Beyond the Frontier

A Romance of Early Days in the Middle West

by Randall Parrish, 1858-1923

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Chapter I

At the Home of Hugo Chevet.

It was early autumn, for the clusters of grapes above me were already purple, and the forest leaves were tinged with red. And yet the air was soft, and the golden bars of sun flickered down on the work in my lap through the laced branches of the trellis. The work was but a pretense, for I had fled the house to escape the voice of Monsieur Cassion who was still urging my uncle to accompany him on his journey into the wilderness. They sat in the great room before the fireplace, drinking, and I had heard enough already to tell me there was treachery on foot against the Sieur de la Salle. To be sure it was nothing to me, a girl knowing naught of such intrigue, yet I had not forgotten the day, three years before, when this La Salle, with others of his company, had halted before the Ursuline convent, and the sisters bade them welcome for the night. 'Twas my part to help serve, and he had stroked my hair in tenderness. I had sung to them, and watched his face in the firelight as he listened. Never would I forget that face, nor believe evil of such a man. No! not from the lips of Cassion nor even from the governor, La Barre.

I recalled it all now, as I sat there in the silence, pretending to work, how we watched them embark in their canoes and disappear, the Indian paddlers bending to their task, and Monsieur la Salle, standing, bareheaded as he waved farewell. Beyond him was the dark face of one they called De Tonty, and in the first boat a mere boy lifted his ragged hat. I know not why, but the memory of that lad was clearer than all those others, for he had met me in the hall and we had talked long in the great window ere the sister came, and took me away. So I remembered him, and his name, Rene de Artigny. And in all those years I heard no more. Into the black wilderness they swept and were lost to those of us at home in New France.

No doubt there were those who knew—Frontenac, Bigot, those who ruled over us at Quebec—but 'twas not a matter supposed to interest a girl, and so no word came to me. Once I asked my Uncle Chevet, and he replied in anger with only a few sentences, bidding me hold my tongue; yet he said enough so that I knew the Sieur de la Salle lived and had built a fort far away, and was buying furs of the Indians. It was this that brought jealousy, and hatred. Once Monsieur Cassion came and stopped with us, and, as I waited on him and Uncle Chevet, I caught words which told me that Frontenac was La Salle's friend, and would listen to no charges brought against him. They talked of a new governor; yet I learned but little, for Cassion attempted to kiss me, and I would wait on him no more.

Then Frontenac was recalled to France, and La Barre was governor. How pleased my Uncle Chevet was when the news came, and he rapped the table with his glass and exclaimed: "Ah! but now we will pluck out the claws of this Sieur de la Salle, and send him where he belongs." But he would explain nothing, until a week later. Cassion came up the river in his canoe with Indian paddlers, and stopped to hold conference. The man treated me with much gallantry, so that I questioned him, and he seemed happy to answer that La Barre had already dispatched a party under Chevalier de Baugis, of the King's Dragoons to take

command of La Salle's Fort St. Louis in the Illinois country. La Salle had returned, and was already at Quebec, but Cassion grinned as he boasted that the new governor would not even give him audience. Bah! I despised the man, yet I lingered beside him, and thus learned that La Salle's party consisted of but two *voyageurs*, and the young Sieur de Artigny. I was glad enough when he went away, though I gave him my hand to kiss, and waved to him bravely at the landing. And now he was back again, bearing a message from La Barre, and seeking volunteers for some western voyage of profit. 'Twas of no interest to me unless my uncle joined in the enterprise, yet I was kind enough, for he brought with him word of the governor's ball at Quebec, and had won the pledge of Chevet to take me there with him. I could be gracious to him for that and it was on my gown I worked, as the two planned and talked in secret. What they did was nothing to me now—all my thought was on the ball. What would you? I was seventeen.

The grape trellis ran down toward the river landing, and from where I sat in the cool shadow, I could see the broad water gleaming in the sun. Suddenly, as my eyes uplifted, the dark outline of a canoe swept into the vista, and the splashing paddles turned the prow inward toward our landing. I did not move, although I watched with interest, for it was not the time of year for Indian traders, and these were white men. I could see those at the paddles, voyageurs, with gay cloths about their heads; but the one in the stern wore a hat, the brim concealing his face, and a blue coat. I knew not who it could be until the prow touched the bank, and he stepped ashore. Then I knew, and bent low over my sewing, as though I had seen nothing, although my heart beat fast. Through lowered lashes I saw him give brief order to the men, and then advance toward the house alone. Ah! but this was not the slender, laughing-eyed boy of three years before. The wilderness had made of him a man—a soldier. He paused an instant to gaze about, and held his hat in his hand, the sun touching his tanned cheeks, and flecking the long, light-colored hair. He looked strong and manly in his tightly buttoned jacket, a knife at his belt, a rifle grasped within one hand. There was a sternness to his face too, although it lit up in a smile, as the searching eyes caught glimpse of my white dress in the cool shade of the grape arbor. Hat still in hand he came toward me, but I only bent the lower, as though I knew nothing of his approach, and had no interest other than my work.

"Mademoiselle," he said gently, "pardon me, but is not this the home of Hugo Chevet, the fur trader?"

I looked up into his face, and bowed, as he swept the earth with his hat, seeing at a glance that he had no remembrance of me.

"Yes," I answered. "If you seek him, rap on the door beyond."

"'Tis not so much Chevet I seek," he said, showing no inclination to pass me, "but one whom I understood was his guest—Monsieur Francois Cassion."

"The man is here," I answered quickly, yet unable to conceal my surprise, "but you will find him no friend to Sieur de la Salle."

"Ah!" and he stared at me intently. "In the name of the saints, what is the meaning of this? You know me then?"

I bowed, yet my eyes remained hidden.

"I knew you once as Monsieur's friend," I said, almost regretting my indiscretion, "and have been told you travel in his company."

“You knew me once!” he laughed. “Surely that cannot be, for never would I be likely to forget. I challenge you, Mademoiselle to speak my name.”

“The Sieur Rene de Artigny, Monsieur.”

“By my faith, the witch is right, and yet in all this New France I know scarce a maid. Nay look up; there is naught to fear from me, and I would see if memory be not new born. Saint Giles! surely ’tis true; I have seen those eyes before; why, the name is on my tongue, yet fails me, lost in the wilderness. I pray you mercy, Mademoiselle!”

“You have memory of the face you say?”

“Ay! the witchery of it; ’tis like a haunting spirit.”

“Which did not haunt long, I warrant. I am Adele la Chesnayne, Monsieur.”

He stepped back, his eyes on mine, questioningly. For an instant I believed the name even brought no familiar sound; then his face brightened, and his eyes smiled, as his lips echoed the words.

“Adele la Chesnayne! Ay! now I know. Why ’tis no less than a miracle. It was a child I thought of under that name—a slender, brown-eyed girl, as blithesome as a bird. No, I had not forgotten; only the magic of three years has made of you a woman. Again and again have I questioned in Montreal and Quebec, but no one seemed to know. At the convent they said your father fell in Indian skirmish.”

“Yes; ever since then I have lived here, with my uncle, Hugo Chevet.”

“Here!” he looked about, as though the dreariness of it was first noticed. “Alone? Is there no other woman?”

I shook my head, but no longer looked at him, for fear he might see the tears in my eyes.

“I am the housekeeper, Monsieur. There was nothing else for me. In France, I am told, my father’s people were well born, but this is not France, and there was no choice. Besides I was but a child of fourteen.”

“And seventeen, now, Mademoiselle,” and he took my hand gallantly. “Pardon if I have asked questions which bring pain. I can understand much, for in Montreal I heard tales of this Hugo Chevet.”

“He is rough, a woodsman,” I defended, “yet not unkind to me. You will speak him fair?”

He laughed, his eyes sparkling with merriment.

“No fear of my neglecting all courtesy, for I come beseeching a favor. I have learned the lesson of when the soft speech wins more than the iron hand. And this other, the Commissaire Cassion—is he a bird of the same plumage?”

I made a little gesture, and glanced back at the closed door.

“Oh, no; he is the court courtier, to stab with words, not deeds. Chevet is rough of speech, and hard of hand, but he fights in the open; Cassion has a double tongue, and one never knows him.” I glanced up into his sobered face. “He is a friend of La Barre.”

“So ’tis said, and has been chosen by the governor to bear message to De Baugis in the Illinois country. I seek passage in his company.”

“You! I thought you were of the party of Sieur de la Salle?”

“I am,” he answered honestly, “yet Cassion will need a guide, and there is none save myself in all New France who has ever made that journey. ’Twill be well for

him to listen to my plan. And why not? We do not fight the orders of the governor: we obey, and wait. Monsieur de la Salle will tell his story to the King."

"The King! to Louis?"

"Ay, 'twill not be the first time he has had audience, and already he is at sea. We can wait, and laugh at this Cassion over his useless journey."

"But he—he is treacherous, Monsieur."

He laughed, as though the words amused.

"To one who has lived, as I, amid savages, treachery is an old story. The Commissaire will not find me asleep. We will serve each other, and let it go at that. Ah! we are to be interrupted."

He straightened up facing the door, and I turned, confronting my uncle as he emerged in advance. He was a burly man, with iron-gray hair, and face reddened by out-of-doors; and he stopped in surprise at sight of a stranger, his eyes hardening with suspicion.

"And who is this with whom you converse so privately, Adele?" he questioned brusquely, "a young popinjay new to these parts I venture."

De Artigny stepped between us, smiling in good humor.

"My call was upon you, Monsieur Chevet, and not the young lady," he said quietly enough, yet with a tone to the voice. "I merely asked her if I had found the right place, and if, Monsieur, the Commissaire Cassion was still your guest."

"And what may I ask might be your business with the Commissaire Cassion?" asked the latter, pressing past Chevet, yet bowing with a semblance of politeness, scarcely in accord with the studied insolence of his words. "I have no remembrance of your face."

"Then, Monsieur Cassion is not observant," returned the younger man pleasantly, "as I accompanied the Sieur de la Salle in his attempt to have audience with the governor."

"Ah!" the word of surprise exploded from the lips. "Sacre! 'tis true! My faith, what difference clothes make. I mistook you for a courier du bois."

"I am the Sieur Rene de Artigny."

"Lieutenant of La Salle's?"

"Scarcely that, Monsieur, but a comrade; for three years I have been with his party, and was chosen by him for this mission."

Cassion laughed, chucking the gloomy-faced Chevet in the side, as though he would give point to a good joke.

"And little the trip hither has profited either master or man, I warrant. La Barre does not sell New France to every adventurer. Monsieur de la Salle found different reception in Quebec than when Frontenac ruled this colony. Where went the fur-stealer?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"To whom? Heaven help us, Chevet, the man would play nice with words. Well, let it go, my young cock, and answer me."

"You mean the Sieur de la Salle?"

"To be sure; I called him no worse than I have heard La Barre speak. They say he has left Quebec; what more know you?"

"'Tis no secret, Monsieur," replied De Artigny quietly enough, although there was a flash in his eyes, as they met mine. "The Sieur de la Salle has sailed for France."

"France! Bah! you jest; there has been no ship outward bound."

"The BRETON paused at St. Roche, held by the fog. When the fog lifted there was a new passenger aboard. By dawn the Indian paddlers had me landed in Quebec."

"Does La Barre know?"

"Faith! I could not tell you that, as he has not honored me with audience."

Cassion strode back and forth, his face dark with passion. It was not pleasant news he had been told, and it was plain enough he understood the meaning.

"By the saints!" he exclaimed. "'Tis a sly fox to break through our guard so easily. Ay, and 'twill give him a month to whisper his lies to Louis, before La Barre can forward a report. But, *sacre!* my young chanticleer, surely you are not here to bring me this bit of news. You sought me, you said? Well, for what purpose?"

"In peace, Monsieur. Because I have served Sieur de la Salle loyally is no reason why we should be enemies. We are both the King's men, and may work together. The word has come to me that you head a party for the Illinois, with instructions for De Baugis at Fort St. Louis. Is this true?"

Cassion bowed coldly, waiting to discover how much more his questioner knew.

"Ah, then I am right thus far. Well, Monsieur, 'twas on that account I came, to volunteer as guide."

"You! 'Twould be treachery."

"Oh, no; our interests are the same so far as the journey goes. I would reach St. Louis; so would you. Because we may have different ends in view, different causes to serve, has naught to do with the trail thither. There is not a man who knows the way as well as I. Four times have I traveled it, and I am not a savage, Monsieur—I am a gentleman of France."

"And you pledge your word?"

"I pledge my word—to guide you safe to Fort St. Louis. Once there I am comrade to Sieur de la Salle."

"Bah! I care not who you comrade with, once you serve my purpose. I take your offer, and if you play me false—"

"Restrain your threats, Monsieur Cassion. A quarrel will get us nowhere. You have my word of honor; 'tis enough. Who will compose the party?"

Cassion hesitated, yet seemed to realize the uselessness of deceit.

"A dozen or more soldiers of the Regiment of Picardy, some *couriers du bois*, and the Indian paddlers. There will be four boats."

"You go by the Ottawa, and the lakes?"

"Such were my orders."

"'Tis less fatiguing, although a longer journey; and the time of departure?"

Cassion laughed, as he turned slightly, and bowed to me.

"We leave Quebec before dawn Tuesday," he said gaily. "It is my wish to enjoy once more the follies of civilization before plunging into the wilderness. The Governor permits that we remain to his ball. Mademoiselle la Chesnayne does me the honor of being my guest on that occasion."

"I, Monsieur!" I exclaimed in surprise at his boastful words. "'Twas my uncle who proposed—"

"Tut, tut, what of that?" he interrupted in no way discomposed. "It is my request which opens the golden gates. The good Hugo here but looks on at a frivolity for which he cares nothing. 'Tis the young who dance. And you, Monsieur de Artigny, am I to meet you there also, or perchance later at the boat landing?"

The younger man seemed slow in response, but across Cassion's shoulder our eyes met. I know not what he saw in the glance of mine, for I gave no sign, yet his face brightened, and his words were carelessly spoken.

"At the ball, Monsieur. 'Tis three years since I have danced to measure, but it will be a joy to look on, and thus keep company with Monsieur Chevet. Nor shall I fail you at the boats: until then, Messieurs," and he bowed hat in hand, "and to you, Mademoiselle, adieu."

We watched him go down the grape arbor to the canoe, and no one spoke but Cassion.

"*Pouf!* he thinks well of himself, that young cockerel, and 'twill likely be my part to clip his spurs. Still 'tis good policy to have him with us, for 'tis a long journey. What say you, Chevet?"

"That he is one to watch," answered my uncle gruffly. "I trust none of La Salle's brood."

"No, nor I, for the matter of that, but I am willing to pit my brains against the best of them. Francois Cassion is not likely to be caught asleep, my good Hugo."

He turned about, and glanced questioningly into my face.

"And so, Mademoiselle, it did not altogether please you to be my guest at the ball? Perchance you preferred some other gallant?"

The sunlight, flickering through the leaves, rested on his face, and brought out the mottled skin of dissipation, the thin line of his cruel lips, the insolent stare of his eyes. I felt myself shrink, dreading he might touch me; yet dominating all else was the thought of De Artigny—the message of his glance, the secret meaning of his pledge—the knowledge that he would be there. So I smiled, and made light of his suspicion.

"It was but surprise, Monsieur," I said gaily "for I had not dreamed of such an honor. 'Tis my wish to go; see, I have been working on a new gown, and now I must work the faster."

I swept him a curtsey, smiling to myself at the expression of his face, and before he could speak had disappeared within. Bah! I would escape those eyes and be alone to dream.

Chapter II

The Choice of a Husband.

It was just before dark when Monsieur Cassion left us, and I watched him go gladly enough, hidden behind the shade of my window. He had been talking for an

hour with Chevet in the room below; I could hear the rattle of glasses, as though they drank, and the unpleasant arrogance of his voice, although no words reached me clearly. I cared little what he said, although I wondered at his purpose in being there, and what object he might have in this long converse with my uncle. Yet I was not sent for, and no doubt it was some conference over furs, of no great interest. The two were in some scheme I knew to gain advantage over Sieur de la Salle, and were much elated now that La Barre held power; but that was nothing for a girl to understand, so I worked on with busy fingers, my mind not forgetful of the young Sieur de Artigny.

It was not that I already loved him, yet ever since girlhood the memory of him had remained in my thought, and in those years since I had met so few young men that the image left on my imagination had never faded. Indeed, it had been kept alive by the very animosity which my uncle cherished against Monsieur de la Salle. The real cause of his bitterness, outside of trade rivalry, I never clearly understood, but he was ever seeking every breath of gossip from that distant camp of adventurers, and angrily commenting thereon. Again and again I overheard him conspiring with others in a vain effort to influence Frontenac to withdraw his support of that distant expedition, and it was this mutual enmity which first brought Cassion to our cabin.

With Frontenac's removal, and the appointment of La Barre as Governor, the hopes of La Salle's enemies revived, and when Cassion's smooth tongue won him a place as Commissaire, all concerned became more bold and confident in their planning. I knew little of it, yet sufficient to keep the remembrance of those adventures fresh in my mind, and never did they recur to me without yielding me vision of the ardent young face of De Artigny as he waved me adieu from the canoe. Often in those years of silence did I dream of him amid the far-off wilderness—the idle dreaming of a girl whose own heart was yet a mystery—and many a night I sat at my window gazing out upon the broad river shimmering in the moonlight, wondering at those wilderness mysteries among which he lived.

Yet only once in all those years had I heard mention of his name. 'Twas but a rumor floating back to us of how La Salle had reached the mouth of a great river flowing into the South Sea, and among the few who accompanied him was De Artigny. I remember yet how strangely my heart throbbed as I heard the brief tale retold, and someone read the names from a slip of paper. Chevet sat by the open fire listening, his pipe in his mouth, his eyes scowling at the news; suddenly he blurted out: "De Artigny, say you? In the name of the fiend! 'tis not the old captain?" "No, no, Chevet," a voice answered testily, "Sieur Louis de Artigny has not stepped foot on ground these ten years; 'tis his brat Rene who serves this freebooter, though 'tis like enough the father hath money in the venture." And they fell to discussing, sneering at the value of the discovery, while I slipped unnoticed from the room.

Chevet did not return to the house after Monsieur Cassion's canoe had disappeared. I saw him walking back and forth along the river bank, smoking, and seemingly thinking out some problem. Nor did he appear until I had the evening meal ready, and called to him down the arbor. He was always gruff and bearish enough when we were alone, seldom speaking, indeed, except to give utterance to some order, but this night he appeared even more morose and silent than his

wont, not so much as looking at me as he took seat, 19 and began to eat. No doubt Cassion had brought ill news, or else the appearance of De Artigny had served to arouse all his old animosity toward La Salle. It was little to me, however, and I had learned to ignore his moods, so I took my own place silently, and paid no heed to the scowl with which he surveyed me across the table. No doubt my very indifference fanned his discontent, but I remained ignorant of it, until he burst out savagely.

"And so you know this young cockerel, do you? You know him, and never told me?"

I looked up in surprise, scarce comprehending the unexpected outburst.

"You mean the Sieur de Artigny?"

"Ay! Don't play with me! I mean Louis de Artigny's brat. Bah! he may fool Cassion with his soft words, but not Hugo Chevet. I know the lot of them this many year, and no ward of mine will have aught to do with the brood, either young or old. You hear that, Adele! When I hate, I hate, and I have reason enough to hate that name, and all who bear it. Where before did you ever meet this popinjay?"

"At the convent three years ago. La Salle rested there overnight, and young De Artigny was of the party. He was but a boy then."

"He came here today to see you?"

"No, never," I protested. "I doubt if he even had the memory of me until I told him who I was. Surely he explained clearly why he came."

He eyed me fiercely, his face full of suspicion, his great hand gripping the knife.

"'Tis well for you if that be true," he said gruffly, "but I have no faith in the lad's words. He is here as La Salle's spy, and so I told Cassion, though the only honor he did me was to laugh at my warning. 'Let him spy,' he said, 'and I will play at the same game; 'tis little enough he will learn, and we shall need his guidance.' Ay! and he may be right, but I want nothing to do with the fellow. Cassion may give him place in his boats, if he will, but never again shall he set foot on my land, nor have speech with you. You mark my words, Mademoiselle?"

I felt the color flame into my cheeks, and knew my eyes darkened with anger, yet made effort to control my speech.

"Yes, Monsieur; I am your ward and have always been obedient, yet this Sieur de Artigny seems a pleasant spoken young man, and surely 'tis no crime that he serves the Sieur de la Salle."

"Is it not!" he burst forth, striking the table with his fist. "Know you not I would be rich, but for that fur stealer. By right those should be my furs he sends here in trade. There will be another tale to tell soon, now that La Barre hath the reins of power; and this De Artigny—bah! What care I for that young cockerel—but I hate the brood. Listen, girl, I pay my debts; it was this hand that broke Louis de Artigny, and has kept him to his bed for ten years past. Yet even that does not wipe out the score between us. 'Tis no odds to you what was the cause, but while I live I hate. So you have my orders; you will speak no more with this De Artigny."

"'Tis not like I shall have opportunity."

"I will see to that. The fool looked at you in a way that made me long to grip his throat; nor do I like your answer, yet 'twill be well for you to mark my words."

"Yes, Monsieur."

“Oh, you’re sweet enough with words. I have heard you before, and found you a sly minx—when my back was turned—but this time it is not I alone who will watch your actions. I have pledged you a husband.”

I got to my feet, staring at him, the indignant words stifled in my throat. He laughed coarsely, and resumed his meal.

“A husband, Monsieur? You have pledged me?”

“Ay! why not? You are seventeen, and ’tis my place to see you well settled.”

“But I have no wish to marry, Monsieur,” I protested. “There is no man for whom I care.”

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and laughed.

“Pooh! if I waited for that no doubt you would pick out some cockerel without so much as a spur to his heel. ’Tis my choice, not yours, for I know the world, and the man you need. Monsieur Cassion has asked me to favor him, and I think well of it.”

“Cassion! Surely, you would not wed me to that creature?”

He pushed back his chair, regarding me with scowling eyes.

“And where is there a better? Sacre! do you think yourself a queen to choose? ’Tis rare luck you have such an offer. Monsieur Cassion is going to be a great man in this New France; already he has the Governor’s ear, and a commission, with a tidy sum to his credit in Quebec. What more could any girl desire in a husband?”

“But, Monsieur, I do not love him; I do not trust the man.”

“Pah!” He burst into a laugh, rising from the table. Before I could draw back he had gripped me by the arm. “Enough of that, young lady. He is my choice, and that settles it. Love! who ever heard of love nowadays? Ah, I see, you dream already of the young gallant De Artigny. Well, little good that will do you. Why what is he? a mere ragged adventurer, without a sou to his name, a prowling wolf of the forest, the follower of a discredited fur thief. But enough of this; I have told you my will, and you obey. Tomorrow we go to Quebec, to the Governor’s ball, and when Monsieur Cassion returns from his mission you will marry him—you understand?”

The tears were in my eyes, blotting out his threatening face, yet there was naught to do but answer.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“And this De Artigny; if the fellow ever dares come near you again I’ll crush his white throat between my fingers.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“To your room then, and think over all I have said. You have never found me full of idle threats I warrant.”

“No, Monsieur.”

I drew my arm from his grasp, feeling it tingle with pain where his fingers had crushed the flesh, and crept up the narrow stairs, glad enough to get away and be alone. I had never loved Chevet, but he had taught me to fear him, for more than once had I experienced his brutality and physical power. To him I was but a chattel, an incumbrance. He had assumed charge of me because the law so ordained, but I had found nothing in his nature on which I could rely for sympathy. I was his sister’s child, yet no more to him than some 24 Indian waif. More, he was honest about it. To his mind he did well by me in thus finding me a

husband. I sank on my knees, and hid my face, shuddering at the thought of the sacrifice demanded. Cassion! never before had the man appeared so despicable. His face, his manner, swept through my memory in review. I had scarcely considered him before, except as a disagreeable presence to be avoided as much as possible. But now, in the silence, the growing darkness of that little chamber, with Chevet's threat echoing in my ears, he came to me in clear vision—I saw his dull-blue, cowardly eyes, his little waxed mustache, his insolent swagger, and heard his harsh, bragging voice.

Ay! he would get on; there was no doubt of that, for he would worm his way through where only a snake could crawl. A snake! that was what he was, and I shuddered at thought of the slimy touch of his hand. I despised, hated him; yet what could I do? It was useless to appeal to Chevet, and the Governor, La Barre, would give small heed to a girl objecting to one of his henchmen. De Artigny! The name was on my lips before I realized I had spoken it, and brought a throb of hope. I arose to my feet, and stared out of the window into the dark night. My pulses throbbed. If he cared; if I only knew he cared, I would fly with him anywhere, into the wilderness depths, to escape Cassion. I could think of no other way, no other hope. If he cared! It seemed to me my very breath stopped as this daring conception, this mad possibility, swept across my mind.

I was a girl, inexperienced, innocent of coquetry, and yet I possessed all the instincts of a woman. I had seen that in his eyes which gave me faith—he remembered the past; he had found me attractive; he felt a desire to meet me again. I knew all this—but was that all? Was it a mere passing fervor, a fleeting admiration, to be forgotten in the presence of the next pretty face? Would he dare danger to serve me? to save me from the clutches of Cassion? A smile, a flash of the eyes, is small foundation to build upon, yet it was all I had. Perchance he gave the same encouragement to others, with no serious thought. The doubt assailed me, yet there was no one else in all New France to whom I could appeal.

But how could I reach him with my tale? There was but one opportunity—the Governor's ball. He would be there; he had said so, laughingly glancing toward me as he spoke the words, the flash of his eyes a challenge. But it would be difficult. Chevet, Cassion, not for a moment would they take eyes from me, and if I failed to treat him coldly an open quarrel must result. Chevet would be glad of an excuse, and Cassion's jealousy would spur him on. Yet I must try, and, in truth, I trusted not so much in Monsieur de Artigny's interest in me, as in his reckless love of adventure. 'Twould please him to play an audacious trick on La Salle's enemies, and make Cassion the butt of laughter.

Once he understood, the game would prove much to his liking, and I could count on his aid, while the greater the danger the stronger it would appeal to such a nature as his. Even though he cared little for me he was a gallant to respond gladly to a maid in distress. Ay, if I might once bring him word, I could rely on his response; but how could that be done? I must trust fortune, attend the ball, and be ready; there was no other choice.

