

THE WOOING OF JOUANEUX.

IN consequence of Massawippa's plan the Frenchman who fed the nuns' pigs guarded in dolor his palisade gate at about 10 o'clock of the evening.

The hospital had these bristling high pickets set all about its premises as a defense against sudden attacks, and its faithful retainer felt that he was courting its destruction in keeping its bolts undone so late. There was, besides, the anticipative terror of a nun's stepping forth to demand of his hands the new novice. Cold dew of suspense stood on his face; and he could only hope that Sister Maillet, who usually had charge of the last novice, believed her to be folded safely in her cell by Sister Brésoles, and that Sister Brésoles believed her to be thus folded by Sister Maillet. When at last the cat footsteps of Massawippa passed through the palisade gate she

requited his sufferings with scarce a nod of thanks, though she hesitated with some show of interest to see him fasten both gate and convent door. Indignation possessed him while he shot the bolts, and freed itself through jerks of the head.

But instead of going to her cell, Massawippa entered the chapel; and Jouaneux, feeling himself still responsible for her, followed and closed the door behind him.

A solitary light burned on the altar. The girl knelt a long time in her devotions.

Jouaneux knelt also, near the door, and after a pater and an ave it may be supposed that he begged St. Joseph to intercede for a poor sinner who felt beset and impelled to meddle with novices.

Having finished her prayers, Massawippa began to ascend the stairway to the rood-loft.

"Where are you going?" whispered Jouaneux, following her in wrath.

She turned around and held to the rail of the stair, while he stood at the foot, she guarding her voice also in reply.

"I am going up here to sleep, lest I wake the Sisters. The floor is no harder than their pallets, and the night is not cold."

"And in the morning my honored Superior calls me to account for you."

"No one has missed me. I shall be up early."

"How do you know you are not missed? Some one may this moment open that chapel door."

"Go away and quit hissing at me then," suggested Massawippa, contracting her brows.

Jouaneaux, drawn by a power irresistible, fell into the error of vain natures, and set himself to lecture the creator of his infatuation.

"I want to talk to you. I want to give you some good advice. Sit down on that step," he demanded.

Massawippa settled down, and rested her chin on her dark soft knuckles. Sparks of amusement burned in the deeps of her eyes. Accustomed to having men of inferior rank around her, she was satisfied that he kept his distance and sat three steps below her, literally beneath her feet. Her beaver gown cased her in rich creases.

Seeing her thus plastic, Jouaneaux's severity ran off his cheeks in a smile. He forgot her abuse of the privilege he had stolen for her. His genial nose tilted up, and as overture to his good advice, showing all his gums, he whispered:

"What a pretty little Sister of St. Joseph you will make!"

Massawippa stirred, and with her dull-red blanket arranged a rest for her head against the balustrade.

"What do you think of me?" he inquired.

After reticent pause of a length to embarrass a modest questioner, Massawippa admitted:

"You are not so black and oily as La Mouche."

"Who is La Mouche?"

"He is my father's adopted nephew."

"Does he want to wed you?"

"He dare not name such a thing to me!"

"That is excellent," commended Jouaneaux. "You have the true spirit of a novice. You must never think of marriage with any man." He gloated upon her, his entire chest sighing.

The scandal of the situation, should any nun open the chapel door, was a danger which made this interview the most delightful sin of his life. But the two Sisters most given to vigils had watched all the previous night, and he counted upon nature's revenge to leave him unmolested.

The taper burned upon the altar, and there were the sacred images keeping guard, chastening both speakers always to a reverent murmur of the voice which rose no louder, and which to a devout ear at the door might have suggested, in that period of miracles, some gentle colloquy between the waxen St. Joseph and his waxen spouse. Massawippa, childishly innocent, and Jouaneaux, nearly as innocent himself, would scarcely be such objects of veneration, though their converse might prove equally harmless.

"Is this the good advice you wished to give me?" inquired Massawippa.

"It is the beginning of it," replied Jouaneaux.

"I do not intend to wed. There is no man fit to wed me," said the half-breed girl in high sincerity, leveling her gaze above his bright poll.

"Look you here, now!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "I am good enough for you, if I would marry you. For while your fathers were ranging the woods, mine were decent tillers of the soil, keeping their skins white and minding the priest. Where could you get a finer husband than I would make you? But I shall never marry. The Queen of France would be no temptation to me. There you sit, enough to turn the head of our blessed St. Joseph, for you turned my head the moment I looked upon you; but I don't want you."

"I will bid you good-night," said Massawippa, drawing her blanket.

"At the proper time, little Sister; when I speak my mind freer of its load. I must live a bachelor, it is true; but if I were a free man I would have you tomorrow, though you scratched me with your wild hands."

"I am not for your bolts and bars," returned Massawippa, scornfully.

