A RIVER CÔTE.

THE four Huron Indians, cut off abruptly from the luxury of a Lower Town drinking-shop, sat in sulky readiness with their grasp upon the oars. Dollard was at the stern of the boat beside Claire, whom he had wrapped in bear-skins, because at high noon the April air was chill upon the river.

Dollier de Casson had likewise taken to his canoe with his servant and pack of sacred utensils, and this small craft rested against the larger one to resist the current's dragging. Dollard's rope yet held to the shore. His impatient eyes watched Quebec Heights for the appearance of Jacques and Louise.

Water lapping the two boats brought them together with faint jars and grindings of the edges. Dollier

de Casson, sitting thus facing the contraband bride, beheld her with increasing interest.

Jacques and Louise, carrying the bride's caskets and impedimenta of their own, finally appeared on Quebec's slopes, descending with deliberation to the landing.

They had no breath to spend in chat, but Jacques realized with voiceless approval that Louise carried manfully her portion of the freight.

He rolled his keg into the boat, slipped the boxes aboard, and helped Louise to a bench in front of himself; then, untying the rope, he sprung in.

The Hurons bent to their oars and the boat shot out into the river, Dollier de Casson's canoe-man following. Above water murmur and rhythmic splash of oars Dollard then called his vassal to account, addressing him over the Indians' swaying shoulders.

"What have you been doing this hour by the sun, Jacques Goffinet?"

"Hour, m'sieur? I have trotted myself into a sweat since we left the cathedral, and thrown away all my bounty the king pays a bachelor on his marriage, except this keg of salt meat and eleven crowns in money. That because of your hot haste, m'sieur. I lose an ox, a cow, a pair of fine hogs, and such chickens as never crowed on St. Bernard, and yet I have been an hour, have I?—May the saints never

let ruin and poverty tread on my heels so fast another hour while I live!"

Claire held out to Dollard, from her furs, a square watch having a mirror set in its back, saying:

"You see, we waited scarcely twenty-five minutes."

Dollard laughed, but called again to his vassal:

"A cow, an ox, a load of swine, and a flock of chickens! And having freighted the boat with these, where did you intend to carry the lady of St. Bernard, your seignior, your wife, yourself, and the rowers, my excellent Jacques? Were we to be turned out as guests to the bishop?"

"Saints forbid, m'sieur," Jacques called back sincerely. "The bishop and the abbess stood by while my wife brought madame's caskets from the convent, and they smiled so 't would make a man's teeth chatter. I am not skilled in the looks of holy folks, but I said to my wife as we came away, 'These Quebec Jesuits, they begrudge the light of day to Montreal.' So it would be cold cheer you got of bishop or abbess, m'sieur."

Dollard and the fur-wrapped bride looked up at Quebec promontory which they were rounding, heights of sheer rock stretching up and holding the citadel in mid-heaven. The Indians steadily flung the boat upstream.

Claire turned over in her mind that mute contempt which Mother Mary evidently felt for what she would

call a girl's fickleness. Her ungracious leave-taking of the upright and duty-loving abbess was a pain to her. As to the bishop, she could not regret that his first benediction had been final. Resentment still heated her against both those strict devotees. She was yet young enough to expect perfect happiness, for the children of man live much before they learn to absorb the few flawless joys which owe their perfection to briefness.

One such moment Claire had when her soldier leaned over her in silence.

"We are going farther from France. Are you homesick, dear?"

"No; I am simply in a rage at the bishop of New France and the abbess of the Ursulines."

"There they go behind the rock of Quebec, entirely separated from us. Have you regrets that you bore such a wedding for my sake?"

"Sieur des Ormeaux, I have but a single fault to find with you."

"What is that?" Dollard anxiously inquired.

"The edge of your hat is too narrow."

"Why, it is the usual head-cover of a French officer of my rank; but I will throw it into the river."

"O, monsieur! that would be worse than ever. If you despise me for seizing on you as I did —"

"O Claire!"

"What will you think when I own my depravity now? The abbess might well smile. She doubtless knows I will say this to you. Are those yellow-feathered men watching us?"

"Not at all. They watch the St. Lawrence."

"Louise's back is turned. But your servant?"