'Tis strange how this vague plan heartened me, and gave new courage. Scarce more than a dream, yet I dwelt upon it, imagining what I would say, and how escape surveillance long enough to make my plea for assistance. Today, as I write, it seems strange that I should ever have dared such a project, yet at the time not a

thought of its immodesty ever assailed me. To my mind Rene de Artigny was no stranger; as a memory he had lived, and been portion of my life for three lonely years. To appeal to him now, to trust him, appeared the most natural thing in the world. The desperation of my situation obscured all else, and I turned to him as the only friend I knew in time of need. And my confidence in his fidelity, his careless audacity, brought instantly a measure of peace. I crept back and lay down upon the bed. The tears dried upon my lashes, and I fell asleep as quietly as a tired child.

Chapter III

I Appeal for Aid.

It had been two years since I was at Quebec, and it was with new eyes of appreciation that I watched the great bristling cliffs as our boat glided silently past the shore and headed in toward the landing. There were two ships anchored in the river, one a great war vessel with many sailors hanging over the rail and watching us curiously. The streets leading back from the water front were filled with a jostling throng, while up the steep hillside beyond a constant stream of moving figures, looking scarcely larger than ants, were ascending and descending. We were in our large canoe, with five Indian paddlers, its bow piled deep with bales of fur to be sold in the market, and I had been sleeping in the stern. It was the sun which awoke me, and I sat up close beside Chevet's knee, eagerly interested in the scene. Once I spoke, pointing to the grim guns on the summit of the crest above, but he answered so harshly as to compel silence. It was thus we swept up to the edge of the landing, and made fast. Cassion met us, attired so gaily in rich vestments that I scarcely recognized the man, whom I had always seen before in dull forest garb, yet I permitted him to take my hand and assist me gallantly to the shore. Faith, but he appeared like a new person with his embroidered coat, buckled shoes and powdered hair, smiling and debonair, whispering compliments to me, as he helped me across a strip of mud to the drier ground beyond. But I liked him none the better, for there was the same cold stare to his eyes, and a cruel sting to his words which he could not hide. The man was the same whatever the cut of his clothes, and I was not slow in removing my hand from his grasp, once I felt my feet on firm earth.

Yet naught I might do would stifle his complacency, and he talked on, seeking to be entertaining, no doubt, and pointing out the things of interest on every hand. And I enjoyed the scene, finding enough to view to make me indifferent to his posturing. Scarcely did I even note what he said, although I must have answered in a fashion, for he stuck at my side, and guided me through the crowd, and up the hill. Chevet walked behind us, gloomy and silent, having left the Indians with the furs until I was safely housed. It was evidently a gala day, for flags and streamers were flying from every window of the Lower Town, and the narrow, crooked streets were filled with wanderers having no apparent business but

enjoyment. Never had I viewed so motley a throng, and I could but gaze about with wide-opened eyes on the strange passing figures.

It was easy enough to distinguish the citizens of Quebec, moving soberly about upon ordinary affairs of trade, and those others idly jostling their way from point to point of interest—hunters from the far West, bearded and rough, fur clad, and never without a long rifle; sailors from the warship in the river; Indians silent and watchful, staring gravely at every new sight; settlers from the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu, great seigniors on vast estates, but like children in the streets of the town; fishermen from Cap St. Roche; *couriers du bois*, and *voyageurs* in picturesque costumes; officers of the garrison, resplendent in blue and gold; with here and there a column of marching soldiers, or statuesque guard. And there were women too, a-plenty—laughing girls, grouped together, ready for any frolic; housewives on way to market; and occasionally a dainty dame, with high-heeled shoe and flounced petticoat, picking her way through the throng, disdainful of the glances of those about. Everywhere there was a new face, a strange costume, a glimpse of unknown life.

It was all of such interest I was sorry when we came to the gray walls of the convent. I had actually forgotten Cassion, yet I was glad enough to be finally rid of him, and be greeted so kindly by Sister Celeste. In my excitement I scarcely knew what it was the bowing Commissaire said as he turned away, or paid heed to Chevet's final growl, but I know the sister gently answered them, and drew me within, closing the door softly, and shutting out every sound. It was so quiet in the stone passageway as to almost frighten me, but she took me in her arms, and looked searchingly into my face.

"The three years have changed you greatly, my child," she said gently, touching my cheeks with her soft hands; "but bright as your eyes are, it is not all pleasure I see in them. You must tell me of your life. The older man, I take it, was your uncle, Monsieur Chevet."

"Yes," I answered, but hesitated to add more.

"He is much as I had pictured him, a bear of the woods."

"He is rough," I protested, "for his life has been hard, yet has given me no reason to complain. 'Tis because the life is lonely that I grow old."

"No doubt, and the younger gallant? He is not of the forest school?"

"'Twas Monsieur Cassion, Commissaire for the Governor."

"Ah! 'tis through him you have invitation to the great ball?"

I bowed my head, wondering at the kind questioning in the sister's eyes. Could she have heard the truth? Perchance she might tell me something of the man.

"He has been selected by Monsieur Chevet as my husband," I explained doubtfully. "Know you aught of the man, sister?"

Her hand closed gently on mine.

"No, only that he has been chosen by La Barre to carry special message to the Chevalier de Baugis in the Illinois country. He hath an evil, sneering face, and an insolent manner, even as described to me by the Sieur de Artigny."

I caught my breath quickly, and my hand grasp tightened.

"The Sieur de Artigny!" I echoed, startled into revealing the truth. "He has been here? has talked with you?"

“Surely, my dear girl. He was here with La Salle before his chief sailed for France, and yesterday he came again, and questioned me.”

“Questioned you?”

“Yes; he sought knowledge of you, and of why you were in the household of Chevet. I liked the young man, and told him all I knew, of your father’s death and the decree of the court, and of how Chevet compelled you to leave the convent. I felt him to be honest and true, and that his purpose was worthy.”

“And he mentioned Cassion?”

“Only that he had arranged to guide him into the wilderness. But I knew he thought ill of the man.”

I hesitated, for as a child I had felt awe of Sister Celeste, yet her questioning eyes were kind, and we were alone. Here was my chance, my only chance, and I dare not lose it. Her face appeared before me misty through tears, yet words came bravely enough to my lips.

“Sister, you must hear me,” I began bewildered, “I have no mother, no friend even to whom to appeal; I am just a girl all alone. I despise this man Cassion; I do not know why, but he seems to be like a snake, and I cannot bear his presence. I would rather die than marry him. I do not think Chevet trusts him, either, but he has some hold, and compels him to sell me as though I was a slave in the market. I am to be made to marry him. I pray you let me see this Sieur de Artigny that I may tell him all, and beseech his aid.”

“But why De Artigny, my girl? What is the boy to you?”

“Nothing—absolutely nothing,” I confessed frankly. “We have scarcely spoken together, but he is a gallant of true heart; he will never refuse aid to a maid like me. It will be joy for him to outwit this enemy of La Salle’s. All I ask is that I be permitted to tell him my story.”

Celeste sat silent, her white hands clasped, her eyes on the stained-glass window. It was so still I could hear my own quick breathing. At last she spoke, her voice still soft and kindly.

“I scarcely think you realize what you ask, my child. ’Tis a strange task for a sister of the Ursulines, and I would learn more before I answer. Is there understanding between you and this Sieur de Artigny?”

“We have met but twice; here at this convent three years ago, when we were boy and girl, and he went westward with La Salle. You know the time, and that we talked together on the bench in the garden. Then it was three days since that he came to our house on the river, seeking Cassion that he might volunteer as guide. He had no thought of me, nor did he know me when we first met. There was no word spoken other than that of mere friendship, nor did I know then that Chevet had arranged my marriage to the Commissaire. We did no more than laugh and make merry over the past until the others came and demanded the purpose of his visit. It was not his words, Sister, but the expression of his face, the glance of his eye, which gave me courage. I think he likes me, and his nature is without fear. He will have some plan—and there is no one else.”

I caught her hands in mine, but she did not look at me, or answer. She was silent and motionless so long that I lost hope, yet ventured to say no more in urging.

“You think me immodest, indiscreet?”

“I fear you know little of the world, my child, yet, I confess this young Sieur made good impression upon me. I know not what to advise, for it may have been but idle curiosity which brought him here with his questioning. ’Tis not safe to trust men, but I can see no harm in his knowing all you have told me. There might be opportunity for him to be of service. He travels with Cassion, you say?”

“Yes, Sister.”

“And their departure is soon?”

“Before daylight tomorrow. When the Commissaire returns we are to be married. So Chevet explained to me; Monsieur Cassion has not spoken. You will give me audience with the Sieur de Artigny?”

“I have no power, child, but I will speak with the Mother Superior, and repeat to her all I have learned. It shall be as she wills. Wait here, and you may trust me to plead for you.”

She seemed to fade from the room, and I glanced about, seeing no change since I was there before—the same bare walls and floor, the rude settee, the crucifix above the door, and the one partially open window, set deep in the stone wall. Outside I could hear voices, and the shuffling of feet on the stone slabs, but within all was silence. I had been away from this emotionless cloister life so long, out in the open air, that I felt oppressed; the profound stillness was a weight on my nerves. Would the sister be successful in her mission? Would the Mother Superior, whose stern rule I knew so well, feel slightest sympathy with my need? And if she did, would De Artigny care enough to come? Perchance it would have been better to have made the plea myself rather than trust all to the gentle lips of Celeste. Perhaps I might even yet be given that privilege, for surely the Mother would feel it best to question me before she rendered decision.

I crossed to the window and leaned out, seeking to divert my mind by view of the scene below, yet the stone walls were so thick that only a tantalizing glimpse was afforded of the pavement opposite. There were lines of people there, pressed against the side of a great building, and I knew from their gestures that troops were marching by. Once I had view of a horseman, gaily uniformed, his frightened animal rearing just at the edge of the crowd, which scattered like a flock of sheep before the danger of pawing hoofs. The man must have gained glimpse of me also, for he waved one hand and smiled even as he brought the beast under control. Then a band played, and I perceived the shiny top of a carriage moving slowly up the hill, the people cheering as it passed. No doubt it was Governor la Barre, on his way to the citadel for some ceremony of the day.

Cassion would be somewhere in the procession, for he was one to keep in the glare, and be seen, but there would be no place for a lieutenant of La Salle’s. I leaned out farther, risking a fall, but saw nothing to reward the effort, except a line of marching men, a mere bobbing mass of heads. I drew back flushed with exertion, dimly aware that someone had entered the apartment. It was the Mother Superior, looking smaller than ever in the gloom, and behind her framed in the narrow doorway, his eyes smiling as though in enjoyment of my confusion, stood De Artigny. I climbed down from the bench, feeling my cheeks burn hotly, and made obeisance. The Mother’s soft hand rested on my hair, and there was silence, so deep I heard the pounding of my heart.

“Child,” said the Mother, her voice low but clear. “Rise that I may see your face. Ah! it has not so greatly changed in the years, save that the eyes hold knowledge of sorrow. Sister Celeste hath told me your story, and if it be sin for me to grant your request then must I abide the penance, for it is in my heart to do so. Until I send the sister you may speak alone with Monsieur de Artigny.”

She drew slightly aside, and the young man bowed low, hat in hand, then stood erect, facing me, the light from the window on his face.

“At your command, Mademoiselle,” he said quietly. “The Mother tells me you have need of my services.”

I hesitated, feeling the embarrassment of the other presence, and scarce knowing how best to describe my case. It seemed simple enough when I was alone, but now all my thoughts fled in confusion, and I realized how little call I had to ask assistance. My eyes fell, and the words trembled unspoken on my lips. When I dared glance up again the Mother had slipped silently from the room, leaving us alone. No doubt he felt the difference also, for he stepped forward and caught my hand in his, his whole manner changing, as he thus assumed leadership. ’Twas so natural, so confidently done, that I felt a sudden wave of hope overcome my timidity.

“Come, Mademoiselle,” he said, almost eagerly. “There is no reason for you to fear confiding in me. Surely I was never sent for without just reason. Let us sit here while you retell the story. Perchance we will play boy and girl again.”

“You remember that?”

“Do I not!” he laughed pleasantly. “There were few pleasant memories I took with me into the wilderness, yet that was one. Ay, but we talked freely enough then, and there is naught since in my life to bring loss of faith. ’Tis my wish to serve you, be it with wit or blade.” He bent lower, seeking the expression in my eyes. “This Hugo Chevet—he is a brute. I know—is his abuse beyond endurance?”

“No, no,” I hastened to explain. “In his way he is not unkind. The truth is he has lived so long in the woods alone, he scarcely speaks. He—he would marry me to Monsieur Cassion.”

Never will I forget the look of sheer delight on his face as these words burst from me. His hand struck the bench, and he tossed back the long hair from his forehead, his eyes merry with enjoyment.

“Ah, good! By all the saints, ’tis even as I hoped. Then have no fear of my sympathy, Mademoiselle. Nothing could please me like a clash with that perfumed gallant. He doth persecute you with his wooing?”

“He has not spoken, save to Chevet; yet it is seemingly all arranged without my being approached.”

“A coward’s way. Chevet told you?”

“Three days ago, Monsieur, after you were there, and Cassion had departed. It may have been that your being seen with me hastened the plan. I know not, yet the two talked together long, and privately, and when the Commissaire finally went away, Chevet called me in, and told me what had been decided.”

“That you were to marry that coxcomb?”

“Yes; he did not ask me if I would; it was a command. When I protested my lack of love, saying even that I despised the man, he answered me with a laugh, insisting it was his choice, not mine, and that love had naught to do with such

matters. Think you this Cassion has some hold on Hugo Chevet to make him so harsh?"

"No doubt, they are hand in glove in the fur trade, and the Commissaire has La Barre's ear just now. He rode by yonder in the carriage a moment since, and you might think from his bows he was the Governor. And this marriage? when does it take place?"

"On Monsieur's safe return from the great West."

The smile came back to his face.

"Not so bad that, for 'tis a long journey, and might be delayed. I travel with him, you know, and we depart at daybreak. What else did this Chevet have to say?"

"Only a threat that if ever you came near me again his fingers would feel your throat, Monsieur. He spoke of hate between himself and your father."

The eyes upon mine lost their tolerant smile, and grew darker, and I marked the fingers of his hand clinch.

"That was like enough, for my father was little averse to a quarrel, although he seldom made boast of it afterwards. And so this Hugo Chevet threatened me! I am not of the blood, Mademoiselle, to take such things lightly. Yet wait—why came you to me with such a tale? Have you no friends?"

"None, Monsieur," I answered gravely, and regretfully, "other than the nuns to whom I went to school, and they are useless in such a case. I am an orphan under guardianship, and my whole life has been passed in this convent, and Chevet's cabin on the river. My mother died at my birth, my father was a soldier on the frontier, and I grew up alone among strangers. Scarcely have I met any save the rough boatmen, and those *couriers du bois* in my uncle's employ. There was no one else but you, Monsieur—no one. 'Twas not immodesty which caused me to make this appeal, but a dire need. I am a helpless, friendless girl."

"You trust me then?"

"Yes, Monsieur; I believe you a man of honor."

He walked across the room, once, twice, his head bent in thought, and I watched him, half frightened lest I had angered him.

"Have I done very wrong, Monsieur?"

He stopped, his eyes on my face. He must have perceived my perplexity, for he smiled again, and pressed my hand gently.

"If so, the angels must judge," he answered stoutly. "As for me, I am very glad you do me this honor. I but seek the best plan of service, Mademoiselle, for I stand between you and this sacrifice with much pleasure. You shall not marry Cassion while I wear a sword; yet, faith! I am so much a man of action that I see no way out but by the strong arm. Is appeal to the Governor, to the judges impossible?"

"He possesses influence now."

"True enough; he is the kind La Barre finds useful, while I can scarce keep my head upon my shoulders here in New France. To be follower of La Salle is to be called traitor. It required the aid of every friend I had in Quebec to secure me card of admission to the ball tonight."

"You attend, Monsieur?"

"Unless they bar me at the sword point. Know you why I made the effort?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Your promise to be present. I had no wish otherwise."

I felt the flush deepen on my cheeks and my eyes fell.

"'Tis most kind of you to say so, Monsieur," was all I could falter.

"Ay!" he interrupted, "we are both so alone in this New France 'tis well we help each other. I will find you a way out, Mademoiselle—perhaps this night; if not, then in the woods yonder. They are filled with secrets, yet have room to hide another."

"But not violence, Monsieur!"

"Planning and scheming is not my way, nor am I good at it. A soldier of La Salle needs more to understand action, and the De Artigny breed has ever had faith in steel. I seek no quarrel, yet if occasion arise this messenger of La Barre will find me quite ready. I know not what may occur. Mademoiselle; I merely pledge you my word of honor that Cassion will no longer seek your hand. The method you must trust to me."

Our eyes met, and his were kind and smiling, with a confidence in their depths that strangely heartened me. Before I realized the action I had given him my hand.

"I do, Monsieur, and question no more, though I pray for peace between you. Our time is up, Sister?"

"Yes, my child," she stood in the doorway, appearing like some saintly image. "The Mother sent me."

De Artigny released my hand, and bowed low.

"I still rely upon your attendance at the ball?" he asked, lingering at the door.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And may bespeak a dance?"

"I cannot say no, although it may cost you dear."

He laughed gaily, his eyes bright with merriment.

"Faith! most pleasures do I find; the world would be dull enough otherwise. Till then, Mademoiselle, adieu."

We heard his quick step ring on the stone of the passage, and Celeste smiled, her hand on mine.

"A lad of spirit that. The Sieur de la Salle picks his followers well, and knows loyal hearts. The De Artignys never fail."

"You know of them, Sister?"

"I knew his father," she answered, half ashamed already of her impulse, "a gallant man. But come, the Mother would have you visit her."

Chapter IV

In the Palace of the Intendant.

The huge palace of the Intendant, between the bluff and the river, was ablaze with lights, and already crowded with guests at our arrival. I had seen nothing of Chevet since the morning, nor did he appear now; but Monsieur Cassion was prompt enough, and congratulated me on my appearance with bows, and words of praise which made me flush with embarrassment. Yet I knew myself that I looked

well in the new gown, simple enough to be sure, yet prettily draped, for Sister Celeste had helped me, and 'twas whispered she had seen fine things in Europe before she donned the sober habit of a nun. She loved yet to dress another, and her swift touches to my hair had worked a miracle. I read admiration in Cassion's eyes, as I came forward from the shadows to greet him, and was not unhappy to know he recognized my beauty, and was moved by it. Yet it was not of him I thought, but Rene de Artigny.

There was a chair without, and bearers, while two soldiers of the Regiment of Picardy, held torches to light the way, and open passage. Cassion walked beside me, his tongue never still, yet I was too greatly interested in the scene to care what he was saying, although I knew it to be mostly compliment. It was a steep descent, the stones of the roadway wet and glistening from a recent shower, and the ceaseless stream of people, mostly denizens of Quebec, peered at us curiously as we made slow progress. Great bonfires glowed from every high point of the cliff, their red glare supplementing our torches, and bringing out passing faces in odd distinctness.

A spirit of carnival seemed to possess the crowd, and more than once bits of green, and handfuls of sweets were tossed into my lap; while laughter, and gay badinage greeted us from every side. Cassion took this rather grimly, and gave stern word to the soldier escort, but I found it all diverting enough, and had hard work to retain my dignity, and not join in the merriment. It was darker at the foot of the hill, yet the crowd did not diminish, although they stood in ankle deep mud, and seemed less vivacious. Now and then I heard some voice name Cassion as we passed, recognizing his face in the torch glow, but there was no sign that he was popular. Once a man called out something which caused him to stop, hand on sword, but he fronted so many faces that he lost heart, and continued, laughing off the affront. Then we came to the guard lines, and were beyond reach of the mob.

An officer met us, pointing out the way, and, after he had assisted us to descend from the chair, we advanced slowly over a carpet of clean straw toward the gaily lighted entrance. Soldiers lined the walls on either side, and overhead blazed a beacon suspended on a chain. It was a scene rather grotesque and weird in the red glow, and I took Cassion's arm gladly, feeling just a little frightened by the strange surroundings.

"Where is my Uncle Chevet?" I asked, more as a relief, than because I cared, although I was glad of his absence because of De Artigny.

"In faith, I know not," he answered lightly. "I won him a card, but he was scarce gracious about it. In some wine shop likely with others of his kind."

There were servants at the door, and an officer, who scanned the cards of those in advance of us, yet passed Cassion, with a glance at his face, and word of recognition. I observed him turn and stare after me, for our eyes met, but, almost before I knew what had occurred, I found myself in a side room, with a maid helping to remove my wraps, and arrange my hair. She was gracious and apt, with much to say in praise of my appearance; and at my expression of doubt, brought a mirror and held it before me. Then, for the first time, did I comprehend the magic of Sister Celeste, and what had been accomplished by her deft fingers. I was no longer a rustic maid, but really a quite grand lady, so that I felt a thrill of pride as I

went forth once more to join Cassion in the hall. 'Twas plain enough to be seen that my appearance pleased him also, for appreciation was in his eyes, and he bowed low over my hand, and lifted it gallantly to his lips.

I will not describe the scene in the great ballroom, for now, as I write, the brilliant pageant is but a dim memory, confused and tantalizing. I recall the bright lights overhead, and along the walls, the festooned banners, the raised dais at one end, carpeted with skins of wild animals, where the Governor stood, the walls covered with arms and trophies of the chase, the guard of soldiers at each entrance, and the mass of people grouped about the room.

It was an immense apartment, but so filled with guests as to leave scarce space for dancing, and the company was a strange one; representative, I thought, of each separate element which composed the population of New France. Officers of the regiments in garrison were everywhere, apparently in charge of the evening's pleasure, but their uniforms bore evidence of service. The naval men were less numerous, yet more brilliantly attired, and seemed fond of the dance, and were favorites of the ladies. These were young, and many of them beautiful; belles of Quebec mostly, and, although their gowns were not expensive, becomingly attired. Yet from up and down the river the seigniors had brought their wives and daughters to witness the event. Some of these were uncouth enough, and oddly appareled; not a few among them plainly exhibiting traces of Indian blood; and here and there, standing silent and alone, could be noted a red chief from distant forest. Most of those men I saw bore evidence in face and dress of the wild, rough life they led—fur traders from far-off waterways, guardians of wilderness forts, explorers and adventurers.

Many a name reached my ears famous in those days, but forgotten long since; and once or twice, as we slowly made our way through the throng, Cassion pointed out to me some character of importance in the province, or paused to present me with formality to certain officials whom he knew. It was thus we approached the dais, and awaited our turn to extend felicitations to the Governor. Just before us was Du L'Hut, whose name Cassion whispered in my ear, a tall, slender man, attired as a courier du bois, with long fair hair sweeping his shoulders. I had heard of him as a daring explorer, but there was no premonition that he would ever again come into my life, and I was more deeply interested in the appearance of La Barre.

He was a dark man, stern of face, and with strange, furtive eyes, concealed behind long lashes and overhanging brows. Yet he was most gracious to Du L'Hut, and when he turned, and perceived Monsieur Cassion next in line, smiled and extended his hand cordially.

"Ah, Francois, and so you are here at last, and ever welcome. And this," he bowed low before me in excess of gallantry, "no doubt will be the Mademoiselle la Chesnayne of whose charms I have heard so much of late. By my faith, Cassion, even your eloquence hath done small justice to the lady. Where, Mademoiselle, have you hidden yourself, to remain unknown to us of Quebec?"

"I have lived with my uncle, Hugo Chevet."

"Ah, yes; I recall the circumstances now—a rough, yet loyal trader. He was with me once on the Ottawa—and tonight?"

"He accompanied me to the city, your excellency, but I have not seen him since."

"Small need, with Francois at your beck and call," and he patted me playfully on the cheek. "I have already tested his faithfulness. Your father, Mademoiselle?"

"Captain Pierre la Chesnayne, sir."

"Ah, yes; I knew him well; he fell on the Richelieu; a fine soldier." He turned toward Cassion, the expression of his face changed.

"You depart tonight?"

"At daybreak, sir."

"That is well; see to it that no time is lost on the journey. I have it in my mind that De Baugis may need you, for, from all I hear Henri de Tonty is not an easy man to handle."

"De Tonty?"

"Ay! the lieutenant Sieur de la Salle left in charge at St. Louis; an Italian they tell me, and loyal to his master. 'Tis like he may resist my orders, and De Baugis hath but a handful with which to uphold authority. I am not sure I approve of your selecting this lad De Artigny as a guide; he may play you false."

"Small chance he'll have for any trick."

"Perchance not, yet the way is long, and he knows the wilderness. I advise you guard him well. I shall send to you for council in an hour; there are papers yet unsigned."

He turned away to greet those who followed us in line, while we moved forward into the crowd about the walls. Cassion whispered in my ear, telling me bits of gossip about this and that one who passed us, seeking to exhibit his wit, and impress me with his wide acquaintance. I must have made fit response, for his voice never ceased, yet I felt no interest in the stories, and disliked the man more than ever for his vapid boasting. The truth is my thought was principally concerned with De Artigny, and whether he would really gain admission. Still of this I had small doubt, for his was a daring to make light of guards, or any threat of enemies, if desire urged him on. And I had his pledge.

My eyes watched every moving figure, but the man was not present, my anxiety increasing as I realized his absence, and speculated as to its cause. Could Cassion have interfered? Could he have learned of our interview, and used his influence secretly to prevent our meeting again? It was not impossible, for the man was seemingly in close touch with Quebec, and undoubtedly possessed power. My desire to see De Artigny was now for his own sake—to warn him of danger and treachery. The few words I had caught passing between La Barre and Cassion had to me a sinister meaning; they were a promise of protection from the Governor to his lieutenant, and this officer of La Salle's should be warned that he was suspected and watched. There was more to La Barre's words than appeared openly; it would be later, when they were alone, that he would give his real orders to Cassion. Yet I felt small doubt as to what those orders would be, nor of the failure of the lieutenant to execute them. The wilderness hid many a secret, and might well conceal another. In some manner that night I must find De Artigny, and whisper my warning.