"If we were settled in the house I made upon my land," said Jouaneaux, tempting himself with the impossible while he leaned back smiling, "little need you

complain of bolts and bars. My case is this: I had a grant of land on the western shore of this island of Montreal."

"Not where the Ottawa comes in?" questioned Massawippa, impaling him with interest.

"That was the exact spot." Jouaneaux widened his mouth pinkly as he became retrospective. "And never wouldst thou guess what turned me from that freeholding to a holy life. I may say that I lead a holy life, for are not vows laid upon me as strait as on the Sulpitian fathers? And straiter; I am under writings to the nuns to serve them to the day of my death, and they be under writings to me to maintain my sickness and old age. It is likely my skeleton barn still stands where I set it up to hold my produce. Down I falls from the ridge of it headlong to the ground, and here in the Hôtel-Dieu I lay for many a month like a rag, the Sisters tending me. It was then I said to myself, 'Jouaneaux, these be angels of pity and patience, yet they soil their hands feeding pigs and bearing up such as thou.' Though I am equal to most of my betters, little Sister, I always held it well to be humble-minded. The result is, I give up my land, I bind myself to serve the saints in this Hôtel-Dieu, and therefore I cannot marry."

Jouaneaux collapsed upon himself with a groaning sigh.

"Then your house and your barn were left to ruin?" questioned Massawippa, passing without sympathy his nuptial restrictions.

"My house!" said Jouaneaux, looking up with reviving spirit. "Little Sister, you would walk over the roof of my house and not perceive it."

"In midwinter?"

"No, now, when young grass springs. I could endure to risk my store of crops where the Iroquois might set torch to them, but this pretty fellow, this outer man of me, I took no risks with him. I chooses me a stump, a nice hollow stump."

"And squeezed into it like a bear?"

"Jouaneaux is a fox, little Sister. Call your clumsy La Mouche the bear. No: I burrows me out a house beneath the stump; a good house, a sizable hole. Over there is my fire-place, and the stump furnishes me a chimney. Any Iroquois seeing my stump smoking would merely say to himself, 'It is afire.' Let a canoe spring out on the river or a cry ring in the forest—down went Jouaneaux into his house, and, as you may say, pulled the earth over his head. I also kept my canoe dragged within there, for there was no telling what might happen to it elsewhere."

Massawippa regarded him with animation. "You had also a boat?"

"Indeed, yes!" the nuns' man affirmed, kindled higher by such interest. "A good birch craft it was,

and large enough for two people." Another groaning sigh paid tribute to this lost instrument of happiness.

"But your house may be all crumbled in now."

"Not that house, little Sister. Look you! it had ceiling and walls of timbers well fastened together and covered with cement. Was not that a snug house? It will endure like rock, and some day I must go and see it once more."

"Perhaps you could not find it now."

Jouaneaux laughed.

"My house! I could walk straight to it, little Sister, and lay my hand on the chimney. That chimney stump, it standeth near the river, the central one in a row of five. Many other rows of five there be in the field, but none, to my eye, exactly like this."

Massawippa rose suddenly and dived like a swallow up the stairway. So much keener was her ear than Jouaneaux's that she was out of sight before he realized the probability of an interruption.

A hand was on the chapel latch, and he turned himself on the step as Sister Judith Brésoles entered, her night taper in her hand. When she discovered him, instead of screaming, she stood and fixed a stern gaze on him, her mouth compressed and her brows holding an upright wrinkle betwixt them. Her servitor stood up in his most pious and depressed attitude.

"Jouaneaux, what are you doing here?"

"Honored Superior, I have been sitting half an hour or so meditating before the sacred images."

"Where is the novice Massawippa?"

"That is what troubles my conscience, honored Superior." Beneath his childlike distress Jouaneaux was silently blessing St. Joseph that it was not Sister Macé with her tendency to resort to the rood-loft. "Here is the case I stand in: the little Sister you call Massawippa, she came begging me for a breath of air by the river before I fastened the bolts to-night."

"You turned that child upon the street!" exclaimed Sister Brésoles. "I cannot find her in any cell or anywhere about the Hôtel-Dieu. You have exceeded your authority, Jouaneaux. It is a frightful thing you have done!"

"Honored Superior, she will be back in the morning. Those half-Indians are not like French girls; they have the bird in them. This one will hop over all evil hap."

"I would ring the tocsin," said Sister Brésoles, "if alarming the town would recall her. Without doubt, though," she sighed, "the girl has returned to her father."

"Honored Superior, if she comes not back to matins as clean and fresh as a brier-rose, turn me out of the Hôtel-Dieu."

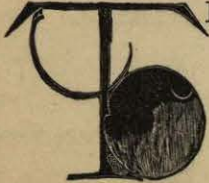
"Get you to bed, Jouaneaux, and, let me tell you,

you must meddle no more with novices. These young creatures are ever a weight on one's heart."

"Especially this one," lamented Jouaneaux, as, leaving the chapel behind Sister Brésoles, he rolled his eyes in one last gaze at the rood-loft.

