

"Let us walk up and down until some supper is served, to get rid of the boat's cramping."

Mademoiselle de Granville sat down and continued to arrange her darning.

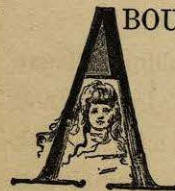
Whenever they were quite at the room's end Claire drew a free breath, but always in passing the masked presence she shrunk bodily against Dollard, for the room was narrow. He, with tense nerves and far-looking eyes, failed to notice this. The eccentricities of any man's female relatives appeal to his blindest side. Custom has used him to them, and his own blood speaks their apology.

The river air blew into the open window. There were no sounds except the footsteps of Dollard and Claire, and a stirring of the household below which was hint of sound only, so thick were the walls and floors.

In due time Jacques came up, bearing the supper. His seignior when at St. Bernard ate in the kitchen. But this was a descent unbefitting a grand bride. While Jacques was preparing the round table, Claire stole another look towards the mask which must now be removed. But by some sudden and noiseless process known to recluse women Mademoiselle de Granville had already taken herself and her embroidery frame out of the room.

X.

THE SEIGNIORY KITCHEN.



ABOUT 1 o'clock of the night Jacques rose from his sleeping-cell, as he was in the habit of doing, to put more wood on the kitchen fire.

The window slits let in some moonlight of a bluish quality, but the larger part of this wide space lay in shadow until Jacques sent over it the ruddiness of a revived fire. Out of uncertainty came the doors of the sleeping-cells, the rafters and dried herbs which hung from them, heavy table and benches and stools, cooking-vessels, guns, bags of stored grain, and the figures of the four Hurons, two at each side of the hearth, stretched out in their blankets with their heels to the fire—and Jacques himself, disordered from sleep and imperfectly thrust into lower garments. He lingered stupidly looking at the magician fire while it rose and crackled

and cast long oblique shadows with the cemented posts.

Dollard descended the stairway from his apartment, pressing down his sword-hilt to keep the scabbard from clanking on each step. He was entirely dressed in his uniform. As he approached the fire and Jacques turned towards him, his face looked bloodless, his features standing high, the forehead well reared back.

"I am glad you are awake," he said to Jacques, half aloud. "Are the others asleep?" indicating those cells occupied by Louise and the Papillon family. There was no questioning the deep slumber which inclosed his Indians.

"Yes, m'sieur."

"Have you packed the provisions I directed you to pack?"

"Yes, m'sieur. M'sieur, you do not leave at this hour?"

"At once."

"But, m'sieur, the Lachine is hard enough to run in daytime."

"There is broad moonlight. Are you sure you understand everything?"

"M'sieur, I hope I do. Have you told madame?"

Dollard wheeled and flung his clinched hands above his head as men do on receiving gunshot wounds.

"O saints! I cannot tell her! I am a wretch, Jacques. She has been happy; I have not caused her a moment's suffering. Let her sleep till morning. Tell her then merely that I have gone to my fortress; that I would not expose her to the dangers of the route by night. It will soon be over now. Sometime she can forgive this cruelty if a deed goes after it to make her proud. She has proud blood, my boy; she loves honor. Oh, what a raving madman I was to marry her, my beloved! I thought it could do *her* no harm—that it could not shake *my* purpose! O my Claire! O my poor New France! Torn this way, I deserve shame with death—no martyr's crown—no touch of glory to lighten my darkness for ever and ever!"

"M'sieur," whimpered Jacques, crouching and wiping nose and eyes with his palms, "don't say that! My little master, my pretty, my dear boy! These women have the trick of tripping a man up when he sets his foot to any enterprise."

"Hear me," said Dollard, grasping him on each side of the collar. "She is the last of the Des Ormeaux to you. Serve her faithfully as you serve the queen of heaven. If she wants to go back to France, go with her. Before this I bequeathed you St. Bernard. Now I am leaving you a priceless charge. Your wife shall obey and follow her to the ends of

the earth. To-day I altered my will in Montreal and gave her my last coin, gave her my seigniory, I gave her *you!* Do you refuse to obey my last commands? Do you disallow my rights in you?"

Jacques's puckered face unflinchingly turned upward and met the stare of his master.

"M'sieur, I will follow my lady's whims and do your commands to the hour of my death."

Dollard, like a mastiff, shook him.