These were my thoughts, crystallizing into purpose, yet I managed to smile cheerily into the face of the Commissaire and make such reply to his badinage as gave him pleasure. Faith, the man loved himself so greatly the trick was easy, the danger being that I yield too much to his audacity. No doubt he deemed me a

simple country maid, overawed by his gallantries, nor did I seek to undeceive him, even permitting the fool to press my hand, and whisper his soft nonsense. Yet he ventured no further, seeing that in my eyes warning him of danger if he grew insolent. I danced with him twice, pleased to know I had not forgotten the step, and then, as he felt compelled to show attention to the Governor's lady, he left me in charge of a tall, thin officer—a Major Callons, I think—reluctantly, and disappeared in the crowd. Never did I part with one more willingly, and as the Major spoke scarcely a dozen words during our long dance together I found opportunity to think, and decide upon a course of action.

As the music ceased my only plan was to avoid Cassion as long as possible, and, at my suggestion, the silent major conducted me to a side room, and then disappeared seeking refreshments. I grasped the opportunity to slip through the crowd, and find concealment in a quiet corner. It was impossible for me to conceive that De Artigny would fail to come. He had pledged his word, and there was that about the man to give me faith. Ay! he would come, unless there had already been treachery. My heart beat swiftly at the thought, my eyes eagerly searching the moving figures in the ballroom. Yet there was nothing I could do but wait, although fear was already tugging at my heart.

I leaned forward scanning each passing face, my whole attention concentrated on the discovery of De Artigny. Where he came from I knew not, but his voice softly speaking at my very ear brought me to my feet, with a little cry of relief. The joy of finding him must have found expression in my eyes, in my eager clasping of his hand, for he laughed.

"'Tis as though I was truly welcomed, Mademoiselle," he said, and gravely enough. "Could I hope that you were even seeking me yonder?"

"It would be the truth, if you did," I responded frankly, "and I was beginning to doubt your promise."

"Nor was it as easily kept as I supposed when given," he said under his breath. "Come with me into this side room where we can converse more freely—I can perceive Monsieur Cassion across the floor. No doubt he is seeking you, and my presence here will give the man no pleasure."

I glanced in the direction indicated, and although I saw nothing of the Commissaire, I slipped back willingly enough through the lifted curtain into the deserted room behind. It was evidently an office of some kind, for it contained only a desk and some chairs, and was unlighted, except for the gleam from between the curtains. The outer wall was so thick a considerable space separated the room from the window, which was screened off by heavy drapery. De Artigny appeared familiar with these details, for, with scarcely a glance about, he led me into this recess, where we stood concealed. Lights from below illumined our faces, and revealed an open window looking down on the court. My companion glanced out at the scene beneath, and his eyes and lips smiled as he turned again and faced me.

"But, Monsieur," I questioned puzzled, "why was it not easy? You met with trouble?"

"Hardly that; a mere annoyance. I may only suspect the cause, but an hour after I left you my ticket of invitation was withdrawn."

"Withdrawn? by whom?"

“The order of La Barre, no doubt; an officer of his guard called on me to say he preferred my absence.”

“’Twas the work of Cassion.”

“So I chose to believe, especially as he sent me word later to remain at the boats, and have them in readiness for departure at any minute. Some inkling of our meeting must have reached his ears.”

“But how came you here, then?”

He laughed in careless good humor.

“Why that was no trick! Think you I am one to disappoint because of so small an obstacle? As the door was refused me I sought other entrance and found it here.” He pointed through the open window. “It was not a difficult passage, but I had to wait the withdrawal of the guards below, which caused my late arrival. Yet this was compensated for by discovering you so quickly. My only fear was encountering someone I knew while seeking you on the floor.”

“You entered through this window?”

“Yes; there is a lattice work below.”

“And whose office is that within?”

“My guess is that of Colonel Delguard, La Barre’s chief of staff, for there was a letter for him lying on the desk. What difference? You are glad I came?”

“Yes, Monsieur, but not so much for my own sake, as for yours. I bring you warning that you adventure with those who would do you evil if the chance arrive.”

“Bah! Monsieur Cassion?”

“’Tis not well for you to despise the man, for he has power and is a villain at heart in spite of all his pretty ways. ’Tis said he has the cruelty of a tiger, and in this case La Barre gives him full authority.”

“Hath the Governor grudge against me also?”

“Only that you are follower of La Salle, and loyal, while he is heart and hand with the other faction. He chided Cassion for accepting you as guide, and advised close watch lest you show treachery.”

“You overheard their talk?”

“Ay! they made no secret of it; but I am convinced La Barre has more definite instructions to give in private, for he asked the Commissaire to come to him later for conference. I felt that you should be told, Monsieur.”

De Artigny leaned motionless against the window ledge, and the light streaming in through the opening of the draperies revealed the gravity of his expression. For the moment he remained silent, turning the affair over in his mind.

“I thank you, Mademoiselle,” he said finally, and touched my hand, “for your report gives me one more link to my chain. I have picked up several in the past few hours, and all seem to lead back to the manipulations of Cassion. Faith! there is some mystery here, for surely the man seemed happy enough when first we met at Chevet’s house, and accepted my offer gladly. Have you any theory as to this change in his front?”

I felt the blood surge to my cheeks, and my eyes fell before the intensity of his glance.

“If I have, Monsieur, ’tis no need that it be mentioned.”

“Your pardon, Mademoiselle, but your words already answer me—’tis then that I have shown interest in you; the dog is jealous!”

“Monsieur!”

He laughed, and I felt the tightening of his hand on mine.

“Good! and by all the gods, I will give him fair cause. The thought pleases me, for rather would I be your soldier than my own. See, how it dovetails in—I meet you at the convent and pledge you my aid; some spy bears word of our conference to Monsieur, and an hour later I receive word that if I have more to do with you I die. I smile at the warning and send back a message of insult. Then my invitation to this ball is withdrawn, and, later still, La Barre even advises that I be assassinated at the least excuse. ’Twould seem they deem you of importance, Mademoiselle.”

“You make it no more than a joke?”

“Far from it; the very fact that I know the men makes it matter of grave concern. I might, indeed, smile did it concern myself alone, but I have your interests in mind—you have honored me by calling me your only friend, and now I know not where I may serve you best—in the wilderness, or here in Quebec?”

“There can nothing injure me here, Monsieur, not with Cassion traveling to the Illinois. No doubt he will leave behind him those who will observe my movements—that cannot harm.”

“It is Hugo Chevet, I fear.”

“Chevet! my uncle—I do not understand.”

“No, for he is your uncle, and you know him only in such relationship. He may have been to you kind and indulgent. I do not ask. But to those who meet him in the world he is a big, cruel, savage brute, who would sacrifice even you, if you stood in his way. And now if you fail to marry Cassion, you will so stand. He is the one who will guard you, by choice of the Commissaire, and orders of La Barre, and he will do his part well.”

“I can remain with the sisters.”

“Not in opposition to the Governor; they would never dare antagonize him; tomorrow you will return with Chevet.”

I drew a quick breath, my eyes on his face.

“How can you know all this, Monsieur? Why should my uncle sacrifice me?”

“No matter how I know. Some of it has been your own confession, coupled with my knowledge of the man. Three days ago I learned of his debt to Cassion, and that the latter had him in his claws, and at his mercy. Today I had evidence of what that debt means.”

“Today!”

“Ay! ’twas from Chevet the threat came that he would kill me if I ever met with you again.”

I could but stare at him, incredulous, my fingers unconsciously grasping his jacket.

“He said that? Chevet?”

“Ay! Chevet; the message came by mouth of the half-breed, his voyageur, and I choked out of him where he had left his master, yet when I got there the man had gone. If we might meet tonight the matter would be swiftly settled.”

He gazed out into the darkness, and I saw his hand close on the hilt of his knife. I caught his arm.

"No, no Monsieur; not that. You must not seek a quarrel, for I am not afraid—truly I am not; you will listen—"

There was a voice speaking in the office room behind, the closing of a door, and the scraping of a chair as someone sat down. My words ceased, and we stood silent in the shadow, my grasp still on De Artigny's arm.

Chapter V

The Order of La Barre.

I did not recognize the voice speaking—a husky voice, the words indistinct, yet withal forceful—nor do I know what it was he said. But when the other answered, tapping on the desk with some instrument, I knew the second speaker to be La Barre, and leaned back just far enough to gain glimpse through the opening in the drapery. He sat at the desk, his back toward us, while his companion, a red-faced, heavily-moustached man, in uniform of the Rifles, stood opposite, one arm on the mantel over the fireplace. His expression was that of amused interest.

"You saw the lady?" he asked.

"In the receiving line for a moment only; a fair enough maid to be loved for her own sake I should say. Faith, never have I seen handsomer eyes."

The other laughed.

"'Tis well Madame does not overhear that confession. An heiress, and beautiful! Piff! but she might find others to her liking rather than this Cassion."

"It is small chance she has had to make choice, and as to her being an heiress, where heard you such a rumor, Colonel Delguard?"

The officer straightened up.

"You forget, sir," he said slowly, "that the papers passed through my hands after Captain la Chesnayne's death. It was at your request they failed to reach the hands of Frontenac."

La Barre gazed at him across the desk, his brows contracted into a frown.

"No, I had not forgotten," and the words sounded harsh. "But they came to me properly sealed, and I supposed unopened. I think I have some reason to ask an explanation, Monsieur."

"And one easily made. I saw only the letter, but that revealed enough to permit of my guessing the rest. It is true, is it not, that La Chesnayne left an estate of value?"

"He thought so, but, as you must be aware, it had been alienated by act of treason."

"Ay! but Comte de Frontenac appealed the case to the King, who granted pardon, and restoration."

"So, 'twas rumored, but unsupported by the records. So far as New France knows there was no reply from Versailles."

The Colonel stood erect, and advanced a step, his expression one of sudden curiosity.

“In faith, Governor,” he said swiftly, “but your statement awakens wonder. If this be so why does Francois Cassion seek the maid so ardently? Never did I deem that cavalier one to throw himself away without due reward.”

La Barre laughed.

“Perchance you do Francois ill judgment, Monsieur le Colonel,” he replied amused. “No doubt ’tis love, for, in truth, the witch would send sluggish blood dancing with the glance of her eyes. Still,” more soberly, his eyes falling to the desk, “’tis, as you say, scarce in accord with Cassion’s nature to thus make sacrifice, and there have been times when I suspected he did some secret purpose. I use the man, yet never trust him.”

“Nor I, since he played me foul trick at La Chine. Could he have found the paper of restoration, and kept it concealed, until all was in his hands?”

“I have thought of that, yet it doth not appear possible. Francois was in ill grace with Frontenac, and could never have reached the archives. If the paper came to his hands it was by accident, or through some treachery. Well,’tis small use of our discussing the matter. He hath won my pledge to Mademoiselle la Chesnayne’s hand, for I would have him friend, not enemy, just now. They marry on his return.”

“He is chosen then for the mission to Fort St. Louis?”

“Ay, there were reasons for his selection. The company departs at dawn. Tell him, Monsieur, that I await him now for final interview.”

I watched Delguard salute, and turn away to execute his order. La Barre drew a paper from a drawer of the desk, and bent over it pen in hand. My eyes lifted to the face of De Artigny, standing motionless behind me in the deeper shadow.

“You overheard, Monsieur?” I whispered.

He leaned closer, his lips at my ear, his eyes dark with eagerness.

“Every word, Mademoiselle! Fear not, I shall yet learn the truth from this Cassion. You suspected?”

I shook my head, uncertain.

“My father died in that faith, Monsieur, but Chevet called me a beggar.”

“Chevet! no doubt he knows all, and has a dirty hand in the mess. He called you beggar, hey!—hush, the fellow comes.”

He was a picture of insolent servility, as he stood there bowing, his gay dress fluttering with ribbons, his face smiling, yet utterly expressionless. La Barre lifted his eyes, and surveyed him coldly.

“You sent for me, sir?”

“Yes, although I scarcely thought at this hour you would appear in the apparel of a dandy. I have chosen you for serious work, Monsieur, and the time is near for your departure. Surely my orders were sufficiently clear?”

“They were, Governor la Barre,” and Cassion’s lips lost their grin, “and my delay in changing dress has occurred through the strange disappearance of Mademoiselle la Chesnayne. I left her with Major Callons while I danced with my lady, and have since found no trace of the maid.”

“Does not Callons know?”

“Only that, seeking refreshments, he left her, and found her gone on his return. Her wraps are in the dressing room.”

“Then ’tis not like she has fled the palace. No doubt she awaits you in some corner. I will have the servants look, and meanwhile pay heed to me. This is a mission of more import than love-making with a maid, Monsieur Cassion, and its success, or failure, will determine your future. You have my letter of instruction?”

“It has been carefully read.”

“And the sealed orders for Chevalier de Baugis?”

“Here, protected in oiled silk.”

“See that they reach him, and no one else; they give him an authority I could not grant before, and should end La Salle’s control of that country. You have met this Henri de Tonty? He was here with his master three years since, and had audience.”

“Ay, but that was before my time. Is he one to resist De Baugis?”

“He impressed me as a man who would obey to the letter, Monsieur; a dark-faced soldier, with an iron jaw. He had lost one arm in battle, and was loyal to his chief.”

“So I have heard—a stronger man than De Baugis?”

“A more resolute; all depends on what orders La Salle left, and the number of men the two command.”

“In that respect the difference is not great. De Baugis had but a handful of soldiers to take from Mackinac, although his voyageurs may be depended upon to obey his will. His instructions were not to employ force.”

“And the garrison of St. Louis?”

“’Tis hard to tell, as there are fur hunters there of whom we have no record. La Salle’s report would make his own command eighteen, but they are well chosen, and he hath lieutenants not so far away as to be forgotten. La Forest would strike at a word, and De la Durantaye is at the Chicago portage, and no friend of mine. ’Tis of importance, therefore, that your voyage be swiftly completed, and my orders placed in De Baugis’ hands. Are all things ready for departure?”

“Ay, the boats only await my coming.”

The Governor leaned his head on his hand, crumbling the paper between his fingers.

“This young fellow—De Artigny,” he said thoughtfully, “you have some special reason for keeping him in your company?”

Cassion crossed the room, his face suddenly darkening.

“Ay, now I have,” he explained shortly, “although I first engaged his services merely for what I deemed to be their value. He spoke me most fairly.”

“But since?”

“I have cause to suspect. Chevet tells me that today he had conference with Mademoiselle at the House of the Ursulines.”

“Ah, ’twas for that then you had his ticket revoked. I see where the shoe pinches. ’Twill be safer with him in the boats than back here in Quebec. Then I give permission, and wash my hands of the whole affair—but beware of him, Cassion.”

“I may be trusted, sir.”

“I question that no longer.” He hesitated slightly, then added in lower tone: “If accident occur the report may be briefly made. I think that will be all.”

Both men were upon their feet, and La Barre extended his hand across the desk. I do not know what movement may have caused it, but at that moment, a wooden ring holding the curtain fell, and struck the floor at my feet. Obeying the first impulse I thrust De Artigny back behind me into the shadow, and held aside the drapery. Both men, turning, startled at the sound, beheld me clearly, and stared in amazement. Cassion took a step forward, an exclamation of surprise breaking from his lips.

"Adele! Mademoiselle!"

I stepped more fully into the light, permitting the curtain to fall behind me, and my eyes swept their faces.

"Yes, Monsieur—you were seeking me?"

"For an hour past; for what reason did you leave the ballroom?"

With no purpose in my mind but to gain time in which to collect my thought and protect De Artigny from discovery, I made answer, assuming a carelessness of demeanor which I was far from feeling.

"Has it been so long, Monsieur?" I returned in apparent surprise. "Why I merely sought a breath of fresh air, and became interested in the scene without."

La Barre stood motionless, just as he had risen to his feet at the first alarm, his eyes on my face, his heavy eyebrows contracted in a frown.

"I will question the young lady, Cassion," he said sternly, "for I have interests here of my own. Mademoiselle!"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"How long have you been behind that curtain?"

"Monsieur Cassion claims to have sought me for an hour."

"Enough of that," his voice grown harsh, and threatening. "You address the Governor; answer me direct."

I lifted my eyes to his stern face, but they instantly fell before the encounter of his fierce gaze.

"I do not know, Monsieur."

"Who was here when you came in?"

"No one, Monsieur; the room was empty."

"Then you hid there, and overheard the conversation between Colonel Delguard and myself?"

"Yes, Monsieur," I confessed, feeling my limbs tremble.

"And also all that has passed since Monsieur Cassion entered?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

He drew a deep breath, striking his hand on the desk, as though he would control his anger.

"Were you alone? Had you a companion?"

I know not how I managed it, yet I raised my eyes to his, simulating a surprise I was far from feeling.

"Alone, Monsieur? I am Adele la Chesnayne; if you doubt, the way of discovery is open without word from me."

His suspicious, doubting eyes never left my face, and there was sneer in his voice as he answered.

"Bah! I am not in love to be played with by a witch. Perchance 'tis not easy for you to lie. Well, we will see. Look within the alcove, Cassion."

The Commissaire was there even before the words of command were uttered, and my heart seemed to stop beating as his heavy hand tore aside the drapery. I leaned on the desk, bracing myself, expecting a blow, a struggle; but all was silent. Cassion, braced, and expectant, peered into the shadows, evidently perceiving nothing; then stepped within, only to instantly reappear, his expression that of disappointment. The blood surged back to my heart, and my lips smiled.

"No one is there, Monsieur," he reported, "but the window is open."

"And not a dangerous leap to the court below," returned La Barre thoughtfully. "So far you win, Mademoiselle. Now will you answer me—were you alone there ten minutes ago?"

"It is useless for me to reply, Monsieur," I answered with dignity, "as it will in no way change your decision."

"You have courage, at least."

"The inheritance of my race, Monsieur."

"Well, we'll test it then, but not in the form you anticipate." He smiled, but not pleasantly, and resumed his seat at the desk. "I propose closing your mouth, Mademoiselle, and placing you beyond temptation. Monsieur Cassion, have the lieutenant at the door enter."

I stood in silence, wondering at what was about to occur; was I to be made prisoner? or what form was my punishment to assume? The power of La Barre I knew, and his stern vindictiveness, and well I realized the fear and hate which swept his mind, as he recalled the conversation I had overheard. He must seal my lips to protect himself—but how? As though in a daze I saw Cassion open the door, speak a sharp word to one without, and return, followed by a young officer, who glanced curiously aside at me, even as he saluted La Barre, and stood silently awaiting his orders. The latter remained a moment motionless, his lips firm set.

"Where is Father Le Guard?"

"In the Chapel, Monsieur; he passed me a moment ago."

"Good; inform the père that I desire his presence at once. Wait! know you the fur trader, Hugo Chevet?"

"I have seen the man, Monsieur—a big fellow, with a shaggy head."

"Ay, as savage as the Indians he has lived among. He is to be found at Eclair's wine shop in the Rue St. Louis. Have your sentries bring him here to me. Attend to both these matters."

"Yes, Monsieur."

La Barre's eyes turned from the disappearing figure of the officer, rested a moment on my face, and then smiled grimly as he fronted Cassion. He seemed well pleased with himself, and to have recovered his good humor.

"A delightful surprise for you, Monsieur Cassion," he said genially, "and let us hope no less a pleasure for the fair lady. Be seated, Mademoiselle; there may be a brief delay. You perceive my plan, no doubt?"

Cassion did not answer, and the Governor looked at me.

"No, Monsieur."

"And yet so simple, so joyful a way out of this unfortunate predicament. I am surprised. Cassion here might not appreciate how nicely this method will answer to close your lips, but you, remembering clearly the private conference between

myself and Colonel Delguard, should grasp my purpose at once. Your marriage is to take place tonight, Mademoiselle."

"Tonight! my marriage! to whom?"

"Ah! is there then more than one prospective bridegroom? Monsieur Cassion surely I am not in error that you informed me of your engagement to Mademoiselle la Chesnayne?"

"She has been pledged me in marriage, Monsieur—the banns published."

I sat with bowed head, my cheeks flaming.

"'Tis then as I understood," La Barre went on, chuckling. "The lady is over modest."

"I have made no pledge," I broke in desperately. "Monsieur spoke to my Uncle Chevet, not I!"

"Yet you were told! You made no refusal?"

"Monsieur, I could not; they arranged it all, and, besides, it was not to be until Monsieur returned from the West. I do not love him; I thought—"

"Bah! what is love? 'Tis enough that you accepted. This affair is no longer one of affection; it has become the King's business, a matter of State. I decide it is best for you to leave Quebec; ay! and New France, Mademoiselle. There is but one choice, imprisonment here, or exile into the wilderness." He leaned forward staring into my face with his fierce, threatening eyes. "I feel it better that you go as Monsieur Cassion's wife, and under his protection. I decree that so you shall go."

"Alone—with—with—Monsieur Cassion?"

"One of his party. 'Tis my order also that Hugo Chevet be of the company. Perchance a year in the wilderness may be of benefit to him, and he might be of value in watching over young De Artigny."

Never have I felt more helpless, more utterly alone. I knew all he meant, but my mind grasped no way of escape. His face leered at me as through a mist, yet as I glanced aside at Cassion it only brought home to me a more complete dejection. The man was glad—glad! He had no conscience, no shame. To appeal to him would be waste of breath—a deeper humiliation. Suddenly I felt cold, hard, reckless; ay! they had the power to force me through the unholy ceremony. I was only a helpless girl; but beyond that I would laugh at them; and Cassion—if he dared—

The door opened, and a lean priest in long black robe entered noiselessly, bending his shaven head to La Barre, as his crafty eyes swiftly swept our faces.

"Monsieur desired my presence?"

"Yes, Père le Guard, a mission of happiness. There are two here to be joined in matrimony by bonds of Holy Church. We but wait the coming of the lady's guardian."

The père must have interpreted the expression of my face.

"'Tis regular, Monsieur?" he asked.

"By order of the King," returned La Barre sternly. "Beyond that it is not necessary that you inquire. Ah! Monsieur Chevet! they found you then? I have a pleasant surprise for you. 'Tis hereby ordered that you accompany Commissaire Cassion to the Illinois country as interpreter, to be paid from my private fund."

Chevet stared into the Governor's dark face, scarce able to comprehend, his brain dazed from heavy drinking.

“The Illinois country! I—Hugo Chevet? ’Tis some joke, Monsieur.”

“None at all, as you will discover presently, my man. I do not jest on the King’s service.”

“But my land, Monsieur; my niece?”

La Barre permitted himself a laugh.

“Bah! let the land lie fallow; ’twill cost little while you draw a wage, and as for Mademoiselle, ’tis that you may accompany her I make choice. Stand back; you have your orders, and now I’ll show you good reason.” He stood up, and placed his hand on Cassion’s arm. “Now my dear, Francois, if you will join the lady.”

Chapter VI

The Wife of Francois Cassion.

It is vague, all that transpired. I knew then, and recall now, much of the scene yet it returns to memory more in a passing picture than an actual reality in which I was an actor. But one clear impression dominated my brain—my helplessness to resist the command of La Barre. His word was law in the colony, and from it there was no appeal, save to the King. Through swimming mist I saw his face, stern, dark, threatening, and then glimpsed Cassion approaching me, a smile curling his thin lips. I shrank back from him, yet arose to my feet, trembling so that I clung to the chair to keep erect.

“Do not touch me, Monsieur,” I said, in a voice which scarcely sounded like my own. Cassion stood still, the smile of triumph leaving his face. La Barre turned, his eyes cold and hard.

“What is this, Mademoiselle? You would dare disobey me?”

I caught my breath, gripping the chair with both hands.

“No, Monsieur le Governor,” I answered, surprised at the clearness with which I spoke. “That would be useless; you have behind you the power of France, and I am a mere girl. Nor do I appeal, for I know well the cause of your decision. It is indeed my privilege to appeal to Holy Church for protection from this outrage, but not through such representative as I see here.”

“Père le Guard is chaplain of my household.”

“And servant to your will, Monsieur. ’Tis known in all New France he is more diplomat than priest. Nay! I take back my word, and will make trial of his priesthood. Father, I do not love this man, nor marry him of my own free will. I appeal to you, to the church, to refuse the sanction.”

The priest stood with fingers interlocked, and head bowed, nor did his eyes meet mine.

“I am but the humble instrument of those in authority, Daughter,” he replied gently, “and must perform the sacred duties of my office. ’Tis your own confession that your hand has been pledged to Monsieur Cassion.”

“By Hugo Chevet, not myself.”

“Without objection on your part.” He glanced up slyly. “Perchance this was before the appearance of another lover, the Sieur de Artigny.”

I felt the color flood my cheeks, yet from indignation rather than embarrassment.

“No word of love has been spoken me by Monsieur de Artigny,” I answered swiftly. “He is a friend, no more. I do not love Francois Cassion, nor marry him but through force; ay! nor does he love me—this is but a scheme to rob me of my inheritance.”

“Enough of this,” broke in La Barre sternly, and he gripped my arm. “The girl hath lost her head, and such controversy is unseemly in my presence. Père le Guard, let the ceremony proceed.”

“’Tis your order, Monsieur?”

“Ay! do I not speak my will plainly enough? Come, the hour is late, and our King’s business is of more import than the whim of a girl.”

I never moved, never lifted my eyes. I was conscious of nothing, but helpless, impotent anger, of voiceless shame. They might force me to go through the form, but never would they make me the wife of this man. My heart throbbed with rebellion, my mind hardened into revolt. I knew all that occurred, realized the significance of every word and act, yet it was as if they appertained to someone else. I felt the clammy touch of Cassion’s hand on my nerveless fingers, and I must have answered the interrogatories of the priest, for his voice droned on, meaningless to the end. It was only in the silence which followed that I seemed to regain consciousness, and a new grip on my numbed faculties. Indeed I was still groping in the fog, bewildered, inert, when La Barre gave utterance to a coarse laugh.

“Congratulations, Francois,” he cried. “A fair wife, and not so unwilling after all. And now your first kiss.”

The sneer of these words was like a slap in the face, and all the hatred, and indignation I felt seethed to the surface. A heavy paper knife lay on the desk, and I gripped it in my fingers, and stepped back, facing them. The mist seemed to roll away, and I saw their faces, and there must have been that in mine to startle them, for even La Barre gave back a step, and the grin faded from the thin lips of the Commissaire.