XVI.

FIRST USE OF A KNIFE.

HE capeline, or small black velvet cap, which Claire had worn on her journeys about New France sheltered her head from the highest and softest of April morning skies. Though so early and humid that mists were still curling and changing form around the mountain and in all the distances, it promised to be a fine day.

Massawippa led the way across the clearing, leaning a little to one side as a sail-boat does when it flies on the wind, her moccasined feet just touching the little billows of ploughed ground; and Claire followed eagerly, though she carried her draperies clutched in her hands. The rising sun would shine on their backs, but before the sun rose they were where he must grope for them among great trees.

One short pause had been made at the outset while Massawippa brought, from some recess known to herself among rocks or stumps in the direction of the mountain, a hempen sack filled with her supplies. She carried this, and a package of what Claire had made up as necessaries from her box in the Hôtel-Dieu, as if two such loads were wings placed under the arms of a half-Huron maid to help her feet skim ploughed ground.

When they had left the clearing and were well behind a massed shelter of forest trunks, Claire was moist and pink with haste and exertion, and here Massawippa paused.

They were, after all, but young girls starting on an excursion with the morning sky for a companion, and they laughed together as they sat down upon a low rock.

"When I closed the door of the parlor," said Claire with very pink lips, "I thought I heard some one stirring in the cells. But we have not been followed, and I trust not seen."

"They were rousing for matins," said the half-Huron. "No, they think I ran away last night; and you, madame, they do not expect to matins. We are taking one risk which I dread, but it must be taken."

"You mean leaving the palisade and entrance doors unfastened? My heart smote me for those

good nuns. Is the risk very great? We have seen no danger abroad."

"Not that. No, madame. Their man, that stupid, who ranks himself with Sulpitian fathers, he is always astir early among his bolts and his pigs. It is his suspicion I dread. For he knows I slept in the chapel last night, and he told me of his house, and in that house we must sleep to-night. Perhaps he dare not tell the Sisters, and in that case he dare not follow to search his house for us. We have also his stupidity to count on. Young men are not wise."

Present discomfort, which puts coming risks farther into the future in most minds, made Claire thrust out her pointed satin feet and look at them dubiously.

"What would Dollard think of these, Massawippa? I have one other pair of heeled shoes in that packet, but they will scarcely hold out for such journeying."

"Madame, that is why I stopped here," said Massawippa, opening her sack. "It was necessary for us to kneel in the chapel and ask the Holy Family's aid before we set out; but we have no time to spend here. Let me get you ready."

"Am I not ready?" inquired Claire, giving her companion a rosy laugh.

"No, madame; your feet must be moccasined and your dress cut off."

The younger girl took from the sack a pair of new moccasins and knelt on one knee before Claire—not as a menial would kneel, but as a commanding junior who has undertaken maternal duty. She flung aside the civilized foot-beautifiers of Louis' reign and substituted Indian shoes, lacing them securely with fine thongs.

"These are the best I had, madame, and I carried them out of the Hôtel-Dieu under my blanket and hid them with our provisions last night."

"What a sensible, kind child you are, Massawippa! But while you were doing this for me I took no thought of any special comfort for you."

"They will bear the journey."

Massawippa rose and took from her store two sheathed knives with cross-hilts—not of the finest workmanship, but of good temper: their pointed blades glittered as she displayed them. She showed her pupil how to place one, sheathed, at a ready angle within her bodice, and then took up the other like a naked sword.

"Now stand on the rock, madame, and let me cut your dress short."

"Oh, no!" pleaded Claire for her draperies. "You do not understand, Massawippa. This is simply the dress which women of my rank wear in France, and because I am going into the woods must I be shorn to my knees like a man?"

Retreating a step she stretched before her the skirt of dark glacé satin with its Grecian border of embroidery at the foot, and in doing so let fall from her arm the overskirt, which trailed its similar border upon the ground behind her.

"Madame," argued Massawippa, suspending the knife, "we have a road of danger before us. That shining stuff hanging behind you will catch on bushes, and weary you, and will soon be ragged though you nurse it on your arm all the way."

"Cut that off, therefore," said Claire, turning. "I am not so childish as to love the pall we hang over our gowns and elbows. But the skirt is not too long if it be lifted by a girdle below the waist. Cut me out a rope of satin, Massawippa."

The hiss of a thick and rich fabric yielding to the knife could be heard behind her back. Massawippa presently lifted the plenteous fleece thus shorn, and pared away the border while the elder girl held it. Together they tied the border about Claire's middle for a support, and over this pulled the top of her skirt in a pouting ruff.

It was now sunrise. Having thus finished equipping themselves they took up each a load, Claire bearing her packet on the arm her surplus drapery had burdened, and when Massawippa had thrust both cast-off shoes and satin under a side of the rock they hurried on.



"Massawippa held her blanket out to canopy her eyes."