"Is there any treachery in you, Jacques Goffinet, free follower of the house of Des Ormeaux? If there is, out with it now, or my dead eyes will pry through you hereafter."

"M'sieur," answered Jacques, lifting his hand and making the sign of the cross, "I am true man to my core. I do love to pile good stuff together and call land mine, but thou knowest I love a bit of cloth from one of thy old garments better than all the seigniories in New France."

Dollard let go Jacques's collar and extended his arms around the stumpy man's neck.

"My good old Jacques! My good old Jacques!"

"How proud I have always been of thee!" choked Jacques.

"I have told her to depend on you, Jacques. The will I brought home in my breast and placed among her caskets. She will provide for Louise and you, and she will provide for poor Renée, also. Kick the

Indians and wake them up. There is not another moment to spare."

The Indians were roused, and stood up taciturn and ready for action, drawing their blankets around themselves. These Hurons, vagrants from Annahotaha's tribe, were hangers-on about the fortress at Montreal. Jacques gave them each a careful dram, and lighted at the fire a dipped candle. With this feeble light he penetrated the darkness of the cellar floor, leading the party down its tortuous staircase.

Dollard, who had stood with his hand on the door-latch, was the last to leave the upper room. His questions followed Jacques around the turns of the stairs.

"You are well provisioned, Jacques?"

"Yes, m'sieur."

"At daybreak you will remember to have Papillon help you bring in an abundant supply of water?"

"Yes, m'sieur."

"Bar the doors when you see any one approaching and keep watch on all sides every day."

"Yes, m'sieur."

Jacques jammed his candle-end into a crack of the rock floor, undid the fastenings, and with a jerk let the moonlight in on their semi-darkness.

They went out to the palisade gate, the Indians dragged the boat carefully to its launching, and Jacques stored in it Dollard's provisions.

"Good-bye, my man," said Dollard.

"M'sieur," said Jacques, "I have always obeyed you. There is but one thing in my heart against you, and I will cleanse myself of that now."

"Quickly, then." The young man had one foot in the boat.

"It is the same old hard spot. Thou wouldst rule me out of this expedition. A man that loves thee as I love thee!"

"Jacques, if I had reasons before on Renée's account, what reasons have I not now?"

"Bless thee, my master Adam Daulac!"

"Bless thee, my Jacques!"

The boat shot off, and Jacques went in and fastened the gate and the door.

XI.

MADemoiselle DE GRANVILLE'S
BROTHER.

SOON after 1 o'clock Claire awoke and sat upright in her dim room. Her alarm at the absence of Dollard was swallowed instantly by greater alarm at the presence of some one else.

This small chamber, like the saloon, was lighted by one square window, and male housekeeping at St. Bernard, combined with the quality of glass manufactured for colonial use at that date, veiled generous moonlight which would have thrown up sharply every object in the severe place.

Claire's garments, folded and laid upon a stool, were motionless to her expanding eyes; so were her boxes where Louise had placed them. All the luggage which a young lady of rank then carried with her to the ends of the earth could be lifted upstairs in the arms of a stout maid. Unstirring was the

small black velvet cap which Claire had chosen from her belongings to wear during the voyage. It was stuck against the wall like a dim blot of ink. But nothing else visible seemed quite so motionless and unstimulating as the figure by the bed. It was Mademoiselle de Granville. Except that her personality was oppressive, she seemed a lifeless lump without breath or sight, until Claire's tense pupils adapted to duski-ness found eyes in the mask, eyes stiffly gazing.

The bride's voice sunk in her throat, but she forced it to husky action.

"What do you want?"

Automatically, holding its elbows to its sides, the figure lifted one forearm and pointed to Claire's garments.

"Do you require me to put them on?"

It continued to point.

"Be so kind as to withdraw, then, and I will put them on."

It continued to point, without change of attitude or sound of human breath.

The girl crept out of her couch at that corner farthest from the figure, rolled up and pinned her white curls as best she could, and assimilated the garments from the stool, keeping her eye braced repellantly against the automaton pointing at her. She finished by drawing her mantle over her dress, and the velvet cap over her hair.

"Now I am ready, if you are determined I shall go somewhere with you."

The figure turned itself about and opened the door into the saloon. Claire followed, keeping far behind those silent feet, and thus they walked through that grim room over which touches of beauty had never been thrown by a woman's keeping.