“’Tis ended then,” I said, and my voice did not falter. “I am this man’s wife. Very well, you have had your way; now I will have mine. Listen to what I shall say, Monsieur le Governor, and you also, Francois Cassion. By rite of church you call me wife, but that is your only claim. I know your law, and that this ceremony has sealed my lips. I am your captive, nothing more; you can rob me now—but, mark you! all that you will ever get is money. Monsieur Cassion, if you dare lay so much as a finger on me, I will kill you, as I would a snake. I know what I say, and mean it. You kiss me! Try it, Monsieur, if you doubt how my race repays insult. I will go with you; I will bear your name; this the law compels, but I am still mistress of my soul, and of my body. You hear me, Messieurs? You understand?”

Illustration:
„You kiss me! Try it, Monsieur, if you doubt
how my race repays insult.“

Cassion stood leaning forward, just where my first words had held him motionless. As I paused his eyes were on my face, and he lifted a hand to wipe away drops of perspiration. La Barre crumpled the paper he held savagely.

"So," he exclaimed, "we have unchained a tiger cat. Well, all this is naught to me; and Francois, I leave you and the wilderness to do the taming. In faith, 'tis time already you were off. You agree to accompany the party without resistance, Madame?"

"As well there, as here," I answered contemptuously.

"And you, Hugo Chevet?"

The giant growled something inarticulate through his beard, not altogether, I thought, to La Barre's liking, for his face darkened.

"By St. Anne! 'tis a happy family amid which you start your honeymoon, Monsieur Cassion," he ejaculated at length, "but go you must, though I send a file of soldiers with you to the boats. Now leave me, and I would hear no more until word comes of your arrival at St. Louis."

We left the room together, the three of us, and no one spoke, as we traversed the great assembly hall, in which dancers still lingered, and gained the outer hall. Cassion secured my cloak, and I wrapped it about my shoulders, for the night air without was already chill, and then, yet in unbroken silence, we passed down the steps into the darkness of the street. I walked beside Chevet, who was growling to himself, scarce sober enough to clearly realize what had occurred, and so we followed the Commissaire down the steep path which led to the river.

There was no pomp now, no military guard, or blazing torches. All about us was gloom and silence, the houses fronting the narrow passage black, although a gleam of fire revealed the surface of the water below. The rough paving made walking difficult, and I tripped twice during the descent, once wrenching an ankle, but with no outcry. I was scarce conscious of the pain, or of my surroundings, for my mind still stood aghast over what had occurred. It had been so swiftly accomplished I yet failed to grasp the full significance.

Vaguely I comprehended that I was no longer Adele la Chesnayne, but the wife of that man I followed. A word, a muttered prayer, an uplifted hand, had made me his slave, his vassal. Nothing could break the bond between us save death. I might hate, despise, revile, but the bond held. This thought grew clearer as my mind readjusted itself, and the full horror of the situation took possession of me. Yet there was nothing I could do; I could neither escape or fight, nor had I a friend to whom I could appeal. Suddenly I realized that I still grasped in my hand the heavy paper knife I had snatched up from La Barre's desk, and I thrust it into the waistband of my skirt. It was my only weapon of defense, yet to know I had even that seemed to bring me a glow of courage.

We reached the river's edge and halted. Below us, on the bank, the blazing fire emitted a red gleam reflecting on the water, and showing us the dark outlines of waiting canoes, and seated figures. Gazing about Cassion broke the silence, his voice assuming the harshness of authority.

"Three canoes! Where is the other? Huh! if there be delay now, someone will make answer to me. Pass the word for the sergeant; ah! is this you Le Claire?"

"All is prepared, Monsieur."

He glared at the stocky figure fronting him in infantry uniform.

"Prepared! You have but three boats at the bank."

"The other is below, Monsieur; it is loaded and waits to lead the way."

"Ah! and who is in charge?"

"Was it not your will that it be the guide—the Sieur de Artigny?"

"*Sacre!* but I had forgotten the fellow. Ay! 'tis the best place for him. And are all provisions and arms aboard? You checked them, Le Claire?"

"With care, Monsieur; I watched the stowing of each piece; there is nothing forgotten."

"And the men?"

"Four Indian paddlers to each boat, Monsieur, twenty soldiers, a priest, and the guide."

"'Tis the tally. Make room for two more in the large canoe; ay, the lady goes. Change a soldier each to your boat and that of Père Allouez until we make our first camp, where we can make new arrangement."

"There is room in De Artigny's canoe."

"We'll not call him back; the fellows will tuck away somehow. Come, let's be off, it looks like dawn over yonder."

I found myself in one of the canoes, so filled with men any movement was almost impossible, yet of this I did not complain for my Uncle Chevet was next to me, and Cassion took place at the steering oar in the stern. To be separated from him was all I asked, although the very sound of his harsh voice rasping out orders, as we swung out from the bank rendered me almost frantic. My husband! God! and I was actually married to that despicable creature! I think I hardly realized before what had occurred, but now the hideous truth came, and I buried my face in my hands, and felt tears stealing through my fingers.

Yet only for a moment were these tears of weakness. Indignation, anger, hatred conquered me. He had won! he had used power to conquer! Very well, now he would pay the price. He thought me a helpless girl; he would find me a woman, and a La Chesnayne. The tears left my eyes, and my head lifted, as purpose and decision returned.

We were skirting the northern bank, the high bluffs blotting out the stars, with here and there, far up above us, a light gleaming from some distant window, its rays reflecting along the black water. The Indian paddlers worked silently, driving the sharp prow of the heavily laden canoe steadily up stream. Farther out to the left was the dim outline of another boat, keeping pace with ours, the moving figures of the paddlers revealed against the water beyond.

I endeavored to discern the canoe which led the way, over which De Artigny held command, but it was hidden by a wall of mist too far away to be visible. Yet the very thought that the young Sieur was there, accompanying us into the drear wilderness, preserved me from utter despair. I would not be alone, or friendless. Even when he learned the truth, he would know it was not my fault, and though he might question, and even doubt, at first, yet surely the opportunity would come for me to confess all, and feel his sympathy, and protection. I cannot explain the confidence which this certainty of his presence brought, or how gratefully I awaited the dawn, and its revelation.

'Tis not in the spirit of youth to be long depressed by misfortune, and although each echo of Cassion's voice recalled my condition, I was not indifferent to the changing scene. Chevet, still sodden with drink, fell asleep, his head on his pack, but I remained wide awake, watching the first faint gleam of light along the edge of the cloud stretching across the eastern sky line. It was a dull, drear morning, everywhere a dull gray, the wide waters about us silent and deserted. To the right the shore line was desolate and bare, except for blackened stumps of fire-devastated woods, and brown rocks, while in every other direction the river spread wide in sullen flow. There was no sound but the dip of the paddles and the heavy breathing.

As the sun forced its way through the obscuring cloud, the mist rose slowly, and drifted aside, giving me glimpse of the canoe in advance, although it remained indistinct, a vague speck in the waste of water. I sat motionless gazing about at the scene, yet vaguely comprehending the nature of our surroundings. My mind reviewed the strange events of the past night, and endeavored to adjust itself to my new environment. Almost in an instant of time my life had utterly changed—I had been married and exiled; wedded to a man whom I despised, and forced to accompany him into the unknown wilderness. It was like a dream, a delirium of fever, and even yet I could not seem to comprehend its dread reality. But the speeding canoes, the strange faces, the occasional sound of Cassion's voice, the slumbering figure of Chevet was evidence of truth not to be ignored, and ahead yonder, a mere outline, was the boat which contained De Artigny. What would he say, or do, when he learned the truth? Would he care greatly? Had I read rightly the message of his eyes? Could I have trust, and confidence in his loyalty? Would he accept my explanation! or would he condemn me for this act in which I was in no wise to blame? Mother of God! it came to me that it was not so much Monsieur Cassion I feared, as the Sieur de Artigny. What would be his verdict? My heart seemed to stop its beating, and tears dimmed my eyes, as I gazed across the water at that distant canoe. I knew then that all my courage, all my hope, centered on his decision—the decision of the man I loved.

Chapter VII

The Two Men Meet.

I could not have slept, although I must have lost consciousness of our surroundings, for I was aroused by Cassion's voice shouting some command, and became aware that we were making landing on the river bank. The sun was two hours high, and the spot selected a low grass-covered point, shaded by trees. Chevet had awakened, sobered by his nap, and the advance canoe had already been drawn up on the shore, the few soldiers it contained busily engaged in starting fires with which to cook our morning meal.

I perceived De Artigny with my first glance, standing erect on the bank, his back toward us, directing the men in their work. As we shot forward toward the landing

he turned indifferently, and I marked the sudden straightening of his body, as though in surprise, although the distance gave me no clear vision of his face. As our canoe came into the shallows, he sprang down the bank to greet us, hat in hand, his eyes on me. My own glance fell before the eagerness in his face, and I turned away.

"Ah! Monsieur Cassion," he exclaimed, the very 88 sound of his voice evidencing delight. "You have guests on the journey; 'tis unexpected."

Cassion stepped over the side, and fronted him, no longer a smiling gallant of the court, but brutal in authority.

"And what is that to you, may I ask, Sieur de Artigny?" he said, coldly contemptuous. "You are but our guide, and it is no concern of yours who may compose the company. 'Twill be well for you to remember your place, and attend to your duties. Go now, and see that the men have breakfast served."

There was a moment of silence, and I did not even venture to glance up to perceive what occurred, although I felt that De Artigny's eyes shifted their inquiry from Cassion's face to mine. There must be no quarrel now, not until he knew the truth, not until I had opportunity to explain, and yet he was a firebrand, and it would be like him to resent such words. How relieved I felt, as his voice made final answer.

"Pardon, Monsieur le Commissaire," he said, pleasantly enough. "It is true I forgot my place in this moment of surprise. I obey your orders."

I looked up as he turned away, and disappeared. Cassion stared after him, smothering an oath, and evidently disappointed at so tame an ending of the affair, for it was his nature to bluster and boast. Yet as his lips changed to a grin, I knew of what the man was thinking—he had mistaken De Artigny's actions for cowardice, and felt assured now of how he would deal with him. He turned to the canoe, a new conception of importance in the sharp tone of his voice.

"Come ashore, men; ay! draw the boat higher on the sand. Now, Monsieur Chevet, assist your niece forward to where I can help her to land with dry feet—permit me, Adele."

"It is not at all necessary, Monsieur," I replied, avoiding his hand, and leaping lightly to the firm sand. "I am no dainty maid of Quebec to whom such courtesy is due." I stood and faced him, not unpleased to mark the anger in his eyes. "Not always have you shown yourself so considerate."

"Why blame me for the act of La Barre?"

"The act would never have been considered had you opposed it, Monsieur. It was your choice, not the Governor's."

"I would wed you—yes; but that is no crime. But let us understand each other. Those were harsh words you spoke in anger in the room yonder."

"They were not in anger."

"But surely—"

"Monsieur, you have forced me into marriage; the law holds me as your wife. I know not how I may escape that fate, or avoid accompanying you. So far I submit, but no farther. I do not love you; I do not even feel friendship toward you. Let me pass."

He grasped my arm, turning me about until I faced him, his eyes glaring into mine.

“Not until I speak,” he replied threateningly. “Do not mistake my temper, or imagine me blind. I know what has so suddenly changed you—it is that gay, simpering fool yonder. But be careful how far you go. I am your husband, and in authority here.”

“Monsieur, your words are insult; release your hand.”

“So you think to deceive! Bah! I am too old a bird for that, or to pay heed to such airs. I have seen girls before, and a mood does not frighten me. But listen now—keep away from De Artigny unless you seek trouble.”

“What mean you by that threat?”

“You will learn to your sorrow; the way we travel is long, and I am woodsman as well as soldier. You will do well to heed my words.”

I released my arm, but did not move. My only feeling toward him at that moment was one of disgust, defiance. The threat in his eyes, the cool insolence of his speech, set my blood on fire.

“Monsieur,” I said coldly, although every nerve of my body throbbed, “you may know girls, but you deal now with a woman. Your speech, your insinuation is insult. I disliked you before; now I despise you, yet I will say this in answer to what you have intimated. Monsieur de Artigny is nothing to me, save that he hath shown himself friend. You wrong him, even as you wrong me, in thinking otherwise, and whatever the cause of misunderstanding between us, there is no excuse for you to pick quarrel with him.”

“You appear greatly concerned over his safety.”

“Not at all; so far as I have ever heard the Sieur de Artigny has heretofore proven himself quite capable of sustaining his own part. ’Tis more like I am concerned for you.”

“For me? You fool! Why, I was a swordsman when that lad was at his mother’s knee.” He laughed, but with ugly gleam of teeth. “Sacre! I hate such play acting. But enough of quarrel now; there is sufficient time ahead to bring you to your senses, and a knowledge of who is your master. Hugo Chevet, come here.”

My uncle climbed the bank, his rifle in hand, with face still bloated, and red from the drink of the night before. Behind him appeared the slender black-robed figure of the Jesuit, his eyes eager with curiosity. It was sight of the latter which caused Cassion to moderate his tone of command.

“You will go with Chevet,” he said, pointing to the fire among the trees, “until I can talk to you alone.”

“A prisoner?”

“No; a guest,” sarcastically, “but do not overstep the courtesy.”

We left him in conversation with the père, and I did not even glance back. Chevet breathed heavily, and I caught the mutter of his voice. “What meaneth all this chatter?” he asked gruffly. “Must you two quarrel so soon?”

“Why not?” I retorted. “The man bears me no love; ’tis but gold he thinks about.”

“Gold!” he stopped, and slapped his thighs. “’Tis precious little of that he will ever see then.”

“And why not? Was not my father a land owner?”

“Ay! till the King took it.”

“Then even you do not know the truth. I am glad to learn that, for I have dreamed that you sold me to this coxcomb for a share of the spoils.”

"What? a share of the spoils! Bah! I am no angel, girl, nor pretend to a virtue more than I possess. There is truth in the thought that I might benefit by your marriage to Monsieur Cassion, and, by my faith, I see no wrong in that. Have you not cost me heavily in these years? Why should I not seek for you a husband of worth in these colonies? Wherefore is that a crime? Were you my own daughter I could do no less, and this man is not ill to look upon, a fair-spoken gallant, a friend of La Barre's, chosen by him for special service—"

"And with influence in the fur trade."

"All the better that," he continued obstinately. "Why should a girl object if her husband be rich?"

"But he is not rich," I said plainly, looking straight into his eyes. "He is no more than a penniless adventurer; an actor playing a part assigned him by the Governor; while you and I do the same. Listen, Monsieur Chevet, the property at St. Thomas is mine by legal right, and it was to gain possession that this wretch sought my hand."

"Your legal right?"

"Ay, restored by the King in special order."

"It is not true; I had the records searched by a lawyer, Monsieur Gautier, of St. Anne."

I gave a gesture of indignation.

"A country advocate at whom those in authority would laugh. I tell you what I say is true; the land was restored, and the fact is known to La Barre and to Cassion. It is this fact which has caused all our troubles. I overheard talk last night between the Governor and his aide-de-camp, Colonel Delguard—you know him?"

Chevet nodded, his interest stirred.

"They thought themselves alone, and were laughing at the success of their trick. I was hidden behind the heavy curtains at the window, and every word they spoke reached my ears. Then they sent for Cassion."

"But where is the paper?"

"I did not learn; they have it hidden, no doubt, awaiting the proper time to produce it. But there is such a document: La Barre explained that clearly, and the reason why he wished Cassion to marry me. They were all three talking when an accident happened, which led to my discovery."

"Ah! and so that was what hurried the wedding, and sent me on this wild wilderness chase. They would bury me in the woods—*sacre!*—"

"Hush now—Cassion has left the canoe already, and we can talk of this later. Let us seem to suspect nothing."

This was the first meal of many eaten together along the river bank in the course of our long journey, yet the recollection of that scene rises before my memory now with peculiar vividness. It was a bright, glorious morning, the arching sky blue overhead, and the air soft with early autumn. Our temporary camp was at the edge of a grove, and below us swept the broad river, a gleaming highway of silvery water without speck upon its surface. Except for our little party of voyagers no evidence of life was visible, not even a distant curl of smoke obscuring the horizon.

Cassion had divided us into groups, and, from where I had found resting place, with a small flat rock for table, I was enabled to see the others scattered to the edge of the bank, and thus learned for the first time, the character of those with whom I was destined to companion on the long journey. There were but four of us in that first group, which included Père Allouez, a silent man, fingering his cross, and barely touching food. His face under the black cowl was drawn, and creased by strange lines, and his eyes burned with fanaticism. If I had ever dreamed of him as one to whom I might turn for counsel, the thought instantly vanished as our glances met.

A soldier and two Indians served us, while their companions, divided into two groups, were gathered at the other extremity of the ridge, the soldiers under discipline of their own under officers, and the Indians watched over by Sieur De Artigny, who rested, however, slightly apart, his gaze on the broad river. Never once while I observed did he turn and glance my way. I counted the men, as I endeavored to eat, scarcely heeding the few words exchanged by those about me. The Indians numbered ten, including their chief, whom Cassion called Altudah. Chevet named them as Algonquins from the Ottawa, treacherous rascals enough, yet with expert knowledge of water craft.

Altudah was a tall savage, wrapped in gaudy blanket, his face rendered sinister and repulsive by a scar the full length of his cheek, yet he spoke French fairly well, and someone said that he had three times made journey to Mackinac, and knew the waterways. There were twenty-four soldiers, including a sergeant and corporal, of the Regiment of Picardy; active fellows enough, and accustomed to the frontier, although they gave small evidence of discipline, and their uniforms were in shocking condition. The sergeant was a heavily built, stocky man, but the others were rather undersized, and of little spirit. The same thought must have been in the minds of others, for the expression on Monsieur Cassion's face was not pleasant as he stared about.

"Chevet," he exclaimed disgustedly "did ever you see a worse selection for wilderness travel than La Barre has given us? Cast your eyes down the line yonder; by my faith! there is not a real man among them."

Chevet who had been growling to himself, with scarce a thought other than the food before him, lifted his eyes and looked.

"Not so bad," he answered finally, the words rumbling in his throat. "Altudah is a good Indian, and has traveled with me before, and the sergeant yonder looks like a fighting man."

"Ay, but the others?"

"No worse than all the scum. De Baugis had no better with him, and La Salle led a gang of outcasts. With right leadership you can make them do men's work. 'Tis no kid-gloved job you have, Monsieur Cassion."

The insulting indifference of the old fur trader's tone surprised the Commissaire, and he exhibited resentment.

"You are overly free with your comments, Hugo Chevet. When I wish advice I will ask it."

"And in the woods I do not always wait to be asked," returned the older man, lighting his pipe, and calmly puffing out the blue smoke. "Though it is likely enough you will be asking for it before you journey many leagues further."

"You are under my orders."

"So La Barre said, but the only duty he gave me was to watch over Adele here. He put no shackle on my tongue. You have chosen your course?"

"Yes, up the Ottawa."

"I supposed so, although that boy yonder could lead you a shorter passage."

"How learned you that?"

"By talking with him in Quebec. He even sketched me a map of the route he traveled with La Salle. You knew it not?"

"'Twas of no moment, for my orders bid me go by St. Ignace. Yet it might be well to question him and the chief also." He turned to the nearest soldier. "Tell the Algonquin, Altudah, to come here, and Sieur de Artigny."

They approached together, two specimens of the frontier as different as could be pictured, and stood silent, fronting Cassion who looked at them frowning, and in no pleasant humor. The eyes of the younger man sought my face for an instant, and the swift glance gave harsher note to the Commissaire's voice.

"We will reload the canoes here for the long voyage," he said brusquely. "The sergeant will have charge of that, but both of you will be in the leading boat, and will keep well in advance of the others. Our course is by way of the Ottawa. You know that stream, Altudah?"

The Indian bowed his head gravely, and extended one hand beneath the scarlet fold of his blanket.

"Five time, Monsieur."

"How far to the west, Chief?"

"To place call Green Bay."

Cassion turned his eyes on De Artigny, a slight sneer curling his lips.

"And you?" he asked coldly.

"But one journey, Monsieur, along the Ottawa and the lakes," was the quiet answer, "and that three years ago, yet I scarce think I would go astray. 'Tis not a course easily forgotten."

"And beyond Green Bay?"

"I have been to the mouth of the Great River."

"You!" in surprise. "Were you of that party?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And you actually reached the sea—the salt water?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Saint Anne! I never half believed the tale true, nor do I think overmuch of your word for it. But let that go. Chevet here tells me you know a shorter journey to the Illinois?"

"Not by canoe, Monsieur. I followed Sieur de la Salle by forest trail to the Straits, and planned to return that way, but 'tis a foot journey."

"Not fitted for such a party as this?"

"Only as you trust to your rifles for food, bearing what packs we might on our backs. With the lady the trail is scarcely possible."

"As to the lady I will make my own decision. Besides, our course is decided. We go to St. Ignace. What will be your course from Green Bay?"

"Along the west shore, Monsieur; it is dangerous only by reason of storms."

"And the distance?"

"From St. Ignace?"

"Ay! from St. Ignace! What distance lies between there and this Fort St. Louis, on the Illinois?"

"'Twill be but a venture, Monsieur, but I think 'tis held at a hundred and fifty leagues."

"Of wilderness?"

"When I passed that way—yes; they tell me now the Jesuits have mission station at Green Bay, and there may be fur traders in Indian villages beyond."

"No chance to procure supplies?"

"Only scant rations of corn from the Indians."

"Your report is in accordance with my instructions and maps, and no doubt is correct. That will be all. Take two more men in your boat, and depart at once. We shall follow immediately."

As De Artigny turned away in obedience to these orders, his glance met mine, and seemed to question. Eager as I was to acquaint him with the true reason of my presence it was impossible. To have exhibited the slightest interest would only increase the enmity between the two men, and serve no good purpose. I did not even venture to gaze after him as he disappeared down the bank, feeling assured that Cassion's eyes were suspiciously watching me. My appearance of indifference must have been well assumed, for there was a sound of confidence in his voice as he bade us return to the canoes, and I even permitted him to assist me to my feet, and aid me in the descent to the shore.

Chapter VIII

I Defy Cassion.

Our progress was slow against the swift current of the St. Lawrence, and we kept close to the overhanging bank, following the guidance of the leading canoe. We were the second in line, and no longer over-crowded, so that I had ample room to rest at ease upon a pile of blankets, and gaze about me with interest on the changing scene.

Cassion, encouraged possibly by my permitting his attendance down the bank, found seat near me, and endeavored to converse; but, although I tried to prove cordial, realizing now that to anger the man would only add to my perplexity, his inane remarks tried me so that I ceased reply, and we finally lapsed into silence. Chevet, who held the steering oar, asked him some questions, which led to a brisk argument, and I turned away my head, glad enough to escape, and be permitted the luxury of my own thoughts.

How beautifully desolate it all was; with what fresh delight each new vista revealed itself. The wild life, the love of wilderness and solitude, was in my blood, and my nature responded to the charm of our surroundings. I was the daughter of one ever attracted by the frontier, and all my life had been passed amid primitive conditions—the wide out-of-doors was my home, and the lonely places called me.

The broad, rapid sweep of the river up which we won our slow passage, the great beetling cliffs dark in shadows, and crowned by trees, the jutting rocks whitened by spray, the headlands cutting off all view ahead, then suddenly receding to permit of our circling on into the unknown—here extended a panorama of which I could never tire.

My imagination swept ahead into the mystery which awaited us in that vast wilderness toward which we journeyed—the dangerous rivers, the portages, the swift rush of gleaming water, the black forests, the plains of waving grass, the Indian villages, and those immense lakes along whose shores we were destined to find way. All this possibility had come to me so unexpectedly, with such suddenness, that even yet I scarcely realized that my surroundings were real. They seemed more a dream than an actual fact, and I was compelled to concentrate my mind on those people about me before I could clearly comprehend the conditions under which I lived.

Yet here was reality enough: the Indian paddlers, stripped to the waist, their bodies glistening, as with steady, tireless strokes, they forced our canoe forward, following relentlessly the wake of the speeding boat ahead; the little group of soldiers huddled in the bows, several sleeping already, the others amusing themselves with game of cards; while just in front of me sat the priest, his fingers clasping an open book, but his eyes on the river. The silhouette of his face, outlined beyond his black hood, seemed carved from stone, it was so expressionless and hard. There was something so sinister about it that I felt a chill run through me, and averted my eyes, only to encounter the glance of Cassion beside me, who smiled, and pointed out a huge terrace of rock which seemed a castle against the blue of the sky. I think he told me the fanciful name the earlier explorers had given the point, and related some legend with which it was connected, but my mind was not on his tale, and soon he ceased effort to entertain me, and his head nodded sleepily.

I turned to glance back beyond the massive figure of Chevet at the steering oar, to gain glimpse of the canoes behind. The first was well up, so that even the faces of its occupants were revealed, but the second was but a black shapeless thing in the distance, a mere blotch upon the waters.

Ahead of us, now sweeping around the point like a wild bird, amid a smother of spray, appeared the advance canoe. As it disappeared I could distinguish De Artigny at the stern, his coat off, his hands grasping a paddle. Above the point once more and in smoother water, I was aware that he turned and looked back, shading his eyes from the sun. I could not but wonder what he thought, what possible suspicion had come to him, regarding my presence in the company. There was no way in which he could have learned the truth, for there had been no communication between him and those who knew the facts.

Never would he conceive so wild a thought as my marriage to Cassion. He might, indeed, believe that some strange, sudden necessity had compelled me to accompany them on this adventure, or he might suspect that I had deceived him, knowing all the time that I was to be of the party. I felt the shame of it bring the red blood into my cheeks, and my lips pressed together in firm resolve. I should tell him, tell him all; and he must judge my conduct from my own words, and not

those of another. In some manner I must keep him away from Cassion—ay, and from Chevet—until opportunity came for me to first communicate with him.

I was a woman, and some instinct of my nature told me that Sieur de Artigny held me in high esteem. And his was the disposition and the training to cause the striking of a blow first. That must not be, for now I was determined to unravel the cause for Cassion's eagerness to marry, and La Barre's willing assistance, and to accomplish this end there could be no quarreling between us.