"Can he do anything but stare at Louise?"

"I forgot the priest."

"His boat is many lengths behind."

"Sieur des Ormeaux, this is a lovely voyage. But do you remember climbing the convent wall and dropping into the garden once where your cousin and I sat with our needlework?"

"Once? Say many times. I spent much of my life on that convent wall. You saw me once."

"You fell on one knee, monsieur, and seized my work and kissed it. That silk mess; I often looked at it afterward. Men have very queer tastes, have they not? It is a shocking thing when a girl has just flown the convent and her own family, but, O Sieur des Ormeaux! I want to kiss you!"

A sail-boat, perhaps venturing down from Three Rivers, cut past them in the distance. Other craft disappeared. No stealthy canoe shot from cover of rock or headland. As Claire half closed her eyes and leaned against the rest provided for her, she thought she saw a heron rise from shallows at the

water's edge, trailing its legs in flight. Catbirds and blue jays could be seen like darting specks, describing lineless curves against the sky or shore.

Sometimes Dollier de Casson's boat lagged, or again it shot close behind Dollard's. The first stop was made on a flat rocky island where there was a spring of clear water. Louise and Jacques spread out as a bridal repast such provisions as Dollard had hurriedly bought in Quebec, with dried eels and cured fish from the St. Bernard cellar. The pause was a brief one. And no tale of this island was dropped in Claire's ear, or of another island nearer the St. Lawrence's mouth: how two hundred Miemac Indians camped there for the night, beaching their canoes and hiding their wives and children in a recess of the rocks; how the Iroquois surprised and blotted them all out. That dreaded war-cry, "Kohe—Kohe!" might well be living in the air along the river yet.

Before reëntering the boat Claire went to the spring for a last cup of water, taking Louise with her.

"And what did the bishop say?" she seized this chance to inquire.

"Mademoiselle—madame, he did nothing but look, as my husband said. We were all four surprised, the bishop, the abbess, my husband, and I."

"Did the abbess accept my purse I bade you leave for the convent?"

"Madame, I left it lying on the floor where she dropped it. She has no doubt picked it up and counted the coins out to charity by this. The whole marriage seems a miracle, with my mother helping the blessed saints."

"Were you, then, pleased, my child?"

"Mademoiselle, I was stupid with delight. For you will now be my mistress and have me to wait on you the rest of our lives. Had *you* no terrors at coming away with a strange man, mademoiselle?"

"Strange man, tongue of pertness! when the Sieur des Ormeaux has been my lover these many years."

"Was he, indeed, one of those troublesome wooers who drove you out of France? You said this morning you would never be yoked in marriage, and long before the sun goes down you are a bride! Ah, madame, the air of this country must be favorable to women!"

Again the boats pushed up-river, following the afternoon westward.

They had passed Cap Rouge, a cluster of cabins, the seignior's substantial stone hut forming one side of the fort-like palisades. The strip farms extended in long ribbons back from the shore. Their black stubble of stumps, mowed by ax and fire, crouched like the pitiful impotence of man at the flanks of unmeasured forest.

Before nightfall the voyagers came near a low beach where sand and gravel insensibly changed to flat clearing, and a côte of three or four families huddled together.

Wild red-legged children came shouting to the water's edge before Dollier de Casson's canoe was beached, and some women equally sylvan gathered shyly among the stumps to welcome him.

As the priest stepped from his boat he waved a hand in farewell to the other voyagers, and Dollard stood up, lifting his hat.

The sacrament of marriage, so easy of attainment in New France at that time, had evidently been dispensed with in the first hut this spiritual father entered. His man carried in his sacred luggage, and the temporary chapel was soon set up in a corner unoccupied. The children hovered near in delight, gazing at tall candles and gilt ornaments, for even in that age of poverty the pomps of the Roman Church were carried into settlers' cabins throughout New France. Dollier de Casson had for his confessional closet a canopy of black cloth stretched over two supports. The penitent crept under this merciful wing, and the priest, seated on a stool, could examine the soul as a modern photographer examines his camera; except that he used ear instead of eye.