Claire followed into another chamber and was shut in darkness. It was the rock side of the house, without moonlighted windows. Mademoiselle de Granville had left her, and she stood confused, forgetting which way she should turn to the door-latch of release. The absence of Dollard now rushed back over her, and helped the dark to heap her with terrors. The sanest people have felt sparks of madness flash across the brain. One such flash created for her a trap in the floor to swallow her to the depths of the island.

Directly her surroundings were lighted by a door opening to an inner room. A priest stood there in black cassock, his face smooth and dark, his eyes dark and attentive. He was not tonsured, but with hair clustering high upon his head he looked like Dollard grown to sudden middle age, his fire burnt to ashes, his shoulders bowed by penances, his soul dried as a fern might be dried betwixt the wooden lids of his breviary. Behind him stood an altar, two tall candles burning upon it, and above the altar

hung a crucifix. She took note of nothing else in the room.

"Pardon me, father; I am lost in the house. Mademoiselle de Granville brought me here and has left me."

"Yes." His voice had depth and volume, and was like Dollard's voice grown older. "She brought you at my request."

"At *your* request, father? Where is Mademoiselle de Granville?"

"In that closet," he replied, showing a door at the corner of his chapel room. "My poor lifeless sister is at her devotions."

"I see my way now. With your permission I will go back," said Claire. This unwholesome priest like a demon presentation of Dollard made her shudder.

"Stop, Mademoiselle Laval."

"I am Madame des Ormeaux; as you should know, being inmate of this house and evidently my husband's brother."

"Mademoiselle de Granville has but one brother," said the priest.

"The Sieur des Ormeaux is her brother."

"There is no Sieur des Ormeaux." He smiled in making the assertion, his lips parting indulgently.

"I mean Dollard, commandant of the fort of Montreal."

"There is no Dollard, commandant of the fort of Montreal. I am the Abbé de Granville."

Claire silently observed him, gathering her convictions. The priest leaned towards her, rubbing his hands.

"This misguided soldier, sometimes called Dollard, he is but a bad dream of mine, my poor child. So keen is your beauty that it still pierces the recollection. In my last dream my conscience tells me I worked some harm to you. Return to your family, mademoiselle, and forgive me. I have become myself again, and these holy tokens recall me to my duty and my vows."

"I know who you are," said Claire. "You are Mademoiselle de Granville."

"I am the Abbé de Granville. Look at me." He took a candle from the altar and held it near his face. So masculine was the countenance that it staggered conviction. The razor had left sleekness there. The tone of flesh was man-like. "I am Dollard," he said. "I am a priest. There can be, of course, no marriage between us. I sent for you to ask your pardon, and to send you from St. Bernard."

This gross and stupid cruelty had on Claire merely the effect of steeping her in color. Her face and throat blushed.

"You are Mademoiselle de Granville," she repeated.

The priest, as if weary of enforcing his explanations, waved his fingers with a gesture of dismissal in Dollard's own manner.

"I am the Abbé de Granville. But we will discuss the subject no further. I must be at my prayers. A trustworthy witness shall confirm what I have told you."

He opened the closet door, carrying the candle with him. His tread had body and sound, though his feet were shod in sandals.

Claire moved guardedly after him. He crossed the closet and entered a long passage so narrow that two persons could scarcely walk abreast in it, nor did she covet the privilege of stepping it thus with her conductor.

As she crossed the closet her rapid eye searched it for the chrysalis of Mademoiselle de Granville. The candle was already in the passage beyond, but distinct enough lay that brocaded figure prostrate on the floor beneath a crucifix, but the mask faced Claire.

She moved on behind Abbé de Granville as with masculine tread of foot he strode the length of the passage and opened a door leading out on the stairway.

"Here, Jacques," he called in his mellow tones, "tell this demoiselle about me; and tell her the truth, or it shall be the worse for you."

Claire, standing on the upper stairs, could see Jacques with his back to the fire and his mouth

opened in consternation at this unpriestly threat. His candle was yet smoking, so lately had it been divorced from its flame.

Abbé de Granville closed the passage door and bolted it.

She went down into the kitchen and Jacques brought her a seat, placed her before the middle hearth, and stationed himself at the corner in an attitude of entire dejection. The other inmates rested in unbroken sleep. The cell occupied by Papillon and his wife resounded with a low guttural duet.