The weariness of the long night conquered even my brain, the steady splash of the paddles becoming a lullaby. Insensibly my head rested back against the pile of blankets, the glint of sunshine along the surface of the water vanished as my lashes fell, and, before I knew it, I slept soundly. I awoke with the sun in the western sky, so low down as to peep at me through the upper branches of trees lining the bank. Our surroundings had changed somewhat, the shores being no longer steep, and overhung with rocks, but only slightly uplifted, and covered with dense, dark woods, somber and silent. Their shadows nearly met in midstream, giving to the scene a look of desolation and gloom, the water sweeping on in sullen flow, without sparkle, or gaiety. Our boat clung close to the west shore, and I could look long distances through the aisles of trees into the silent gloom beyond. Not a leaf rustled, not a wild animal moved in the coverts. It was like an abode of death.

And we moved so slowly, struggling upward against the current, for the Indians were resting, and the less expert hands of soldiers were wielding the paddles, urged on by Cassion, who had relieved Chevet at the steering oar. The harsh tones of his voice, and the heavy breathing of the laboring men alone broke the solemn stillness. I sat up, my body aching from the awkward position in which I lay, and endeavored to discern the other canoes.

Behind us stretched a space of straight water, and one canoe was close, while the second was barely visible along a curve of the shore. Ahead, however, the river appeared vacant, the leading boat having vanished around a wooded bend. My eyes met those of Cassion, and the sight of him instantly restored me to a recollection of my plan—nothing could be gained by open warfare. I permitted my lips to smile, and noted instantly the change of expression in his face.

"I have slept well, Monsieur," I said pleasantly, "for I was very tired."

"'Tis the best way on a boat voyage," assuming his old manner, "but now the day is nearly done."

"So late as that! You will make camp soon?"

"If that be Cap Sante yonder, 'tis like we shall go ashore beyond. Ay! see the smoke spiral above the trees; a hundred rods more and we make the turn. The fellows will not be sorry, the way they ply the paddles." He leaned over and shook Chevet. "Time to rouse, Hugo, for we make camp. Bend to it, lads; there is food and a night's rest waiting you around yonder point. Dig deep, and send her along."

As we skirted the extremity of shore I saw the opening in the woods, and the gleam of a cheerful fire amid green grass. The advance canoe swung half-hidden amid the overhanging roots of a huge pine tree, and the men were busily at work ashore. To the right they were already erecting a small tent, its yellow canvas showing plainly against the leafy background of the forest. As we circled the point closely, seeking the still water, we could perceive Altudah standing alone on a flat

rock, his red blanket conspicuous as he pointed out the best place for landing. As we nosed into the bank, our sharp bow was grasped by waiting Indians and drawn safely ashore. I reached my feet, stiffened, and scarcely able to move my limbs, but determined to land without the aid of Cassion, whose passage forward was blocked by Chevet's huge bulk. As my weight rested on the edge of the canoe, De Artigny swung down from behind the chief, and extended his hand.

"A slight spring," he said, "and you land with dry feet; good! now let me lift you––so."

I had but the instant; I knew that, for I heard Cassion cry out something just behind me, and, surprised as I was by the sudden appearance of De Artigny, I yet realized the necessity for swift speech.

"Monsieur," I whispered. "Do not talk, but listen. You would serve me?"

"Ay!"

"Then ask nothing, and above all do not quarrel with Cassion. I will tell you everything the moment I can see you safely alone. Until then do not seek me. I have your word?"

He did not answer, for the Commissaire grasped my arm, and thrust himself in between us, his action so swift that the impact of his body thrust De Artigny back a step. I saw the hand of the younger man close on the knife hilt at his belt, but was quick enough to avert the hot words burning his lips.

"A bit rough, Monsieur Cassion," I cried laughing merrily, even as I released my arm. "Why so much haste? I was near falling, and it was but courtesy which led the Sieur de Artigny to extend me his hand. It does not please me for you to be ever seeking a quarrel."

There must have been that in my face which cooled him, for his hand fell, and his thin lips curled into sarcastic smile.

"If I seemed hasty," he exclaimed, "it was more because I was blocked by that boor of a Chevet yonder, and it angered me to have this young gamecock ever at hand to push in. What think you you were employed for, fellow—an esquire of dames? Was there not work enough in the camp yonder, that you must be testing your fancy graces every time a boat lands?"

There was no mild look in De Artigny's eyes as he fronted him, yet he held his temper, recalling my plea no doubt, and I hastened to step between, and furnish him excuse for silence.

"Surely you do wrong to blame the young man, Monsieur, as but for his aid I would have slipped yonder. There is no cause for hard words, nor do I thank you for making me a subject of quarrel. Is it my tent they erect yonder?"

"Ay," there was little graciousness to the tone, for the man had the nature of a bully. "'Twas my thought that it be brought for your use; and if Monsieur de Artigny will consent to stand aside, it will give me pleasure to escort you thither."

The younger man's eyes glanced from the other's face into mine, as though seeking reassurance. His hat was instantly in his hand, and he stepped backward, bowing low.

"The wish of the lady is sufficient," he said quietly, and then stood again erect, facing Cassion. "Yet," he added slowly, "I would remind Monsieur that while I serve him as a guide, it is as a volunteer, and I am also an officer of France."

"Of France? Pah! of the renegade La Salle."

“France has no more loyal servant, Monsieur Cassion in all this western land—nor is he renegade, for he holds the Illinois at the King’s command.”

“Held it—yes; under Frontenac, but not now.”

“We will not quarrel over words, yet not even in Quebec was it claimed that higher authority than La Barre’s had led to recall. Louis had never interfered, and it is De Tonty, and not De Baugis who is in command at St. Louis by royal order. My right to respect of rank is clearer than your own, Monsieur, so I beg you curb your temper.”

“You threaten me?”

“No; we who live in the wilderness do not talk, we act. I obey your orders, do your will, on this expedition, but as a man, not a slave. In all else we stand equal, and I accept insult from no living man. ’Tis well that you know this, Monsieur.”

The hat was back upon his head, and he had turned away before Cassion found answering speech. It was a jaunty, careless figure, disappearing amid the trees, the very swing of his shoulders a challenge, nor did he so much as glance about to mark the effect of his insolent words. For the instant I believed Cassion’s first thought was murder, for he gripped a pistol in his hand, and flung one foot forward, an oath sputtering between his lips. Yet the arrant coward in him conquered even that mad outburst of passion, and before I could grasp his arm in restraint, the impulse had passed, and he was staring after the slowly receding figure of De Artigny, his fingers nerveless.

“Mon Dieu—no! I’ll show the pup who is the master,” he muttered. “Let him disobey once, and I’ll stretch his dainty form as I would an Indian cur.”

“Monsieur,” I said, drawing his attention to my presence. “’Tis of no interest to me your silly quarrel with Sieur de Artigny. I am weary with the boat journey, and would rest until food is served.”

“But you heard the young cockerel! What he dared say to me?”

“Surely; and were his words true?”

“True! what mean you? That he would resist my authority?”

“That he held commission from the King, while your only authority was by word of the Governor? Was it not by Royal Orders that La Salle was relieved of command?”

Cassion’s face exhibited embarrassment, yet he managed to laugh.

“A mere boast the boy made, yet with a grain of truth to bolster it. La Barre acted with authority, but there has not been time for his report to be passed upon by Louis. No doubt ’tis now upon the sea.”

“And now for this reason to lay his cause before the King, the Sieur de la Salle, sailed for France.”

“Yes, but too late; already confirmation of La Barre’s act is en route to New France. The crowing cockerel yonder will lose his spurs. But come, ’tis useless to stand here discussing this affair. Let me show you how well your comfort has been attended to.”

I walked beside him among the trees, and across the patch of grass to where the tent stood against a background of rock. The Indians and soldiers in separate groups were busied about their fires, and I could distinguish the chief, with Chevet, still beside the canoes, engaged in making them secure for the night. The

evening shadows were thickening about us, and the gloom of the woods extended already across the river to the opposite shore.

De Artigny had disappeared, although I glanced about in search for him, as Cassion drew aside the tent flap, and peered within. He appeared pleased at the way in which his orders had been executed.

"'Tis very neat, indeed, Monsieur," I said pleasantly, glancing inside. "I owe you my thanks."

"'Twas brought for my own use," he confessed, encouraged by my graciousness, "for as you know, I had no previous warning that you were to be of our party. Please step within."

I did so, yet turned instantly to prevent his following me. Already I had determined on my course of action, and now the time had come for me to speak him clearly; yet now that I had definite purpose in view it was no part of my game to anger the man.

"Monsieur," I said soberly. "I must beg your mercy. I am but a girl, and alone. It is true I am your wife by law, but the change has come so suddenly that I am yet dazed. Surely you cannot wish to take advantage, or make claim upon me, until I can bid you welcome. I appeal to you as a gentleman."

He stared into my face, scarcely comprehending all my meaning.

"You would bar me without? You forbid me entrance?"

"Would you seek to enter against my wish?"

"But you are my wife; that you will not deny! What will be said, thought, if I seek rest elsewhere?"

"Monsieur, save for Hugo Chevet, none in this company know the story of that marriage, or why I am here. What I ask brings no stain upon you. 'Tis not that I so dislike you, Monsieur, but I am the daughter of Pierre la Chesnayne, and 'tis not in my blood to yield to force. It will be best to yield me respect and consideration."

"You threatened me yonder—before La Barre."

"I spoke wildly, in anger. That passion has passed—now I appeal to your manhood."

He glanced about, to assure himself we were alone.

"You are a sly wench," he said, laughing unpleasantly, "but it may be best that I give you your own way for this once. There is time enough in which to teach you my power. And so you shut the tent to me, fair lady, in spite of your pledge to Holy Church. Ah, well! there are nights a plenty between here and St. Ignace, and you will become lonely enough in the wilderness to welcome me. One kiss, and I leave you."

"No, Monsieur."

His eyes were ugly.

"You refuse that! *Mon Dieu!* Do you think I play? I will have the kiss—or more."

Furious as the man was I felt no fear of him, merely an intense disgust that his hands should touch me, an indignation that he should offer me such insult. He must have read all this in my eyes, for he made but the one move, and I flung his hand aside as easily as though it had been that of a child. I was angry, so that my lips trembled, and my face grew white, yet it was not the anger that stormed.

"Enough, Monsieur—go!" I said, and pointed to where the fires reddened the darkness. "Do not dare speak to me again this night."

An instant he hesitated, trying to muster courage, but the bully in him failed, and with an oath, he turned away, and vanished. It was nearly dark then, and I sat down on a blanket at the entrance, and waited, watching the figures between me and the river. I did not think he would come again, but I did not know; it would be safer if I could have word with Chevet. A soldier brought me food, and when he returned for the tins I made him promise to seek my uncle, and send him to me.

Chapter IX

The Flames of Jealousy.

My only faith in Hugo Chevet rested in his natural resentment of Cassion's treachery relative to my father's fortune. He would feel that he had been cheated, deceived, deprived of his rightful share of the spoils.

The man cared nothing for me, as had already been plainly demonstrated, yet, but for this conspiracy of La Barre and his Commissaire, it would have been his privilege to have handled whatever property Pierre la Chesnayne left at time of his death. He would have been the legal guardian of an heiress, instead of the provider for an unwelcomed child of poverty.

He had been tricked into marrying me to Cassion, feeling that he had thus rid himself of an incumbrance, and at the same time gained a friend and ally at court, and now discovered that by that act he had alienated himself from all chance of ever controlling my inheritance. The knowledge that he had thus been outwitted would rankle in the man's brain, and he was one to seek revenge. It was actuated by this thought 116 that I had sent for him, feeling that perhaps at last we had a common cause.

Whether, or not, Cassion would take my dismissal as final I could not feel assured. No doubt he would believe my decision the outburst of a woman's mood, which he had best honor, but in full faith that a few days would bring to me a change of mind. The man was too pronounced an egotist to ever confess that he could fail in winning the heart of any girl whom he condescended to honor, and the very injury which my repulse had given to his pride would tend to increase his desire to possess me.

However little he had cared before in reality, now his interest would be aroused, and I would seem to him worthy of conquest. He would never stop after what had occurred between us until he had exhausted every power he possessed. Yet I saw nothing more of him that night, although I sat just within the flap of the tent watching the camp between me and the river. Shadowing figures glided about, revealed dimly by the fires, but none of these did I recognize as the Commissaire, nor did I hear his voice.

I had been alone for an hour, already convinced that the soldier had failed to deliver my message, when my Uncle Chevet finally emerged from the shadows, and announced his presence. He appeared a huge, shapeless figure, his very

massiveness yielding me a feeling of protection, and I arose, and joined him. His greeting proved the unhappiness of his mind.

"So you sent for me—why? What has happened between you and Cassion?"

"No more than occurred between us yonder in Quebec, when I informed him that I was his wife in name only," I answered quietly. "Do you blame me now that you understand his purpose in this marriage?"

"But I don't understand. You have but aroused my suspicion. Tell me all, and if the man is a villain he shall make answer to me."

"Ay, if you imagine you have been outplayed in the game, although it is little enough you would care otherwise. Let there be no misunderstanding between us, Monsieur. You sold me to Francois Cassion because you expected to profit through his influence with La Barre. Now you learn otherwise, and the discovery has angered you. For the time being you are on my side—but for how long?"

He stared at me, his slow wits scarcely translating my words. Seemingly the man had but one idea in his thick head.

"How know you the truth of all you have said?" he asked. "Where learned you of this wealth?"

"By overhearing conversation while hidden behind the curtain in La Barre's office. He spoke freely with his aide, and later with Cassion. It was my discovery there which led to the forced marriage, and our being sent with this expedition."

"You heard alone?"

"So they thought, and naturally believed marriage would prevent my ever bearing witness against them. But I was not alone."

"*Mon Dieu!* Another heard?"

"Yes, the Sieur de Artigny."

Chevet grasped my arm, and in the glare of the fire I could see his excitement pictured in his face.

"Who? That lad? You were in hiding there together? And did he realize what was said?"

"That I do not know," I answered, "for we have exchanged no word since. When my presence was discovered, De Artigny escaped unseen through the open window. I need to meet him again that these matters may be explained, and that I may learn just what he overheard. It was to enlist your aid that I sent for you."

"To bring the lad here?"

"No; that could not be done without arousing the suspicion of Cassion. The two are already on the verge of quarrel. You must find some way of drawing the Commissaire aside—not tonight, for there is plenty of time before us, and I am sure we are being watched now—and that will afford me opportunity."

"But why may I not speak him?"

"You!" I laughed. "He would be likely to talk with you. A sweet message you sent him in Quebec."

"I was drunk, and Cassion asked it of me."

"I thought as much; the coward makes you pull his chestnuts from the fire. Do you give me the pledge?"

"Ay! although 'tis not my way to play sweet, when I should enjoy to wring the fellow's neck. What was it La Barre said?"

I hesitated a moment, doubting how much I had better tell, yet decided it would be best to intrust him with the facts, and some knowledge of what I proposed to do.

"That just before he died my father's property was restored to him by the King, but the Royal order was never recorded. It exists, but where I do not know, nor do I know as yet for what purpose it was concealed. My marriage to Cassion must have been an afterthought, for he is but a creature of La Barre's. It is through him the greater villains seek control; but, no doubt, he was a willing tool enough, and expects his share."

"Why not let me choke the truth out of him then? Bah! it would be easy."

"For two reasons," I said earnestly. "First, I doubt if he knows the true conspiracy, or can lay hands on the King's restoration. Without that we have no proof of fraud. And second, coward though he may be, his very fear might yield him courage. No, Uncle Chevet, we must wait, and learn these facts through other means than force. 'Tis back in Quebec, not in this wilderness, we will find the needed proofs. What I ask of you is, pretend to know nothing; do not permit Cassion to suspicion that I have confided in you. We must encourage him to talk by saying nothing which will put him on guard."

"But he is already aware that you have learned the truth."

"Of that I am not certain. It was the conversation between La Barre and Colonel Delguard which gave me the real cue. Of this Cassion may not have heard, as he entered the room later. I intended to proceed on that theory, and win his confidence, if possible. There is a long, tiresome journey before us, and much may be accomplished before we return."

Chevet stood silent, his slow mind struggling with the possibilities of my plan. I could realize the amazement with which he comprehended this cool proposition. He, who had considered me a thoughtless girl, incapable of serious planning, was suddenly forced to realize that a woman confronted him, with a will and mind of her own. It was almost a miracle, and he failed to entirely grasp the change which had occurred in my character. He stared at me with dull eyes, like those of an ox, his lips parted as he sought expression.

"You—you will try, as his wife, to win confession?" he asked finally, grasping vaguely the one thought occurring to him.

"No; there is a better way. I despise the man; I cannot bear that he touch me. More than that, if I read him aright, once I yield and confess myself his property, he will lose all interest in my possession. He is a lady killer; 'tis his boast. The man has never been in love with me; it was not love, but a desire to possess my fortune, which led to his proposal of marriage. Now I shall make him love me."

"You! *Mon Dieu!* how?"

"By refusing him, tantalizing him, arousing a desire which I will not gratify. Already his thought of me has changed. Last night in Quebec he was surprised, and aroused to new interest in me as a woman. He considered me before as a helpless girl, with no will, no character—the sort with which he had had his way all through life. He thought I would fall in his arms, and confess him master. The words I spoke to La Barre shocked and startled him out of his self complacency. Nor was that all—even before then he had begun to suspicion my relations with Sieur de Artigny.

"It was at his suggestion, you say, that you sent that young man your message of warning to keep away from me. Good! the poison is already working, and I mean it shall. Two hours ago, when we landed here, the two men were on verge of quarrel, and blows would have been struck but that I intervened. He is finding me not so easy to control, and later still the mighty Commissaire met with a rebuff which rankles."

I laughed at the remembrance, satisfied now as I placed the situation in words, that my plans were working well. Chevet stood silent, his mouth agape, struggling to follow my swift speech.

"Do you see now what I mean to do?" I asked gravely. "We shall be alone in the wilderness for months to come. I will be the one woman; perchance the only white woman into whose face he will look until we return to Quebec. I am not vain, yet I am not altogether ill to look upon, nor shall I permit the hardships of this journey to affect my attractiveness. I shall fight him with his own weapons, and win. He will beg, and threaten me, and I shall laugh. He will love me, and I shall mock. There will be jealousy between him and De Artigny, and to win my favor he will confess all that he knows. Tonight he sulks somewhere yonder, already beginning to doubt his power to control me."

"You have quarreled?"

"No—only that I asserted independence. He would have entered this tent as my husband, and I forbade his doing so. He stormed and threatened, but dare not venture further. He knows me now as other than a weak girl, but my next lesson must be a more severe one. 'Tis partly to prepare that I sent for you; I ask the loan of a pistol—the smaller one, to be concealed in my dress."

"You would kill the man?"

"Pooh! small danger of that. You may draw the charge if you will. For him to know that I possess the weapon will protect me. You do not grasp my plan?"

He shook his head gloomily, as though it was all a deep puzzle to his mind, yet his great hand held forth the pistol, the short barrel of which gleamed wickedly in the fire glow, as I thrust it out of sight.

"'Tis not the way I front enemies," he growled stubbornly, "and I make little of it. *Mon Dieu!* I make them talk with these hands."

"But my weapons are those of a woman," I explained, "and I will learn more than you would with your brute strength. All I ask of you now, Uncle Chevet, is that you keep on friendly terms with Monsieur Cassion, yet repeat nothing to him of what I have said, and gain me opportunity for speech alone with Sieur de Artigny."

"Ah! perhaps I perceive—you love the young man?"

I grasped his sleeve in my fingers, determined to make this point at least clear to his understanding. His blunt words had set my pulses throbbing, yet it was resentment, indignation, I felt in strongest measure.

"Mother of God, no! I have spoken with him but three times since we were children. He is merely a friend to be trusted, and he must be made to know my purpose. It will be joy to him to thus affront Cassion, for there is no love lost between them. You understand now?"

He growled something indistinctly in his beard, which I interpreted as assent, but I watched his great form disappear in the direction of the fire, my own mind

far from satisfied; the man was so lacking in brains as to be a poor ally, and so obstinate of nature as to make it doubtful if he would long conform to my leadership. Still it was surely better to confide in him to the extent I had than permit him to rage about blindly, and in open hostility to Cassion.

I seated myself just within the tent, my eyes on the scene as revealed in the fire-glow, and reflected again over the details of my hastily born plan. The possibility of the Commissaire's return did not greatly trouble me, my confidence fortified by the pistol concealed in my waist. No doubt he was already asleep yonder in the shadows, but this night was only the beginning. The opposition he had met would prove a spur to endeavor, and the desire to win me a stronger incentive than ever. He may have been indifferent, careless before—deeming me easy prey—but from now on I meant to lead him a merry chase.

I cannot recall any feeling of regret, any conception of evil, as my mind settled upon this course of action. There was no reason why I should spare him. He had deliberately lied, and deceived me. His marriage to me was an act of treachery; the only intent to rob me of my just inheritance. There seemed to me no other way left in which I could hope to overcome his power. I was a woman, and must fight with the weapons of my sex; mine was the strength of the weak.

How dark and still it was, for the fires had died down into beds of red ash, and only the stars glimmered along the surface of the river. The only movement I could perceive was the dim outline of a man's figure moving about near the canoes—a watchman on guard, but whether red or white I could not determine. It was already late, well into the night, and the forest about us was black and still. Slowly my head sank to the blanket, and I slept.

Chapter X

We Attain the Ottawa.

It was not yet dawn when the stir in the camp aroused me, and the sun had not risen above the bluffs, or begun to tinge the river, when our laden canoes left the bank and commenced their day's journey up stream. De Artigny was off in advance, departing indeed before I had left the tent, the chief seated beside him. I caught but a glimpse of them as the canoe rounded the bend in the bank, and slipped silently away through the lingering shadows, yet it gladdened me to know his eyes were turned toward my tent until they vanished.

Cassion approached me with excessive politeness, waiting until the last moment, and escorting me to the shore. It made me smile to observe his pretense at gallantry, yet I accepted his assistance down the bank with all possible graciousness, speaking to him so pleasantly as to bring a look of surprise to his face. 'Twas plain to be seen that my conduct puzzled him, for although he sought to appear at ease, his words faltered sadly. He, who had so long considered himself as past master of the art of love-making had most unexpectedly encountered a character which he could not comprehend.

However, that his purpose was in no way changed was made evident as we took our places in the canoes. A new distribution had been arranged, Chevet accompanying the sergeant, leaving the Commissaire and me alone, except for the père, who had position in the bow. I observed this new arrangement from underneath lowered lashes, but without comment, quietly taking the place assigned me, and shading my face from the first rays of the sun.

The day which followed was but one of many we were destined to pass in the canoes. I have small recollection of it, except the weariness of my cramped position, and Cassion's efforts to entertain. Our course kept us close to the north shore, the high banks cutting off all view in that direction, while in the other there was nothing to see but an expanse of water.

Except for a single canoe, laden with furs, and propelled by Indian paddlers, bound for Quebec and a market, we encountered no travelers. These swept past us swiftly in grip of the current, gesticulating, and exchanging salutations, and were soon out of sight. Our own boats scattered, as no danger held us together, and there were hours when we failed to have even a glimpse of their presence.

At noon we landed in a sheltered cove, brilliant with wild flowers, and partook of food, the rearward canoes joining us, but De Artigny was still ahead, perhaps under orders to keep away. To escape Cassion, I clambered up the front of the cliff, and had view from the summit, marking the sweep of the river for many a league, a scene of wild beauty never to be forgotten. I lingered there at the edge until the voice of the Commissaire recalled me to my place in the canoe.

It is of no consequence now what we conversed about during that long afternoon, as we pushed steadily on against the current. Cassion endeavored to be entertaining and I made every effort to encourage him, although my secret thoughts were not pleasant ones. Where was all this to lead? Where was to be the end? There was an expression in the man's face, a glow in his eyes, which troubled me. Already some instinct told me that his carelessness was a thing of the past. He was in earnest now, his vague desire stimulated by my antagonism.

He had set out to overcome my scruples, to conquer my will, and was merely biding his time, seeking to learn the best point of attack. It was with this end in view that he kept me to himself, banishing Chevet, and compelling De Artigny to remain well in advance. He was testing me now by his tales of Quebec, his boasting of friendship with the Governor, his stories of army adventure, and the wealth he expected to amass through his official connections. Yet the very tone he assumed, the conceit shown in his narratives, only served to add to my dislike. This creature was my husband, yet I shrank from him, and once, when he dared to touch my hand, I drew it away as though it were contamination. It was then that hot anger leaped into his eyes, and his true nature found expression before he could restrain the words:

"*Mon Dieu!* What do you mean, you chit?"

"Only that I am not won by a few soft words, Monsieur," I answered coldly.

"But you are my wife; 'twill be well for you to remember that."

"Nor am I likely to forget, yet because a priest has mumbled words over us does not make me love you."

"*Sacre!*" he burst forth, yet careful to keep his voice pitched to my ears alone, "you think me a plaything, but you shall learn yet that I have claws. Bah! do you imagine I fear the coxcomb ahead?"

"To whom do you refer, Monsieur?"

"Such innocence! to that boot-licker of La Salle's to whom you give your smiles, and pretty words."

"Rene de Artigny!" I exclaimed pleasantly, and then laughed. "Why how ridiculous you are, Monsieur. Better be jealous of Père Allouez yonder, for of him I see far the most. Why do you pick out De Artigny on whom to vent your anger?"

"I like not the way he eyes you, nor your secret meetings with him in Quebec."

"If he even sees me I know it not, and as for secret meetings, knew you not that Sister Celeste was with me while we talked."

"Not in the Governor's palace."

"You accuse me of that then," indignantly. "Because I am your wife, you can insult, yet it was your hand that drew aside the curtain, and found me alone. Do you hope to gain my respect by such base charges as that, Monsieur?"

"Do you deny that he had been with you?"

"I? Do I deny! It is not worthy my while. Why should I? We were not married then, nor like to be to my knowledge. Why, then, if I wished, was it not my privilege to speak with the Sieur de Artigny? I have found him a very pleasant, and polite young man."

"A pauper, his only fortune the sword at his side."

"Ah, I knew not even that he possessed one. Yet of what interest can all this be to me, Monsieur, now that I am married to you?"