The interior of a peasant censitaire's dwelling changes little from generation to generation. One

may still see the crucifix over the principal bed, joints of cured meat hanging from rafters, and the artillery of the house resting there on hooks. A rough-built loom crowded inmates whom it clothed. And against the wall of the entrance side dangled a vial of holy water as a safeguard against lightning.

Dollier de Casson stood up to admonish his little flock, gathered from all the huts of the côte, into silence before him. The men took off their rough caps and put them under their arms, standing in a disordered group together. Though respectful and obedient, they did not crowd their spiritual father with such wild eagerness as the women, who, on any seat found or carried in, sat hungrily, hushing around their knees the nipped French dialect of their children.

"What is this, Antonio Brunette?" exclaimed Father de Casson after he had cast his eyes among them. "Could you not wait my coming, when you well knew I purposed marrying you this time? You intend to have the wedding and the christening together."

"Father," expostulated the swart youth, avoiding the priest to gaze sheepishly at his betrothed's cowering distress, "Pierre's daughter is past sixteen, and we would have been married if you had been here. You know the king lays a fine on any father who lets his daughter pass sixteen without binding her in marriage. And Pierre is a very poor man."

"Therefore, to help Pierre evade his Majesty's fine, you must break the laws of Heaven, must you, my son? Hearty penance shall ye both do before I minister to you the sacrament of marriage. My children, the evil one prowls constantly along the banks of this river, while your poor confessors can only reach you at intervals of months. Heed my admonitions. Where is Pierre's wife?"

Down went Pierre's face between his hands into his cap.

"Dead," he articulated from its hollow. "Without absolution. And the little baby on her arm, it went with her unbaptized."

"God have pity on you, my children," said Dollier de Casson. "I will say masses over her grave, and it is well with the little unblemished soul. How many children have you, Pierre?"

"Seventeen, father."

"Twenty-six, he should say, father," a woman near the priest declared. "For the widow of Jean Ba'ti' Morin has nine."

"And why should Pierre count as his own the flock of Jean Ba'ti' Morin's widow?"

"Because he is to marry her, father, when Antonio Brunette marries his oldest girl."

"If I come not oftener," remarked the priest, "you will all be changed about and newly related to each other so that I shall not know how to name ye. I will

read the service for the dead over your first wife, Pierre, before I marry you to your second. It is indeed better to be dwelling in love than in discord. Have you had any disagreements?"

"No, father; but Jean Ba'ti's oldest boy has taken to the woods and is off among the Indians, leaving his mother to farm alone with only six little lads to help her."

"Another *coureur de bois*," said the priest in displeasure.

"Therefore, father," opportunely put in Jean Ba'ti's widow, "I having no man at all, and Pierre having no woman at all, we thought to wed."

"Think now of your sins," said Father de Casson, "from oldest to youngest. After penance and absolution and examination in the faith ye shall have mass."

The solemn performance of these religious duties began and proceeded until dusk obliterated all faces in the dimly lighted cabin. Stump roots were piled up in the fire-place, and Pierre's daughter, between her prayers, put on the evening meal to cook.

If a child tittered at going under the confessional tent, its mother gave it a rear prod with admonishing hand. In that humble darkness Father de Casson's ear received the whispers of all these plodding souls, and his tongue checked their evil and nourished their good. The cabin became a chapel full of kneeling figures telling beads.

This portion of his duty finished, Dollier de Casson postponed the catechizing, and made Pierre take a lighted stick of pine and show him that ridge whereunder mother and baby lay. There was always danger of surprise by the Iroquois. The men and women who followed in irregular procession through the vast dimness of northern twilight kept on their guard against moving stumps or any sudden uprising like the rush of quails from some covert. In rapid tones the priest repeated the service for the dead; then called his followers from their knees to return to the house to celebrate the weddings of Pierre and Pierre's daughter.

After this rite, supper was served in Pierre's house, the other families dispersing to their own tables — cabbage-soup, fat pork, and coarse bread made from pounded grain; for this côte was too poor to have a mill. These were special luxuries for Father de Casson, for the usual censitaire supper consisted of bread and eels. The missionary priest, accustomed with equal patience to fasting or eating, spread his hands above unsavory steam and blessed the meal. Silently, while he spoke, the door opened and a slim dark girl entered the house.



"Peace be with you, Massawippa."