"Where is Sieur des Ormeaux, Jacques?" inquired the lady of St. Bernard.

Writhing betwixt two dilemmas, Dollard's follower cunningly seized upon the less painful one, and nodded up the stairway.

"He's been out again, has he?"

"Do you mean the priest?"

"Monsieur the abbé."

"Jacques, who is he?"

"The Abbé de Granville," replied Jacques with a shrug, first of one shoulder and then the other, as if the sides of his person took turns in rejecting this statement. "And he sends you to me for the truth, madame. Is not that the craziest part of the play when he knows what I will tell you? There is no limiting a woman, madame, when she takes to whims."

"Then it really was Mademoiselle de Granville playing priest?"

"Madame, she befools me sometimes until I know not whether to think her man or woman. So secret is this half-sister of my master's, and so jealous of her pretty abbé, it unsettles a plain soldier. A fine big robust priest he is, and you would take her for a ghost in petticoats. It goes against my conscience, so that I have come nigh to mention it in confession, all this mumming and male-attiring, and even calling for hot shaving-water! Yet she seems an excellent devoted soul when no one crosses her, and for days at a time will be Mademoiselle de Granville, as gentle and timid as a sheep. Besides, women take pleasure in putting on raiment of different kinds, and when you come to look at a priest's cassock, it is not so far from being a petticoat that I need to raise a scandal against St. Bernard and my commandant's sister on account of it. M'sieur he minds none of her pranks, and she hath had her humor since I was set to keep guard over her; and if it be a mad humor, it harms no one but herself."*

Claire's glance rested on the coarse floor where many nailed shoes had left their prints in the grain.

* The legend of Mademoiselle de Granville dates from the year 1698. It seemed but a slight anachronism to place this singular though unimportant figure in the year 1660.

"Such a monomaniac cannot be a pleasant house-mate."

"No, madame; the poor lady is not charming. And she will have the biggest of candles for her altar. But then she must amuse herself. I was, indeed, speechless when I saw her turn you out on the stairway. She does not like a woman about, especially a pretty woman, and doubtless she will dismiss my Louise many times. But, madame, let me entreat you to return to sleep and have no fear. I will even lock the doors of her chambers. She will disturb you no more."

Claire listened aside to some outer sound, and then exclaimed:

"You did not tell me where the commandant is, Jacques. He has not gone back to his fortress, without me?"

Jacques's face fell into creases of anguish.

"Madame, he said you were to sleep undisturbed till morning."

"He should have obtained Mademoiselle de Granville's consent to that. This is not answering a question I have already repeated to you."

"Madame, he has taken the Indians and gone in his boat. Soldiers must do all sorts of things, especially commandants. He would not expose you to the dangers of the route by night."

"Listen!" Her expression changed.

Jacques gladly listened.

"I was sure I heard some noise before! You see you are mistaken. He is not yet gone."

Mellow relief, powerful as sunshine, softened the swarthy pallor of Jacques's face. He caught his candle from the chimney shelf and jammed its charred wick against a glowing coral knot in the log.

"Madame, that 's m'sieur at the gate. I know his stroke and his call. I'll bring him up."

No man can surely say, with all his ancestry at his back and his unproved nature within, what he can or cannot do in certain crises of his life.

"What is it, m'sieur?" exclaimed Jacques as he let Dollard through the gate.

"We went scarce a quarter of a league. I came back because I cannot leave her without telling her; it was a cowardly act!" exclaimed Dollard, darting into the house. "She must go with me to Montreal."

XII.

DOLLARD'S CONFESSION.

IF Dollard was surprised at finding Claire standing by the fire dressed for her journey, he gave himself no time for uttering it, but directed Jacques to bring down madame's boxes and to wake Louise.

"One casket will be enough, Jacques," countermanded madame; "the one which has been opened. If there is such haste, the others can be sent hereafter. As for my poor Louise, I will not have her waked; this is but her second night's sleep on land. Some one can be found in Montreal to attend me, and I shall see her again soon."

Jacques shuffled down from his master's apartment, carrying the luggage on his shoulder and his candle in one hand. Dollard waited for him, to say aside:

"In three weeks come to Montreal and ask for your lady at the governor's house. Subject yourself to her orders thenceforward."