That my words brought him no comfort was plain enough to be seen, yet I doubt if it ever occurred to his mind that I simply made sport, and sought to anger him. It was on his mind to say more, yet he choked the words back, and sat there in moody silence, scarce glancing at me again during the long afternoon. But when we finally made landing for the night, it was plain to be seen that his vigilance was in no wise relaxed, for, although he avoided me himself, the watchful Jesuit was ever at my side, no doubt in obedience to his orders. This second camp, as I recall, was on the shore of Lake St. Peter, in a noble grove, the broad stretch of waters before us silvered by the sinking sun. My tent was pitched on a high knoll, and the scene outspread beneath was one of marvelous beauty. Even the austere père was moved to admiration, as he pointed here and there, and conversed with me in his soft voice. Cassion kept to the men along the bank below, while Chevet lay motionless beside a fire, smoking steadily.

I had no glimpse of De Artigny, although my eyes sought him among the others. The chief, Altudah, glided out from among the trees as it grew dusk, made some report, and as quickly disappeared again, leaving me to believe the advance party had made camp beyond the curve of the shore. The priest lingered, and we had our meal together, although it was not altogether to my liking. Once he endeavored to talk with me on the sacredness of marriage, the duty of a wife's obedience to her husband, the stock phrases rolling glibly from his tongue, but my answers gave him small comfort. That he had been so instructed by Cassion was in my mind, and he was sufficiently adroit to avoid antagonizing me by pressing the matter. As we were eating, a party of fur traders, bound east, came ashore in a small fleet of

canoes, and joined the men below, building their fires slightly up stream. At last Père Allouez left me alone, and descended to them, eager to learn the news from Montreal. Yet, although seemingly I was now left alone, I had no thought of adventuring in the darkness, as I felt convinced the watchful priest would never have deserted my side had he not known that other eyes were keeping vigil.

From that moment I never felt myself alone or unobserved. Cassion in person did not make himself obnoxious, except that I was always seated beside him in the boat, subject to his conversation, and attentions. Ever I had the feeling the man was testing me, and venturing how far he dared to go. Not for a moment did I dare to lower my guard in his presence, and this constant strain of watchfulness left me nervous, and bitter of speech.

In every respect I was a prisoner, and made to realize my helplessness. I know not what Cassion suspected, what scraps of information he may have gained from Chevet, but he watched me like a hawk. Never, I am sure, was I free of surveillance—in the boat under his own eye; ashore accompanied everywhere by Père Allouez, except as I slept, and then even some unknown sentry kept watch of the tent in which I rested. However it was managed I know not, but my uncle never approached me alone, and only twice did I gain glimpse of Sieur de Artigny—once, when his canoe returned to warn us of dangerous water ahead, and once when he awaited us beside the landing at Montreal. Yet even these occasions yielded me new courage, for, as our eyes met I knew he was still my friend, waiting, as I was, the opportunity for a better understanding. This knowledge brought tears of gratitude to my eyes, and a thrill of hope to my heart. I was no longer utterly alone.

We were three days at Montreal, the men busily engaged in adding to their store of provisions. I had scarcely a glimpse of the town, as I was given lodging in the convent close to the river bank, and the père was my constant companion during hours of daylight. I doubt if he enjoyed the task any more than I, but he proved faithful to his master, and I could never venture to move without his black robe at my side.

Nor did I seek to avoid him, for my mind grasped the fact already that my only hope of final liberty lay in causing Cassion to believe I had quietly yielded to fate. Surely as we plunged deeper into the wilderness his suspicions would vanish, and his grim surveillance relax. I must patiently abide my time. So I sat with the sisters within the dull, gray walls, seemingly unconscious of the *père's* eyes stealthily watching my every motion, as he pretended other employment.

Cassion came twice, more to assure himself that I was safely held than for any other purpose, yet it pleased me to see his eyes follow my movements, and to realize the man had deeper interest in me than formerly. Chevet, no doubt, spent his time in the wine shops; at least I never either saw, or heard of him. Indeed I asked nothing as to his whereabouts, as I had decided already his assistance would be of no value.

We departed at dawn, and the sun was scarce an hour high when the prows of our canoes turned into the Ottawa. Now we were indeed in the wilderness, fronting the vast unknown country of the West, with every league of travel leaving behind all trace of civilization. There was nothing before us save a few scattered missions, presided over by ragged priests, and an occasional fur trader's station, the

headquarters of wandering couriers du bois. On every side were the vast prairies, and stormy lakes, roamed over by savage men and beasts through whom we must make our way in hardship, danger, and toil.

Cassion spread out his rude map in the bottom of the canoe, and I had him point out the route we were to follow. It was a long, weary way he indicated, and, for the moment, my heart almost failed me, as we traced together the distance outlined, and pictured in imagination the many obstacles between us and our goal. Had I known the truth, all those leagues were destined to disclose of hardship and peril, I doubt my courage to have fronted them. But I did not know, nor could I perceive a way of escape. So I crushed back the tears dimming my eyes, smiled into his face, as he rolled up the map, and pretended to care not at all.

When night came we were in the black woods, the silence about us almost unearthly, broken only by the dash of water over the rocks below where we were camped, promising a difficult portage on the morrow. Alone, oppressed by the silence, feeling my helplessness as perhaps I never had before, and the dread loneliness of the vast wilderness in which I lay, I tossed on my bed for hours, ere sheer exhaustion conquered, and I slept.

Chapter XI

I Gain Speech with De Artigny.

Our progress up the Ottawa was so slow, so toilsome, the days such a routine of labor and hardship, the scenes along the shore so similar, that I lost all conception of time. Except for the Jesuit I had scarcely a companion, and there were days, I am sure, when we did not so much as exchange a word.

The men had no rest from labor, even Cassion changing from boat to boat as necessity arose, urging them to renewed efforts. The water was low, the rapids more than usually dangerous, so that we were compelled to portage more often than usual. Once the leading canoe ventured to shoot a rapid not considered perilous, and had a great hole torn in its prow by a sharp rock. The men got ashore, saving the wreck, but lost their store of provisions, and we were a day there making the damaged canoe again serviceable.

This delay gave me my only glimpse of De Artigny, still dripping from his involuntary bath, and so busily engaged at repairs, as to be scarcely conscious of my presence on the bank above him. Yet I can hardly say that, for once he glanced up, and our eyes met, and possibly he would have joined me, but for the sudden appearance of Cassion, who swore at the delay, and ordered me back to where the tent had been hastily erected. I noticed De Artigny straighten up, angered that Cassion dared speak to me so harshly, but I had no wish then to precipitate an open quarrel between the two men, and so departed quickly. Later, Father Allouez told me that in the overturning of the canoe the young Sieur had saved the life of

the Algonquin Chief, bringing him ashore unconscious, helpless from a broken shoulder.

This accident to Altudah led to the transferring of the injured Indian to our canoe, and caused Cassion to join De Artigny in advance. This change relieved me of the constant presence of the Commissaire, who wearied me with his ceaseless efforts to entertain, but rendered more difficult than ever my desire to speak privately with the younger man. The *père* evidently had commands to keep me ever in view, for he clung to me like a shadow, and scarcely for a moment did I feel myself alone, or unwatched.

It was five days later, and in the heart of all that was desolate and drear, when this long sought opportunity came in most unexpected fashion. We had made camp early, because of rough water ahead, the passage of which it was not deemed best to attempt without careful exploration. So, while the three heavily laden canoes drew up against the bank, and prepared to spend the night, the leading canoe was stripped, and sent forward, manned only with the most expert of the Indian paddlers to make sure the perils of the current. From the low bank to which I had climbed I watched the preparations for the dash through those madly churning waters above. Cassion was issuing his orders loudly, but exhibited no inclination to accompany the party, and suddenly the frail craft shot out from the shore, with De Artigny at the steering paddle, and every Indian braced for his task, and headed boldly into the smother. They vanished as though swallowed by the mist, Cassion, and a half dozen soldiers racing along the shore line in an effort to keep abreast of the laboring craft.

It was a wild, desolate spot in which we were, a mere rift in the bluffs, which seemed to overhang us, covered with a heavy growth of forest. The sun was still an hour high, although it was twilight already beside the river, when Cassion, and his men came straggling back, to report that the canoe had made safe passage, and, taking advantage of his good humor, I proposed a climb up an opening of the bluff, down which led a deer trail plainly discernible.

"Not I," he said, casting a glance upward. "The run over the rocks will do me for exercise tonight."

"Then will I assay it alone," I replied, not displeased at his refusal. "I am cramped from sitting in the canoe so long."

"'Twill be a hard climb, and they tell me the *père* has strained a tendon of his leg coming ashore."

"And what of that!" I burst forth, giving vent to my indignation. "Am I a ten-year-old to be guarded every step I take? 'Tis not far to the summit, and no danger. You can see yourself the trail is not steep. Faith! I will go now, just to show that I am at liberty."

He laughed, an unpleasant sound to it, yet made no effort to halt me. 'Tis probable he felt safe enough with De Artigny camped above the rapids, and he had learned already that my temper might become dangerous. Yet he stood and watched while I was half-way up before turning away, satisfied no doubt that I would make it safely. It was like a draught of wine to me to be alone again; I cannot describe the sense of freedom, and relief I felt when a spur of the cliff shut out all view of the scene below.

The rude path I followed was narrow, but not steep enough to prove wearisome, and, as it led up through a crevice in the earth, finally emerged at the top of the bluff at a considerable distance above the camp I had left. Thick woods covered the crest, although there were open plains beyond, and I was obliged to advance to the very edge in order to gain glimpse of the river.

Once there, however, with footing secure on a flat rock, the scene outspread was one of wild and fascinating beauty. Directly below me were the rapids, rock strewn, the white spray leaping high in air, the swift, green water swirling past in tremendous volume. It scarcely seemed as though boats could live in that smother, or find passage between those jutting rocks, yet as I gazed more closely, I could trace the channel close in against the opposite shore, and note where the swift current bore back across the river.

Leaning far out, grasping a branch to keep from falling, I distinguished the canoe at the upper landing, and the Indians busily preparing camp. At first I saw nothing of any white man, but was gazing still when De Artigny emerged from some shadow, and stepped down beside the boat. I know not what instinct prompted him to turn and look up intently at the bluff towering above. I scarcely comprehended either what swift impulse led me to undo the neckerchief at my throat, and hold it forth in signal. An instant he stared upward, shading his eyes with one hand.

I must have seemed a vision clinging there against the sky, yet all at once the truth burst upon him, and, with a wave of the arm, he sprang up the low bank, and joined his Indians. I could not hear what he said, but with a single word he left them, and disappeared among the trees at the foot of the bluff.

I drew back, almost frightened, half inclined to flee before he could attain the summit. What could I say? How could I meet him? What if Cassion had followed me up the path, or had despatched one of his men to spy upon my movements? Ever since leaving Quebec my one hope had been this interview with De Artigny, yet now that it was imminent I shrank from it, in actual confusion, my heart fluttering, my mind blank, yet I was not a coward, and did not run, but waited, feeling my limbs tremble under me, and listening for the first sound of his approach.

He must have scrambled straight up the steep face of the bluff, for it could have been scarcely more than a minute, when I heard him crunching a passage through the bushes, and then saw him emerge above the edge. Clinging to a tree limb, his eyes sought eagerly to locate me, and when I stepped forward, he sprang erect, and bowed, jerking his hat from his head. There was about his action the enthusiasm of a boy, and his face glowed with an eagerness and delight which instantly broke down every barrier between us.

“You waved to me?” he exclaimed. “You wished me to come?”

“Yes,” I confessed, swept from my guard by his enthusiasm. “I have been anxious to confer with you, and this is my first opportunity.”

“Why I thought you avoided me,” he burst forth. “It is because I felt so that I have kept away.”

“There was nothing else I could do but pretend,” I exclaimed, gaining control over my voice as I spoke. “My every movement has been watched since we left

Quebec; this is the first moment I have been left alone—if, indeed, I am now." And I glanced about doubtfully into the shadows of the forest.

"You imagine you may have been followed here? By whom? Cassion?"

"By himself, or some emissary. Père Allouez has been my jailor, but chances to be disabled at present. The Commissaire permitted me to climb here alone, believing you to be safely camped above the rapids, yet his suspicions may easily revive."

"His suspicions!" the Sieur laughed softly. "So that then is the trouble? It is to keep us apart that he bids me make separate camp each night; and assigns me to every post of peril. I feel the honor, Mademoiselle, yet why am I especially singled out for so great a distinction?"

"He suspects us of being friends. He knew I conferred with you at the convent, and even believes that you were with me hidden behind the curtain in the Governor's office."

"Yet if all that be true," he questioned, his voice evidencing his surprise. "Why should our friendship arouse his antagonism to such an extent? I cannot understand what crime I have committed, Mademoiselle. It is all mystery, even why you should be here with us on this long journey? Surely you had no such thought when we parted last?"

"You do not know what has occurred?" I asked, in astonishment. "No one has told you?"

"Told me! How? I have scarcely held speech with anyone but the Algonquin chief since we took to the water. Cassion has but given orders, and Chevet is mum as an oyster. I endeavored to find you in Montreal, but you were safely locked behind gray walls. That something was wrong I felt convinced, yet what it might be no one would tell me. I tried questioning the père, but he only shook his head, and left me unanswered. Tell me then, Mademoiselle, by what right does this Cassion hold you as a captive?"

My lips trembled, and my eyes fell, yet I must answer.

"He is my husband, Monsieur."

I caught glimpse of his face, picturing surprise, incredulity. He drew a sharp breath, and I noted his hand close tightly on the hilt of his knife.

"Your husband! that cur! Surely you do not jest?"

"Would that I did," I exclaimed, losing all control in sudden wave of anger. "No, Monsieur, it is true; but listen. I supposed you knew; that you had been told. It is hard for me to explain, yet I must make it all plain for you to understand. I do not love the man, his very presence maddens me, nor has the creature dared as yet to lay hand on my person. See; I carry this," and I drew the pistol from my dress, and held it in my hand. "Chevet loaned it me, and Cassion knows I would kill him if he ventured insult. Yet that serves me little, for my opposition only renders the man more determined. At Quebec I was but a plaything, but now he holds me worth the winning."

"But why did you marry him, then?"

"I am coming to that, Monsieur. You overheard what was said in La Barre's office about—about my father's property?"

“Ay! although it was not all clear to me. Captain la Chesnayne had lost his estates, confiscated by the Crown; yet before his death these had been restored to him by the King.”

“Yes, but the report of the restoration had never been made to his rightful heirs. The papers had been held back and concealed, while those in authority planned how to retain possession. Cassion was chosen as an instrument, and sought my hand in marriage.”

De Artigny smothered an oath, his eyes darkening with anger.

“It was to further this scheme that he induced Chevet to announce our engagement, and drive me to consent. Once my husband the fortune was securely in his hands—indeed, I need never know its existence; nor would Chevet suspicion the trick. Yet, as I see it now, La Barre had no great faith in the man he had chosen, and thought best to test him first by this journey to St. Louis. If he proved himself, then on his return, he was to have the reward of official position and wealth. I was but a pawn in the game, a plaything for their pleasure.”

My voice broke, and I could scarcely see through the tears in my eyes, but I felt his strong hand close over mine, the warm pressure an unspoken pledge.

“The dogs! and then what happened?”

“You know, already. I was discovered behind the curtain, when you escaped through the open window. They were not certain I was not alone there, as I claimed, but compelled me to confess what I had overheard. La Barre was quick to grasp the danger of discovery, and the only method by which my lips could be closed. By threat he compelled me to marry Francois Cassion, and accompany him on this journey into the wilderness.”

“The ceremony was performed by a priest?”

“By Père le Guard, the Governor’s chaplain.”

“And Hugo Chevet, your uncle? Did he remain silent? make no protest?”

I gave a gesture of despair.

“He! Never did he even conceive what occurred, until I told him later on the river. Even now I doubt if his sluggish brain has grasped the truth. To him the alliance was an honor, an opening to possible wealth in the fur trade through Cassion’s influence with La Barre. He could perceive nothing else except his good luck in thus ridding himself of the care of a poor niece who had been a sorry burden.”

“But you explained to him?”

“I tried to, but only to regret the effort. Giant as he is physically, his intellect is that of a big boy. All he can conceive of is revenge—a desire to crush with his hands. He hates Cassion, because the man has robbed him of the use of my father’s money; but for my position he cares nothing. To his mind the wrong has all been done to him, and I fear he will brood over it until he seeks revenge. If he does he will ruin everything.”

De Artigny stood silent, evidently in thought, endeavoring to grasp the threads of my tale.

“How did you attain the summit of this bluff?” he questioned at last.

“Yonder; there is a deer trail leading down.”

“And you fear Cassion may follow?”

“He will likely become suspicious if I am long absent, and either seek me himself, or send one of his men. This is the first moment of freedom I have experienced since we left Quebec. I hardly know how to behave myself.”

“And we must guard it from being the last,” he exclaimed, a note of determination, and leadership in his voice. “There are questions I must ask, so that we may work together in harmony, but Cassion can never be allowed to suspect that we have communication. Let us go forward to the end of the trail where you came up; from there we can keep watch below.”

He still grasped my hand, and I had no thought of withdrawing it. To me he was a friend, loyal, trustworthy, the one alone to whom I could confide. Together we clambered over the rough rocks to where the narrow cleft led downward.

Chapter XII

On the Summit of the Bluff.

Securely screened from observation by the low growing bushes clinging to the edge of the bluff, and yet with a clear view of the cleft in the rocks half way to the river, De Artigny found me a seat on a hummock of grass, but remained standing himself. The sun was sinking low, warning us that our time was short, for with the first coming of twilight I would certainly be sought, if I failed to return to the lower camp.

For a moment he did not break the silence, and I glanced up, wondering why he should hesitate. His face was grave, no longer appearing, as was its wont, young and careless, but marked by thought and perplexity. Something strong and earnest in the character of the man, brought forth by this emergency, seemed to stamp itself on his features. If I had ever before imagined him to be a mere reckless youth, with that moment such conception vanished, and I knew I was to rely on the experience of a man—a man trained in a rough wilderness school, yet with mind and heart fitted to meet any emergency. The knowledge brought me boldness.

“You would question me, Monsieur,” I asked doubtfully. “It was for that you led me here?”

“Yes,” instantly aroused by my voice, but with eyes still scanning the trail. “And there is no time to waste, if I am to do my part intelligently. You must return below before the sun disappears, or Monsieur Cassion might suspect you had lost your way. You have sought me for assistance, counsel perhaps, but this state of affairs has so taken me by surprise that I do not think clearly. You have a plan?”

“Scarcely that, Monsieur. I would ascertain the truth, and my only means of doing so is through a confession by Francois Cassion.”

“And he is too cold-blooded a villain to ever acknowledge guilt. To my mind the methods of Chevet would be most likely to bring result.”

“But not to mine, Monsieur,” I interrupted earnestly. “The man is not so cold-blooded as you imagine. Arrogant he is, and conceited, deeming himself admired,

and envied by all, especially my sex. He has even dared boast to me of his victims. But therein lies his very weakness; I would make him love me."

He turned now, and looked searchingly into my face, no glimpse of a smile in the gray eyes.

"Pardon; I do not understand," he said gravely. "You seek his love?"

I felt his manner a rebuke, a questioning of my honesty, and swift indignation brought the answering words to my lips.

"And why not pray! Must I not defend myself—and what other weapons are at hand? Do I owe him kindness; or tender consideration? The man married me as he would buy a slave."

"You may be justified," he admitted regretfully. "Yet how is this to be done?"

I arose to my feet, and stood before him, my face uplifted, and, with one hand, thrust aside the shade of my hat.

"Monsieur, deem you that impossible?"

His lips parted in a quick smile, revealing the white teeth, and he bowed low, flinging his hat to the ground, and standing bareheaded.

"*Mon Dieu!* No! Monsieur Cassion is to be congratulated. Yet it was my thought you said yonder that you despised the man."

"I do; what reason have I to feel otherwise? Yet there lies my strength in this battle. He laughs at women, plays with them, breaks their hearts. It is his pride and boast, and his success in the past has ministered to his self conceit. He thought me of the same kind, but has already had his lesson. Do you not know what that means to a man like him? More than ever he will desire my favor. A week back, he cared nothing; I was but a plaything, awaiting his pleasure; his wife to be treated as he pleased. He knows better now, and already his eyes follow me as though he were my dog."

"And that then is why you send for me—that I may play my part in the game?"

I shrugged my shoulders, yet there was doubt in my eyes as I faced him.

"Is there harm in such play, Monsieur," I asked innocently, "with so important an end in view? 'Tis not that I seek amusement, but I must find out where this King's pardon is hidden, who concealed it, and obtain proof of the fraud which compelled my marriage. My only hope of release lies in compelling Francois Cassion to confess all he knows of this foul conspiracy. I must possess the facts before we return to Quebec."

"But of what use?" he insisted. "You will still remain his wife, and your property will be in his control. The church will hold you to the marriage contract."

"Not if I can establish the truth that I was deceived, defrauded, and married by force. Once I have the proofs in my hands, I will appeal to Louis—to the Pope for relief. These men thought me a helpless girl, friendless and alone, ignorant of law, a mere waif of the frontier. Perhaps I was, but this experience has made of me a woman. In Montreal I talked with the Mother Superior, and she told me of a marriage in France where the père officiated under threat, and the Pope dissolved the ties. If it can be done for others, it shall be done for me. I will not remain the wife of Francois Cassion."

"Yet you would make him love you?"

"In punishment for his sins; in payment for those he has ruined. Ay! 'tis a duty I shall not shrink from, Monsieur de Artigny, even although you may deem it

unwomanly. I do not mean it so, nor hold myself immodest for the effort. Why should I? I but war against him with his own weapons, and my cause is just. And I shall win, whether or not you give me your aid. How can I fail, Monsieur? I am young, and not ill to look upon; this you have already confessed; here in this wilderness I am alone, the only woman. He holds me his wife by law, and yet knows he must still win me. There are months of loneliness before us, and he will not look upon the face of another white woman in all those leagues. Are there any French of my sex at Fort St. Louis?"

"No."

"Nor at St. Ignace, Père Allouez assures me. I shall have no rival then in all this wilderness; you think me harmless, Monsieur? Look at me, and say!"

"I do not need to look; you will have your game, I have no doubt, although the final result may not prove what you desire."

"You fear the end?"

"It may be so; you play with fire, and although I know little of women, yet I have felt the wild passions of men in lands where there is no restraint of law. The wilderness sees many tragedies—fierce, bitter, revengeful deeds—and 'tis best you use care. 'Tis my belief this Francois Cassion might prove a devil, once his heart was tricked. Have you thought of this?"

I had thought of it, but with no mercy in my heart, yet as De Artigny spoke I felt the ugliness of my threat more acutely, and, for an instant, stood before him white-lipped, and ashamed. Then before me arose Cassion's face, sarcastic, supercilious, hateful, and I laughed in scorn of the warning.

"Thought of it!" I exclaimed, "yes, but for that I care nothing. Why should I, Monsieur? Has the man shown mercy to me, that I should feel regret because he suffers? As to his revenge, death is not more to be dreaded than a lifetime passed in his presence. But why do you make plea on his behalf—the man is surely no friend of yours?"

"I make no plea for him," he answered, strangely sober, "and claim no friendship. Any enemy to La Salle is an enemy to Rene de Artigny; but I would front him as a man should. It is not my nature to do a deed of treachery."

"You hold this treachery?"

"What else? You propose luring him to love you, that you may gain confession from his lips. To attain this end you barter your honesty, your womanhood; you take advantage of your beauty to enslave him; you count as ally the loneliness of the wilderness; ay! and, if I understand aright, you hope through me to awaken the man's jealousy. Is this not true?"

I drew a quick breath, my eyes staring into his face, and my limbs trembling. His words cut me like a knife, yet I would not yield, would not even acknowledge their truth.

"You are unjust, unfair," I burst forth impetuously. "You will see but the one side—that of the man. I cannot fight this battle with my hands, nor will I submit to such wrong without struggle. He has never thought to spare me, and there is no reason why I should show him mercy. I wish your good will, Monsieur, your respect, but I cannot hold this plan which I propose as evil. Do you?"

He hesitated, looking at me with such perplexity in his eyes as to prove his doubt.

“I cannot judge you,” he admitted at last, “only that is not the way in which I have been trained. Neither will I stand between you and your revenge, nor have part in it. I am your friend—now, always. In every honorable way I will serve you, and your cause. If Cassion dares violence, or insult he must reckon with me, though I faced his whole company. I pledge you this, but I will not play a part, or act a lie even at your request.”

“You mean you will not pretend to care for me?” I asked, my heart leaden at his words.

“There would be no pretense,” he answered frankly. “I do care for you, but I will not dishonor my thought of you by thus deliberately scheming to outwit your husband. I am a man of the woods, the wilderness; not since I was a boy have I dwelt in civilization, but in all that time I have been companion of men to whom honor was everything. I have been comrade with Sieur de la Salle, with Henri de Tonty, and cannot be guilty of an act of treachery even for your sake. Perchance my code is not the same as the perfumed gallants of Quebec—yet it is mine, and learned in a hard school.”

He went on quietly, “there are two things I cannot ignore—one is, that I am an employee of this Francois Cassion, pledged to his service by my own free will; the other is, that you are his wife, joined to him by Holy Church, and although you may have assumed those vows under coercion, your promise is binding. I can but choose my path of duty, and abide therein.”

His words hurt, angered me; I lacked power of expression, ability to grasp his full meaning and purpose.

“You—you desert me then? You—you leave me to this fate?”

“I leave you to reconsider your choice of action,” he returned gravely, his hat still in hand, his lips unsmiling. “I do believe your womanhood will find a better way to achieve its liberty, but what that way is I must trust you to discover. I am your friend, Adele, always—you will believe that?”

I did not answer; I could not, because of the choking in my throat, yet I let him grasp my hand. Once I raised my eyes to his, but lowered them instantly in strange confusion. Here was a man I did not understand, whose real motives I could not fathom. His protest had not yet penetrated my soul, and I felt toward him, an odd mixture of respect and anger. He released my hand, and turned away, and I stood motionless as he crossed the open space between the trees. At the edge of the bluff he paused and glanced about, lifting his hat in gesture of farewell. I do not think I moved, or made response, and an instant later he was gone.

I know not how long I stood there staring into vacancy, haunted by regret, tortured by fear and humiliation. Slowly all else crystallized into indignation, with a fierce resolve to fight on alone. The sun sank, and all about me clung the purple twilight, yet I did not move. He had been unjust, unfair; his simple code of the woods could not be made to apply to such a situation as this of mine.

I had a right to use the weapons of womanhood in my own defense. Ay! and I would; and whether voluntary, or not this spotless knight of the wilderness should be my ally. Let him pretend to high virtue, yet surely under that outer armor of resolve there beat the heart of a man. He meant all he said; he was honest in it; not once did I doubt that, yet his apparent indifference, his seeming willingness to leave me to fate, and Cassion, was all assumed.

That one glimpse I had into his eyes told me this in a sudden revelation stronger than any words. I smiled at the recollection, the sense of power reawakening in my heart. He did care—no less than I cared, and this knowledge gave me the weapon I needed, and the courage to use it.

I heard no sound of warning, yet as I turned to retrace my way to the camp below, I became suddenly aware of the presence of Cassion.

Chapter XIII

We Reach the Lake.

He was between me and the deer trail, and enough of daylight yet remained to enable me to perceive the man clearly. How long he may have been there observing me I could not know, but when I first saw him he was bent forward, apparently deeply interested in some sudden discovery upon the ground at his feet.

"You thought me long in returning, Monsieur?" I asked carelessly, and taking a step toward him. "It was cooler up here, and the view from the bluff yonder beautiful. You may gain some conception of it still, if you care."

He lifted his head with a jerk, and stared into my face.

"Ay! no doubt," he said harshly, "yet I hardly think it was the view which held you here so long. Whose boot print is this, Madame? not yours, surely."

I glanced where he pointed, my heart leaping, yet not altogether with regret. The young Sieur had left his trail behind, and it would serve me whether by his will or no.

"Certainly not mine," and I laughed. "I trust, Monsieur, your powers of observation are better than that—'tis hardly a compliment."

"Nor is this time for any lightness of speech, my lady," he retorted, his anger fanned by my indifference. "Whose is it then, I ask you? What man has been your companion here?"

"You jump at conclusions, Monsieur," I returned coldly. "The stray imprint of a man's boot on the turf is scarcely evidence that I have had a companion. Kindly stand aside, and permit me to descend."

"*Mon Dieu!* I will not!" and he blocked my passage. "I have stood enough of your tantrums already in the boat. Now we are alone, and I will have my say. You shall remain here until I learn the truth."

His rage rather amused me, and I felt not the slightest emotion of fear, although there was threat in his words, and in the gesture accompanying them. I do not think the smile even deserted my lips, as I sought a comfortable seat on a fallen tree trunk, fully conscious that nothing would so infuriate the man as studied indifference.

"Very well, Monsieur, I await your investigation with pleasure," I said sweetly. "No doubt it will prove interesting. You honor me with the suspicion that I had an appointment here with one of your men?"

"No matter what I suspicion."

“Of course not; you treat me with marked consideration. Perchance others have camped here, and explored these bluffs.”

“The print is fresh, not ancient, and none of the men from my camp have come this way.”

He strode forward, across the narrow open space, and disappeared into the fringe of trees bordering the edge of the bluff. It would have been easy for me to depart, to escape to the security of the tent below, but curiosity held me motionless. I knew what he would discover, and preferred to face the consequences where I was free to answer him face to face. I wished him to be suspicious, to feel that he had a rival; I would fan his jealousy to the very danger point. Nor had I long to wait. Forth from the shade of the trees he burst, and came toward me, his face white, his eyes blazing.

“Tis the fellow I thought,” he burst forth, “and he went down the face of the bluff yonder. So you dared to have tryst with him?”

“With whom, Monsieur?”

“De Artigny, the young fool! Do you think me blind? Did I not know you were together in Quebec? What are you laughing at?”

“I was not laughing, Monsieur. Your ridiculous charge does not amuse me. I am a woman; you insult me; I am your wife; you charge me with indiscretion. If you think to win me with such cowardly insinuations you know little of my nature. I will not talk with you, nor discuss the matter. I return to the camp.”

His hands clinched as though he had the throat of an enemy between them, but angry as he was, some vague doubt restrained him.

“*Mon Dieu!* I’ll fight the dog!”

“De Artigny, you mean? Tis his trade, I hear, and he is good at it.”

“Bah! a bungler of the woods. I doubt if he ever crossed blades with a swordsman. But mark you this, Madame, the lad feels my steel if ever you so much as speak to him again.”

There was contempt in my eyes, nor did I strive to disguise it.

“Am I your wife, Monsieur, or your slave?”

“My wife, and I know how to hold you! Mon Dieu! but you shall learn that lesson. I was a fool to ever give the brat place in the boats. La Barre warned me that he would make trouble. Now I tell you what will occur if you play false with me.”

“You may spare your threats—they weigh nothing. The Sieur de Artigny is my friend, and I shall address him when it pleases me. With whatever quarrel may arise between you I have no interest. Let that suffice, and now I bid you good night, Monsieur.”

He made no effort to halt me, nor to follow, and I made my way down the darkening path, without so much as turning my head to observe his movements. It was almost like a play to me, and I was reckless of the consequences, intent only on my purpose.

I was awake a long time, lying alone on my blankets within the silent tent, and staring out at the darkness. I saw Cassion descend the deer path, perhaps an hour after I left him, and go on to the main camp below. He made no pause as he passed, yet walked slowly as though in thought. Where he went I could not determine in the gloom, yet was convinced he had no purpose then of seeking De

Artigny or of putting his threat into immediate action. In all probability he believed that his words would render me cautious, in spite of my defiant response, and that I would avoid creating trouble by keeping away from the younger man. He was no brawler, except as he felt safe, and this young frontiersman was hardly the antagonist he would choose. It would be more apt to be a blow in the dark, or an overturned canoe.

I cannot recall now that I experienced any regret for what had occurred. Perhaps I might if I had known the end, yet I felt perfectly justified in all my actions. I had done no conscious wrong, and was only seeking that which was mine by every standard of justice. I knew I despised Cassion, while my feeling's toward De Artigny were so confused, and indefinite as to be a continual puzzle. I knew nothing of what love was—I was merely aware that the man interested me, and that I felt confidence in him. I recalled his words, the expression of his face, and felt the sharp sting of his rebuke, yet all was strangely softened by the message I had read in his eyes.

He had not approved of my course, yet in his heart had not blamed; he would not lend himself to my purpose, yet remained no less loyal to me. I could ask no more. Indeed, I had no wish to precipitate an open quarrel between the two men. However it ended, such an occurrence would serve me ill, and all that my plan contemplated was that they should distrust each other, and thus permit me to play the one against the other, until I won my game. I felt no fear of the result, no doubt of my ability to manipulate the strings adroitly enough to achieve the end sought.

The one point I ignored was the primitive passions of men. These were beyond my control; were already beyond, although I knew it not. Fires were smouldering in hearts which out yonder in the dark woods would burst into flame of destruction. Innocent as my purpose was, it had in it the germs of tragedy; but I was then too young, too inexperienced to know.

Nor had I reason to anticipate the result of my simple 164 ruse, or occasion to note any serious change in my surroundings. The routine of our journey gave me no hint of the hidden passions seething below the outward appearance of things. In the early dawn we broke camp as usual, except that chosen boatmen guided the emptied canoes through the rapids, while the others of the party made portage along the rough shore. In the smooth water above we all embarked again, and won slow way against the current. The advance company had departed before our arrival, nor did I again obtain glimpse of De Artigny for many days.

I would not say that Cassion purposely kept us apart, for the arrangement might have been the same had I not been of the party, yet the only communication between the two divisions occurred when some messenger brought back warning of dangerous water ahead. Usually this messenger was an Indian, but once De Artigny himself came, and guided our canoes through a torrent of white, raging water, amid a maze of murderous rocks.

During these days and weeks Cassion treated me with consideration and outward respect. Not that he failed to talk freely, and to boast of his exploits and adventures, yet he refrained from laying hand on me, nor did he once refer to the incident of the bluff. I knew not what to make of the man in this new rôle of

gallant, yet suspicioned that he but bided his time, and a better opportunity for exhibiting his true purpose.

There were times, when he thought I was not observing him, when the expression of his eyes brought me uneasiness, and I was soon aware that, in spite of his genial manner, and friendly expression, his surveillance was in no degree relaxed. Not for a moment was I alone. When he was not beside me in the canoe, Père Allouez became my companion, and at night a guard kept vigilant eye upon my tent. Twice I ventured to test this fact, only to be halted, and turned back within three yards of the entrance. Very polite the soldier was, with explanation of danger from prowling beasts, and the strictness of his order. At first such restraint angered me, but on second thought I did not greatly care, humiliating though it was; yet the protection thus afforded was not altogether unwelcome, and was in itself evidence of Cassion's determination to conquer me.

Nor was the journey lacking in interest or adventure. Never shall I forget the charm of those days and nights, amid which we made slow and toilsome passage through the desolate wilderness, ever gaining new leagues to the westward. Only twice in weeks did we encounter human beings—once a camp of Indians on the shore of a lake, and once a Capuchin monk, alone but for a single *voyageur*, as companion, passed us upon the river. He would have paused to exchange words, but at sight of Père Allouez's black robe, he gave swift command to his *engagé*, and the two disappeared as though fleeing from the devil.

But what visions of beauty, and sublimity, were those that swept constantly past us as we thus advanced into the wild depths of the woods. No two views were ever alike, and every curve in the river bank brought a fresh vista. I never tired of the vast, silent forests that seemed to shut us in, nor of the dancing silver of the swift water under our keel, nor of the great rocky bluffs under whose grim shadows we found passage. To me the hardships even were enjoyable: the clambering over rough portages, the occasional mishap, the coarse fare, the nights I was compelled to pass in the canoe, these only served to give added zest to the great adventure, to make real the unusual experiences I was passing through.

I was scarce more than a girl, young, strong, little accustomed to luxury, and my heart responded to the exhilaration of constant change, and the thrill of peril. And when, at last, we made the long portage, tramping through the dark forest aisles, bearing on our shoulders heavy loads, scarcely able to see the sun even at midday through the leafy screen of leaves, and came forth at twilight on the shores of the mighty lake, no words can express the raptures with which I stood and gazed across that expanse of heaving, restless water. The men launched their canoes upon the surface, and made camp in the edge of the forest, but I could not move, could not restrain my eyes, until darkness descended and left all before me a void.

Never had I gazed upon so vast a spectacle, so somber in the dull gray light, stretching afar to the horizon, its wild, desolate silence adding to its awful majesty. Even when darkness enshrouded it all, the memory haunted me, and I could but think and dream, frightened and awed in presence of that stupendous waste of waters. The soldiers sang about their fires, and Cassion sought me with what he meant to be courteous words, but I was in no spirit to be amused. For hours I lay alone, listening to the dull roar of waves along the shore, and the wind in the

trees. De Artigny, and his party, camped just beyond us, across the mouth of a narrow stream, but I saw nothing of him, nor do I believe I gave his presence a thought.

It was scarcely more than daybreak when we broke camp, and headed our canoes out into the lake. With the dawn, and the glint of sunlight over the waters, much of my dread departed, and I could appreciate the wild song of delight with which our Indian paddlers bent to their work. The sharp-prowed canoes swept through the waters swiftly, no longer battling against a current, and the shore line ever in view was fascinating in its green foliage. We kept close to the northern shore, and soon found passage amid numerous islands, forest covered, but with high, rocky outlines.

Of life there was no sign, and the silence of the vast primeval wilderness surrounding us rested heavily upon me. Whether this same sense of loneliness and awe affected the others I cannot say—yet the savage song died away, and the soldiers sat motionless, while the Indians plied their paddles noiselessly. Cassion even restrained his garrulous tongue, and when I glanced at him in some surprise, he was intent on the shores of a passing island, forgetful of my presence.

For four days we coasted thus, never out of sight of shore, and usually with islands between us and the main body of water. In all that time we had no sign of man—not even a wisp of smoke, nor heard the crack of distant rifle. About us extended loneliness and desolation, great waters never still, vast forests grim and somber, tall, menacing rocks, bright-colored in the sun.

Once it rained, drenching us to the skin, and driving us to shelter in an island cove. Once a sudden storm swept the lake, and we barely made land in time to save us from wreck, Chevet's canoe smashing an ugly hole in its bow, and a soldier dislocating his shoulder in the struggle. The accident held us for some hours, and later, when once more afloat, retarded progress.

This misfortune served also to restore Monsieur Cassion to his natural ill temper, and led to a quarrel between himself and Chevet which might have ended seriously had I not intervened. The incident, however, left the Commissaire in ugly mood, and caused him to play the bully over his men. To me he was sullen, after an attempt at insolence, and sat glowering across the water, meditating revenge.

At last we left the chain of islands behind, and one morning struck out from the shore into the waste of waters, the prows of the canoes turned westward, the steersman guiding our course by the sun. For several hours we were beyond view of land, with naught to rest the eye upon save the gray sea, and then, when it was nearly night, we reached the shore, and beached our canoes at St. Ignace.

Chapter XIV

At St. Ignace.

So much had been said of St. Ignace, and so long had the name been familiar throughout New France, that my first view of the place brought me bitter disappointment. The faces of the others in our party pictured the same disillusion.

Hugo Chevet had been in these parts before on fur-trading expeditions, and 'twas probable that De Artigny had stopped there on one of his voyages with La Salle. But to all the others the place had been merely a name, and our imagination had invested it with an importance scarcely justified by what we saw as our canoes drew in toward the beach.

The miserable little village was upon a point of land, originally covered with heavy growth of forest. A bit of this had been rudely cut, the rotting stumps still standing, and from the timber a dozen rough log houses had been constructed facing the lake. A few rods back, on slightly higher land, was a log chapel, and a house, somewhat more pretentious than the others, in which the priests lodged. The whole aspect of the place was peculiarly desolate and depressing, facing that vast waste of water, the black forest shadows behind, and those rotting stumps in the foreground.

Nor was our welcome one to make the heart rejoice. Scarce a dozen persons gathered at the beach to aid us in making landing, rough engagés mostly, and not among them all a face familiar. It was only later, when two priests from the mission came hurrying forward, that we were greeted by cordial speech. These invited a few of us to become guests at the mission house, and assigned the remainder of our party to vacant huts.

Cassion, Chevet, and Père Allouez accompanied me as I walked beside a young priest up the beaten path, but De Artigny was left behind with the men. I overheard Cassion order him to remain, but he added some word in lower voice, which brought a flush of anger into the younger man's face, although he merely turned on his heel without reply.

The young Jesuit beside me—a pale-faced, delicate appearing man, almost emaciated in his long black robe—scarcely breathed a word as we climbed the rather steep ascent, but at the door of the mission house paused gravely, and directed our attention to the scene unrolled behind. It was indeed a vista of surpassing beauty, for from this point we could perceive the distant curve of the shore, shadowed by dark forests, while the lake itself, silvered by the setting sun stretched afar to the horizon, unbroken in its immensity except for an island lifting its rock front leagues away.

So greatly was I impressed with the view, that after we had been shown into the bare room of the mission, where scarcely a comfort was to be seen, I crossed to the one window, and stood there staring out, watching the light fade across those leagues of water, until the purple twilight descended like a veil of mist. Yet I heard the questions and answers, and learned that nearly all the inhabitants were away on various expeditions into the wilderness, none remaining except the two priests in charge of the mission, and the few *engagés* necessary for their work. Only a few days before five priests had departed to establish a mission at Green Bay, and visit the Indian villages beyond.

The young Jesuit spoke freely when once convinced that our party journeyed to the Illinois country, and was antagonistic to La Salle, who had shown small liking for his Order. The presence of Père Allouez overcame his first suspicion at

recognition of De Artigny, and he gave free vent to his dislike of the Recollets, and the policy of those adventurous Frenchmen who had dared oppose the Jesuits.

He produced a newly drawn map of the great lake we were to traverse, and the men studied it anxiously while the two priests and the engagé prepared a simple meal. For the moment I was forgotten, and left alone on a rude bench beside the great fireplace, to listen to their discussion, and think my own thoughts.

We remained at St. Ignace three days, busily engaged in repairing our canoes, and rendering them fit for the long voyage yet before us. From this point we were to venture on treacherous waters, as yet scarcely explored, the shores inhabited by savage, unknown tribes, with not a white man in all the long distance from Green Bay to the Chicago portage. Once I got out the map, and traced the distance, feeling sick at heart as I thus realized more clearly the weary journey.

Those were dull, lonely days I passed in the desolate mission house, while the others were busy at their various tasks. Only at night time, or as they straggled in, to their meals, did I see anyone but Père Allouez, who was always close at hand, a silent shadow from whose presence I could not escape. I visited the priest's garden, climbed the rocks overlooking the water, and even ventured into the dark forest, but he was ever beside me, suave but insistent on doing his master's will. The only glimpse I had of De Artigny was at a distance, for not once did he approach the mission house. So I was glad enough when the canoes were ready, and all preparations made for departure.

Yet we were not destined to escape thus easily from St. Ignace. Of what occurred I must write as it happened to me then, and not as its full significance became later clear to my understanding. It was after nightfall when Cassion returned to the mission house. The lights were burning on the table, and the three priests were rather impatiently waiting their evening meal, occasionally exchanging brief sentences, or peering out through the open window toward the dark water.

As long as daylight lasted this had been my post of observation, while watching the distant figures busily engaged in reloading the canoes for the morrow's journey. They were like so many ants, running across the brown sands, both soldiers and Indians stripped to the waist, apparently eager enough to complete their task. Occasionally the echo of a song reached my ears, and the distance was not so great but that I could distinguish individuals. Cassion sat upon a log directing operations, not even rising to lend a hand, but Chevet gave his great strength freely.

De Artigny was back among the huts, in charge of that end of the line, no doubt, and it was only occasionally I gained glimpse of his presence. An Indian canoe came ashore just before sundown, and our men knocked off work to cluster about and examine its cargo of furs. Angered by the delay Cassion strode in among them, and, with bitter words and a blow or two, drove them back to their task. The loss of time was not great, yet they were still busily engaged when darkness shut out the scene.

Cassion came in alone, yet I observed nothing strange about his appearance, except that he failed to greet me with the usual attempt at gallantry, although his sharp eyes swept our faces, as he closed the door, and stared about the room.

“What! not eaten yet?” he exclaimed. “I anticipated my fate to be a lonely meal, for the rascals worked like snails, and I would not leave them rest until all was finished. Faith, the odor is appetizing, and I am hungry as a bear.”

The younger priest waved his hand to the *engagé*, yet asked softly:

“Monsieur Chevet—he is delayed also?”

“He will sup with his men tonight,” returned Cassion shortly, seating himself on the bench. “The sergeant keeps guard of the canoes, and Chevet will be useful with those off duty.”

The man ate as though nearly famished, his ready tongue unusually silent, and at the conclusion of the meal, appeared so fatigued, that I made early excuse to withdraw so he might rest in comfort, climbing the ladder in one corner to my own bed beneath the eaves. This apartment, whose only advantage was privacy, was no more than a narrow space between the sloping rafters of the roof, unfurnished, but with a small window in the end, closed by a wooden shutter. A partition of axe-hewn planks divided this attic into two compartments, thus composing the priests’ sleeping chambers. While I was there they both occupied the one to the south, Cassion, Chevet, and Père Allouez resting in the main room below.

As I lowered the trap in the floor, shutting out the murmur of voices, I was conscious of no desire to sleep, my mind busily occupied with possibilities of the morrow. I opened the window, and seated myself on the floor, gazing out at the night. Below extended the priests’ garden, and beyond the dark gloom of forest depths. A quarter moon peeped through cloud rifts, and revealed in spectral light the familiar objects. It was a calm, peaceful scene, yet ghostly in the silvery gleam and silence—the stumps of half-burned trees assuming grotesque forms, and the wind tossing branches as though by some demon hand. Yet in my restless mood that outside world called me and I leaned forth to see if it was possible to descend.

The way of egress was easy—a mere step to the flat roof of the kitchen, the dovetailed logs of which afforded a ladder to the ground. I had no object in such adventure, but a restless impulse urged me, and, almost before I realized my action, I was upon the ground. Avoiding the gleam of light which streamed from the open window of the room below, I crossed the garden, and reached the path leading downward to the shore. From this point I could perceive the wide sweep of water, showing silvery in the dim moonlight, and detect the darker rim of the land. There was fire on the point below the huts, and its red glare afforded glimpses of the canoes—mere blurred outlines—and occasionally the figure of a man, only recognizable as he moved.

I was still staring at this dim picture when some noise, other than the wind, startled me, and I drew silently back behind a great stump to avoid discovery. My thought was that someone had left the mission house—Cassion perhaps with final orders to those on the beach—but a moment later I realized my mistake, yet only crouched lower in the shadow—a man was advancing from the black concealment of the woods, and crossing the open space.

He moved cautiously, yet boldly enough, and his movements were not those of an Indian, although the low bushes between us and the house shadow, prevented my distinguishing more than his mere outline. It was only when he lifted his head into the gleam of light, and took hasty survey through the window of the scene within, that I recognized the face of De Artigny. He lingered scarcely a moment,

evidently satisfied with what he saw, and then drew silently back, hesitating a brief space, as though debating his next movement.

I waited breathless, wondering what his purpose could be, half inclined to intercept and question him. Was he seeking to serve my cause? to learn the truth of my relationship with Cassion? or did he have some other object, some personal feud in which he sought revenge? The first thought sent the warm blood leaping through my veins; the second left me shivering as if with sudden chill.

Even as I stood, hesitating, uncertain, he turned, and retraced his steps along the same path of his approach, passing me not ten steps away, and vanishing into the wood. I thought he paused at the edge, and bent down, yet before I found voice, or determination to stop him, he had disappeared. My courage returned, spurred by curiosity. Why should he take so roundabout a way to reach the shore? What was that black, shapeless thing he had paused to examine? I could see something there, dark and motionless, though to my eyes no more than a shadow.

I ventured toward it, creeping behind the bushes bordering the path, conscious of an odd fear as I drew closer. Yet it was not until I emerged from the fringe of shrubbery that even the faintest conception of what the object I saw was occurred to me. Then I stopped, frozen by horror, for I confronted a dead body.

For an instant I could not utter a sound, or move a muscle of my body. My hands clung convulsively to a nearby branch, thus supporting me erect in spite of trembling limbs, and I stared at the grewsome object, black and almost shapeless in the moonlight. Only part of the trunk was revealed, the lower portion concealed by bushes, yet I could no longer doubt it was a man's body—a large, heavily built man, his hat still crushed on his head, but with face turned away.

What courage overcame my horror, and urged me forward I cannot tell; I seemed impelled by some power not my own, a vague fear of recognition tugging at my heart. I crept nearer, almost inch by inch, trembling at every noise, dreading to discover the truth. At last I could perceive the ghastly features—the dead man was Hugo Chevet.

I scarcely know why this discovery of his identity brought back so suddenly my strength, and courage. But it did; I was no longer afraid, no longer shrank from contact with the corpse. I confess I felt no special sorrow, no deep regret at the fate which had overtaken him. Although he was my mother's brother, yet his treatment of me had never been kind, and there remained no memories to touch my heart. Still his death was from treachery, murder, and every instinct urged me to learn its cause, and who had been guilty of the crime.

I nerved myself to the effort, and turned the body sufficiently to enable me to discover the wound—he had been pierced by a knife from behind; had fallen, no doubt, without uttering a cry, dead ere he struck the ground. Then it was murder, foul murder, a blow in the back. Why had the deed been done? What spirit of revenge, of hatred, of fear, could have led to such an act? I got again to my feet, staring about through the weird moonlight, every nerve throbbing, as I thought to grip the fact, and find its cause. Slowly I drew back, shrinking in growing terror from the corpse, until I was safely in the priest's garden. There I paused irresolute, my dazed, benumbed brain beginning to grasp the situation, and assert itself.

Chapter XV

The Murder of Chevet.

Who had killed him? What should I do? These were the two questions haunting my mind, and becoming more and more insistent. The light still burned in the mission house, and I could picture the scene within—the three priests reading, or talking softly to each other, and Cassion asleep on his bench in the corner, wearied with the day.

I could not understand, could not imagine a cause, and yet the assassin must have been De Artigny. How else could I account for his presence there in the night, his efforts at concealment, his bending over the dead body, and then hurrying away without sounding an alarm. The evidence against the man seemed conclusive, and yet I would not condemn. There might be other reasons for his silence, for his secret presence, and if I rushed into the house, proclaiming my discovery, and confessing what I had seen, he would be left without defense.

Perhaps it might be the very purpose of the real murderer to thus cast suspicion on an innocent man, and I would be the instrument. But who else could be the murderer? That it could have been Cassion never seriously occurred to me, but I ran over in my mind the rough men of our party—the soldiers, some of them quarrelsome enough, and the Indians to whom a treacherous blow was never unnatural. This must have been the way it happened—Chevet had made some bitter enemy, for he was ever prodigal of angry word and blow, and the fellow had followed him through the night to strike him down from behind. But why did De Artigny fail to sound an alarm when he found the body? Why was he hiding about the mission house, and peering in through the window?

I sank my face in my hands, so dazed and bewildered as to be incapable of thought—yet I could not, I would not believe him guilty of so foul a crime. It was not possible, nor should he be accused through any testimony from my lips. He could explain, he must explain to me his part in this dreadful affair, but, unless he confessed himself, I would never believe him guilty. There was but one thing for me to do—return silently to my room, and wait. Perhaps he had already descended to camp to alarm the men; if not the body would be early discovered in the morning, and a few hours delay could make no difference to Hugo Chevet.

The very decision was a relief, and yet it frightened me. I felt almost like an accomplice, as though I also was guilty of a crime by thus concealing my knowledge, and leaving that body to remain alone there in the dark. Yet there was nothing else to do. Shrinking, shuddering at every shadow, at every sound, my nerves throbbing with agony, I managed to drag my body up the logs, and in through the window. I was safe there, but there was no banishing from memory what I had seen—what I knew lay yonder in the wood shadow. I sank to the floor, clutching the sill, my eyes staring through the moonlight. Once I thought I saw a man's indistinct figure move across an open space, and once I heard voices far away.

The priests entered the room opposite mine, and I could distinguish the murmur of their voices through the thin partition. These became silent, and I prayed, with head bowed on the window sill. I could not leave that position, could not withdraw my eyes from the scene without. The moon disappeared, the night darkening; I could no longer perceive the line of forest trees, and sitting thus I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

I do not know that I was called, yet when I awoke a faint light proclaiming the dawn was in the sky, and sounds of activity reached my ears from the room below. I felt tired and cramped from my unnatural position, but hastened to join the others. The morning meal was already on the table, and we ate as usual, no one mentioning Chevet, thus proving the body had not been discovered. I could scarcely choke the food down, anticipating every instant the sounding of an alarm. Cassion hurried, excited, no doubt, by the prospect of getting away on our journey, but seemed in excellent humor. Pushing back the box on which he sat, he buckled his pistol belt, seized his hat, and strode to the door.

"We depart at once," he proclaimed briefly. "So I will leave you, here, to bring the lady."

Père Allouez, still busily engaged, murmured some indistinct reply, and Cassion's eyes met mine.

"You look pale, and weary this morning," he said. "Not fear of the voyage, I hope?"

"No, Monsieur," I managed to answer quietly. "I slept ill, but shall be better presently—shall I bear my blankets to the boats?"

"The *engagé* will see to that, only let there be as little delay as possible. Ah! here comes a messenger from below—what is it, my man?"

The fellow, one of the soldiers whose face I did not recall, halted in the open door, gasping for breath, his eyes roving about the room.

"He is dead—the big man," he stammered. "He is there by the woods."

"The big man—dead!" Cassion drew back, as though struck a blow. "What big man? Who do you mean?"

"The one in the second canoe, Monsieur; the one who roared."

"Chevet? Hugo Chevet? What has happened to him? Come, speak up, or I'll slit your tongue!"

The man gulped, gripping the door with one hand, the other pointing outward.

"He is there, Monsieur, beyond the trail, at the edge of the wood. I saw him with his face turned up—*Mon Dieu!* so white; I dare not touch him, but there was blood, where a knife had entered his back."

All were on their feet, their faces picturing the sudden horror, yet Cassion was first to recover his wits, and lead the way without. Grasping the soldier's arm, and bidding him show where the body lay, he thrust him through the door. I lingered behind shrinking from being again compelled to view the sight of the dead man, yet unable to keep entirely away. Cassion stopped, looking down at the object on the grass, but made no effort to touch it with his hands. The soldier bent, and rolled the body over, and one of the priests felt in the pockets of the jacket, bringing forth a paper or two. Cassion took these, gripping them in his fingers, his face appearing gray in the early light.

"*Mon Dieu!* the man has been murdered," he exclaimed, "a dastard blow in the back. Look about, and see if you find a knife. Had he quarrel with anyone, Moulin?"

The soldier straightened up.

"No, Monsieur; I heard of none, though he was often rough and harsh of tongue to the men. Ah! now I recall, he had words with Sieur de Artigny on the beach at dusk. I know not the cause, yet the younger man left him angrily, and passed by where I stood, with his hands clinched."

"De Artigny, hey!" Cassion's voice had a ring of pleasure in it. "Ay! he is a hothead. Know you where the young cock is now?"

"He, with the Chief, left an hour ago. Was it not your order, Monsieur?"

Cassion made a swift gesture, but what it might signify I could not determine, as his face was turned away. A moment there was silence, as he shaded his eyes, and peered out across the water.

"True, so I did," he said at last. "They were to depart before dawn. The villain is yonder—see; well off that farthest point, and 'tis too late to overtake him now. *Sacre!* there is naught for us to do, that I see, but to bury Hugo Chevet, and go our way—the King's business cannot wait."

They brought the body into the mission house, and laid it upon the bench. I did not look upon the ghastly face, which the young priest had covered, but I sank to my knees and prayed earnestly for the repose of his soul. For a moment I felt in my heart a tenderness for this rough, hard man who in the past had caused me such suffering.

Perchance he was not altogether to blame; his had been a rough, hard life, and I had only brought him care and trouble. So there were tears in my eyes as I knelt beside him, although in secret my heart rejoiced that De Artigny had gone, and would not be confronted with his victim; for there was no longer doubt in my mind of his guilt, for surely, had the man been innocent, he would have sounded an alarm. It was Cassion's hand which aroused me, and I glanced up at his face through the tears clinging to my lashes.

"What, crying!" he exclaimed, in apparent surprise. "I never thought the man of such value to you as to cause tears at his death."

"He was of my blood," I answered soberly, rising to my feet, "and his murder most foul."

"Ay! true enough, girl, and we will bring to book the villain who did the deed. Yet we cannot remain here to mourn, for I am on the King's service. Come, we have lost time already, and the canoes wait."

"You would go at once?" I asked, startled at his haste, "without even waiting until he is buried?"

"And why not? To wait will cost us a day; nor, so far as I can see, would it be of the slightest value to Hugo Chevet. The priests here will attend to the ceremony, and this handful of silver will buy him prayers. *Pouf!* he is dead, and that is all there is to it; so come along, for I will wait here no longer."

The man's actions, his manner, and words were heartless. For an instant I stood in revolt, ready to defy openly, an angry retort on my lips; yet before I found speech, Père Allouez rested his hand on my shoulder.

"'Tis best, my child," he said softly. "We can no longer serve the dead by remaining here, and there are long leagues before us. In the boat your prayers will reach the good God just as surely as though you knelt here beside this poor body. 'Tis best we go."

I permitted him to lead me out through the door, and we followed Cassion down the steep path to the shore. The latter seemed to have forgotten all else save our embarkation, and hurried the soldier off on a run to get the boats in the water. The *père* held to my arm, and I was conscious of his voice continually speaking, although I knew nothing of what he said. I was incapable of thinking, two visions haunting me—the body of Hugo Chevet outstretched on the bench in the mission house, and Rene de Artigny far away yonder on the water. Why had it happened? What could ever excuse a crime like this?

On the beach all was in readiness for departure, and it was evident enough that Moulin had already spread the news of Chevet's murder among his comrades. Cassion, however, permitted the fellows little time for discussion, for at his sharp orders they took their places in the canoes, and pushed off. The priest was obliged to assume Chevet's former position, and I would gladly have accompanied him, but Cassion suddenly gripped me in his arms, and without so much as a word, waded out through the surf, and put me down in his boat, clambering in himself, and shouting his orders to the paddlers.

I think we were all of us glad enough to get away. I know I sat silent, and motionless, just where he placed me, and stared back across the widening water at the desolate, dismal scene. How lonely, and heart-sickening it was, those few log houses against the hill, the blackened stumps littering the hillside, and the gloomy forest beyond. The figures of a few men were visible along the beach, and once I saw a black-robed priest emerge from the door of the mission house, and start down the steep path.

The picture slowly faded as we advanced, until finally the last glimpse of the log chapel disappeared in the haze, and we were alone on the mystery of the great lake, gliding along a bare, uninhabited shore. I was aroused by the touch of Cassion's hand on my own as it grasped the side of the canoe.

"Adele," he said, almost tenderly. "Why should you be so serious? Cannot we be friends?"

My eyes met his in surprise.

"Friends, Monsieur! Are we not? Why do you address me like that?"

"Because you treat me as though I were a criminal," he said earnestly. "As if I had done you an evil in making you my wife. 'Twas not I who hastened the matter, but La Barre. 'Tis not just to condemn me unheard, yet I have been patient and kind. I thought it might be that you loved another—in truth I imagined that De Artigny had cast his spell upon you; yet you surely cannot continue to trust that villain—the murderer of your uncle."

"How know you that to be true?" I asked.

"Because there is no other accounting for it," he explained sternly. "The quarrel last evening, the early departure before dawn—"

"At your orders, Monsieur."

"Ay, but the sergeant tells me the fellow was absent from the camp for two hours during the night; that in the moonlight he saw him come down the hill.

Even if he did not do the deed himself, he must have discovered the body—yet he voiced no alarm."

I was silent, and my eyes fell from his face to the green water.

"'Twill be hard to explain," he went on. "But he shall have a chance."

"A chance! You will question him; and then—"

He hesitated whether to answer me, but there was a cruel smile on his thin lips.

"Faith, I do not know. 'Tis like to be a court-martial at the Rock, if ever we get him there; though the chances are the fellow will take to the woods when he finds himself suspected. No doubt the best thing I can do will be to say nothing until we hold him safe, though 'tis hard to pretend with such a villain."

He paused, as if hoping I might speak, and my silence angered him.

"Bah, if I had my way the young cockerel would face a file at our first camp. Ay! and it will be for you to decide if he does not."

"What is your meaning, Monsieur?"

"That I am tired of your play-acting; of your making eyes at this forest dandy behind my back. Sang Dieu! I am done with all this—do you hear?—and I have a grip now which will make you think twice, my dear, before you work any more sly tricks on me. Sacre, you think me easy, hey? I have in my hand so," and he opened and closed his fingers suggestively, "the life of the lad."

Chapter XVI

My Pledge Saves De Artigny.

I had one glimpse of his face as he leaned forward, and there was a look in it which made me shudder, and turn away. His was no idle threat, and whether the man truly loved me or not, his hatred of De Artigny was sufficient for any cruelty.

I realized the danger, the necessity for compromise, and yet for the moment I lacked power to speak, to question, fearful lest his demands would be greater than I could grant. I had no thought of what I saw, and still that which my eyes rested upon remains pictured on my brain, the sparkle of sun on the water, the distant green of the shore, the soldiers huddled in the canoe, the dark shining bodies of the Indians ceaselessly plying the paddles, and beyond us, to the left, another canoe, cleaving the water swiftly, with Père Allouez' face turned toward us, as though he sought to guess our conversation. I was aroused by the grip of Cassion's hand.

"Well, my beauty," he said harshly, "haven't I waited long enough to learn if it is war or peace between us?"

I laughed, yet I doubt if he gained any comfort from the expression of the eyes which met his.

"Why I choose peace, of course, Monsieur," I answered, assuming a carelessness I was far from feeling. "Am I not your wife? Surely you remind me of it often enough, so I am not likely to forget; but I resent the insult of your words, nor will you ever win favor from me by such methods. I have been friendly with Sieur de

Artigny, it is true, but there is nothing more between us. Indeed no word has passed my lips in his presence I would not be willing for you to hear. So there is no cause for you to spare him on my account, or rest his fate on any action of mine."

"You will have naught to do with the fellow?"

"There would be small chance if I wished, Monsieur; and do you suppose I would seek companionship with one who had killed my uncle?"

"'Twould scarce seem so, yet I know not what you believe."

"Nor do I myself; yet the evidence is all against the man thus far. I confess I should like to hear his defense, but I make you this pledge in all honor—I will have no word with him, on condition that you file no charges until we arrive at Fort St. Louis."

"Ah!" suspiciously, "you think he has friends there to hold him innocent."

"Why should I, Monsieur? Indeed, why should I care but to have justice done? I do not wish his blood on your hands, or to imagine that he is condemned because of his friendship for me rather than any other crime. I know not what friends the man has at the Rock on the Illinois. He was of La Salle's party, and they are no longer in control. La Barre said that De Baugis commanded that post, and for all I know De Tonty and all his men may have departed."

"'Tis not altogether true, and for that reason we are ordered to join the company. De Baugis has the right of it under commission from La Barre, but does not possess sufficient soldiers to exercise authority. La Salle's men remain loyal to De Tonty, and the Indian tribes look to him for leadership. *Mon Dieu!* it was reported in Quebec that twelve thousand savages were living about the fort—ay! and De Artigny said he doubted it not, for the meadows were covered with tepees—so De Baugis has small chance to rule until he has force behind him. They say this De Tonty is of a fighting breed—the savages call him the man with the iron hand—and so the two rule between them, the one for La Barre, and the other for La Salle, and we go to give the Governor's man more power."

"You have sufficient force?"

"Unless the Indians become hostile; besides there is to be an overland party later to join us in the spring, and Sieur de la Durantaye, of the regiment of Carignan-Salliers is at the Chicago portage. This I learned at St. Ignace."

"Then it would seem to me, Monsieur, that you could safely wait the trial of De Artigny until our arrival at the fort. If he does not feel himself suspected, he will make no effort to escape, and I give you the pledge you ask."

It was not altogether graciously that he agreed to this, yet the man could not refuse, and I was glad enough to escape thus easily, for it was my fear that he might insist on my yielding much more to preserve De Artigny from immediate condemnation and death. The fellow had the power, and the inclination, and what good fortune saved me, I can never know. I think he felt a certain fear of me, a doubt of how far he might presume on my good nature.

Certainly I gave him small encouragement to venture further, and yet had he done so I would have been at my wit's end. Twice the words were upon his lips—a demand that I yield to his mastery—but he must have read in my eyes a defiance he feared to front, for they were not uttered. 'Twas that he might have this very talk that he had found me place alone in his canoe, and I would have respected

him more had he dared to carry out his desire. The coward in the man was too apparent, and yet that very cowardice was proof of treachery. What he hesitated to claim boldly he would attain otherwise if he could. I could place no confidence in his word, nor reliance upon his honor.

However nothing occurred to give Cassion opportunity, nor to tempt me to violate my own pledge. We proceeded steadily upon our course, aided by fair weather, and quiet waters for several days. So peaceful were our surroundings that my awe and fear of the vast lake on which we floated passed away, and I began to appreciate its beauty, and love those changing vistas, which opened constantly to our advance.

We followed the coast line, seldom venturing beyond sight of land, except as we cut across from point to point; and fair as the wooded shore appeared, its loneliness, and the desolation of the great waters began, at last, to affect our spirits. The men no longer sang at their work, and I could see the depression in their eyes as they stared about across ceaseless waves to the dim horizon.

Day after day it was the same dull monotony, crouched in the narrow canoe, watching the movements of the paddlers, and staring about at endless sea and sky, with distant glimpse of wilderness. We lost interest in conversation, in each other, and I lay for hours with eyes closed to the glare of the sun, feeling no desire save to be left alone. Yet there were scenes of surpassing beauty unrolled before us at sunrise and sunset, and when the great silvery moon reflected its glory in the water.

Had companionship been congenial no doubt every league of that journey would have proven a joy to be long remembered, but with Cassion beside me, ever seeking some excuse to make me conscious of his purpose, I found silence to be my most effective weapon of defense. Twice I got away in Père Allouez' canoe, and found pleasure in conversing, although I had no confidence in the priest, and knew well that my absence would anger Cassion.

Our camps occurred wherever night overtook us and we found good landing place. Occasionally we went ashore earlier, and the Indians hunted for wild game, usually with success. In all these days and nights I had no glimpse of De Artigny, nor of his crew. It was not possible for me to question Cassion, for to do so would have aroused his jealous suspicion; but, as he never once referred to their continued absence, I became convinced that it was his orders which kept them ahead. No doubt it was best, as the men soon forgot the tragedy of Hugo Chevet's death, and after the first day I do not recall hearing the murder discussed.

Such deeds were not uncommon, and Chevet had made no friends to cherish his memory. If others suspected De Artigny they felt little resentment or desire to punish him—and doubtless the men had quarreled, and the fatal knife thrust been delivered in fair fight. The result interested them only slightly, and none regretted the loss of the man killed.

We made no entrance into Green Bay, for there was nothing there but a newly established mission station, and perhaps a hunter's camp, scarcely worth our wasting two days in seeking. Besides the night we made camp at a spot marked on the map as Point de Tour, we found waiting us there the advance canoe, and both De Artigny and the chief counseled that our course be south across the mouth of the bay. I sat in my tent and watched them discuss the matter in the red glow of a

fire, but this was my only glimpse of De Artigny, until he led the way the next morning.

Our voyage that day was a long one, and we were often beyond view of land, although we skirted several islands. The lake was stirred by a gentle breeze, yet not enough to delay our passage, and the sky above was cloudless. The Indian chief took the steering paddle in one of our boats, relieving Père Allouez, and De Artigny guided us, his canoe a mere black speck ahead. It was already dark when we finally attained the rocky shore of Port de Morts.

When dawn came De Artigny and his crew had departed by order of Cassion, but the chief remained to take charge of the third canoe. The indifference the younger man had shown to my presence hurt me strangely—he had made no effort to approach or address me; indeed, so far as I was aware, had not so much as glanced in my direction. Did he still resent my words, or was it his consciousness of guilt, which held him thus aloof?

Not for a moment would I believe him wholly uninterested. There had been that in his eyes I should never forget, and so I persuaded myself that he thus avoided me because he feared to anger Cassion. This was not at all in accord with his nature as I understood it, yet the explanation gave me a certain content, and I could find no better. Thus we resumed our journey southward along the shore, but with clouded skies overhead, and the water about us dull and gray.

Chapter XVII

The Break of Storm.

We had no more pleasant weather for days, the skies being overcast and the wind damp and chill. It did not rain, nor were the waves dangerous, although choppy enough to make paddling tiresome and difficult.

A mist obscured the view, and compelled us to cling close to the shore so as to prevent becoming lost in the smother, and as we dare not venture to strike out boldly from point to point, we lost much time in creeping along the curves.

The canoes kept closer together, never venturing to become separated, and the men stationed on watch in the bows continually called to each other across the tossing waters in guidance. Even De Artigny kept within sight, and made camp with us at night, although he made no effort to seek me, nor did I once detect that he even glanced in my direction. The studied indifference of the man puzzled me more than it angered, but I believed it was his consciousness of guilt, rather than any dislike which caused his avoidance. In a way I rejoiced at his following this course, as I felt bound by my pledge to Cassion, and had no desire to further arouse the jealousy of the latter, yet I remained a woman, and consequently felt a measure of regret at being thus neglected and ignored.

However I had my reward, as this state of affairs was plainly enough to Monsieur Cassion's liking, for his humor changed for the better, in spite of our slow progress, and I was pleased to note that his watchfulness over my

movements while ashore noticeably relaxed. Once he ventured to speak a bold word or two, inspired possibly by my effort to appear more friendly, but I gave him small opportunity to become offensive, for the raw, disagreeable atmosphere furnished me with sufficient excuse to snuggle down beneath blankets, and thus ignore his presence.

I passed most of those days thus hidden from sight, only occasionally lifting my head to peer out at the gray, desolate sea, or watch the dim, mist-shrouded coast line. It was all of a color—a gloomy, dismal scene, the continuance of which left me homesick and spiritless. Never have I felt more hopeless and alone. It seemed useless to keep up the struggle; with every league we penetrated deeper into the desolate wilderness, and now I retained not even one friend on whom I could rely.

As Cassion evidenced his sense of victory—as I read it in his laughing words, and the bold glance of his eyes—there came to me a knowledge of defeat, which seemed to rob me of all strength and purpose. I was not ready to yield yet; the man only angered me, and yet I began dimly to comprehend that the end was inevitable—my courage was oozing away, and somewhere in this lonely, friendless wilderness the moment I dreaded would come, and I would have no power to resist. More than once in my solitude, hidden beneath the blankets, I wiped tears from my eyes as I sensed the truth; yet he never knew, nor did I mean he should.

I had no knowledge of the date, nor a very clear conception of where we were, although it must have been either the fourth or fifth day since we left Port du Morts. The night before, we had camped at the mouth of a small stream, the surrounding forest growing down close to the shore, and so thick as to be almost impenetrable. The men had set up my tent so close to the water the waves broke scarcely a foot away, and the fire about which the others clustered for warmth was but a few yards distant.

Wrapped in my blankets I saw De Artigny emerge from the darkness, and approach Cassion, who drew a map from his belt pocket, and spread it open on the ground in the glare of the fire. The two men bent over it, tracing the lines with finger tips, evidently determining their course for the morrow. Then De Artigny made a few notes on a scrap of paper, arose to his feet, and disappeared.

They had scarcely exchanged a word, and the feeling of enmity between them was apparent. Cassion sat quiet, the map still open, and stared after the younger man until he vanished in the darkness. The look upon his face was not a pleasant one.

Impelled by a sudden impulse I arose to my feet, the blanket still draped about my shoulders, and crossed the open space to the fire. Cassion, hearing the sound of my approach, glanced around, his frown changing instantly into a smile.

“Ah, quite an adventure this,” he said, adopting a tone of pleasantry. “The first time you have left your tent, Madame?”

“The first time I have felt desire to do so,” I retorted. “I feel curiosity to examine your map.”

“And waited until I was alone; I appreciate the compliment,” and he removed his hat in mock gallantry. “There was a time when you would have come earlier.”

“Your sarcasm is quite uncalled for. You have my pledge relative to the Sieur de Artigny, Monsieur, which suffices. If you do not care to give me glimpse of your map, I will retire again.”

"*Pouf!* do not be so easily pricked, I spoke in jest. Ay, look at the paper, but the tracing is so poor 'tis no better than a guess where we are. Sit you down, Madame, so the fire gives light, and I will show you our position the best I can."

"Did not De Artigny know?"

"He thinks he does, but his memory is not over clear, as he was only over this course the once. 'Tis here he has put the mark, while my guess would be a few leagues beyond."

I bent over, my eyes seeking the points indicated. I had seen the map before, yet it told me little, for I was unaccustomed to such study, and the few points, and streams named had no real meaning to my mind. The only familiar term was Chicagou Portage, and I pointed to it with my fingers.

"Is it there we leave the lake, Monsieur?"

"Ay; the rest will be river work. You see this stream? 'Tis called the Des Plaines, and leads into the Illinois. De Artigny says it is two miles inland, across a flat country. 'Twas Père Marquette who passed this way first, but since then many have traversed it. 'Tis like to take us two days to make the portage."

"And way up here is Port du Morts, where we crossed the opening into Green Bay, and we have come since all this distance. Surely 'tis not far along the shore now to the portage?"

"*Mon Dieu*, who knows! It looks but a step on the map, yet 'tis not likely the distance has ever been measured."

"What said the Sieur de Artigny?"

"Bah! the Sieur de Artigny; ever it is the Sieur de Artigny. 'Tis little he knows about it in my judgment. He would have it thirty leagues yet, but I make it we are ten leagues to the south of where he puts us. What, are you going already? Faith, I had hopes you might tarry here a while yet, and hold converse with me."

I paused, in no way tempted, yet uncertain.

"You had some word you wished to say, Monsieur?"

"There are words enough if you would listen."

"'Tis no fault of yours if I do not. But not now, Monsieur. It is late, and cold. We take the boats early, and I would rest while I can."

He was on his feet, the map gripped in his hand, but made no effort to stop me, as I dropped him a curtsey, and retreated. But he was there still when I glanced back from out the safety of the tent, his forehead creased by a frown. When he finally turned away the map was crushed shapeless in his fingers.

The morning dawned somewhat warmer, but with every promise of a storm, threatening clouds hanging above the water, sullen and menacing, their edges tipped with lightning. The roar of distant thunder came to our ears, yet there was no wind, and Cassion decided that the clouds would drift southward, and leave us safe passage along the shore. His canoe had been wrenched in making landing the evening before, and had taken in considerable water during the night. This was bailed out, but the interior was so wet and uncomfortable that I begged to be given place in another boat, and Cassion consented, after I had exhibited some temper, ordering a soldier in the sergeant's canoe to exchange places with me.

We were the last to depart from the mouth of the stream where we had made night camp, and I took more than usual interest, feeling oddly relieved to be away from Cassion's presence for an entire day. The man irritated me, insisting on a

freedom of speech I could not tolerate, thus keeping me constantly on defense, never certain when his audacity would break bounds. So this morning it was a relief to sit up, free of my blanket, and watch the men get under way.

We may have proceeded for half a league, when a fog swept in toward the land enveloping us in its folds, although we were close enough to the shore so as to keep safely together, the word being passed back down the line, and as we drew nearer I became aware that De Artigny's boat had turned about, and he was endeavoring to induce Cassion to go ashore and make camp before the storm broke. The latter, however, was obstinate, claiming we were close enough for safety, and finally, in angry voice, insisted upon proceeding on our course.

De Artigny, evidently feeling argument useless, made no reply, but I noticed he held back his paddlers, and permitted Cassion's canoe to forge ahead. He must have discovered that I was not with Monsieur, for I saw him stare intently at each of the other canoes, as though to make sure of my presence, shading his eyes with one hand, as he peered through the thickening mist. This action evidenced the first intimation I had for days of his continued interest in my welfare, and my heart throbbed with sudden pleasure. Whether, or not, he felt some premonition of danger, he certainly spoke words of instruction to his Indian paddlers, and so manipulated his craft as to keep not far distant, although slightly farther from shore, than the canoe in which I sat.

Cassion had already vanished in the fog, which swept thicker and thicker along the surface of the water, the nearer boats becoming mere indistinct shadows. Even within my own canoe the faces of those about me appeared gray and blurred, as the damp vapor swept over us in dense clouds. It was a ghastly scene, rendered more awesome by the glare of lightning which seemed to split the vapor, and the sound of thunder reverberating from the surface of the lake.

The water, a ghastly, greenish gray, heaved beneath, giving us little difficulty, yet terrifying in its suggestion of sullen strength, and the shore line was barely discernible to the left as we struggled forward. What obstinacy compelled Cassion to keep us at the task I know not—perchance a dislike to yield to De Artigny's advice—but the sergeant swore to himself, and turned the prow of our canoe inward, hugging the shore as closely as he dared, his anxious eyes searching every rift in the mist.

Yet, dark and drear as the day was, we had no true warning of the approaching storm, for the vapor clinging to the water concealed from our sight the clouds above. When it came it burst upon us with mad ferocity, the wind whirling to the north, and striking us with all the force of three hundred miles of open sea. The mist was swept away with that first fierce gust, and we were struggling for life in a wild turmoil of waters. I had but a glimpse of it—a glimpse of wild, raging sea; of black, scurrying clouds, so close above I could almost reach out and touch them; of dimly revealed canoes flung about like chips, driving before the blast.

Our own was hurled forward like an arrow, the Indian paddlers working like mad to keep stern to the wind, their long hair whipping about. The soldiers crouched in the bottom, clinging grimly to any support, their white faces exhibiting the abasement of fear. The sergeant alone spoke, yelling his orders, as he wielded steering paddle, his hat blown from his head, his face ghastly with

sudden terror. It was but the glimpse of an instant; then a paddle broke, the canoe swung sideways, balanced on the crest of a wave and went over.

I was conscious of cries, shrill, instantly smothered, and then I sank, struggling hard to keep above water, yet borne down by the weight of the canoe. I came up again, choking and half strangled, and sought to grip the boat as it whirled past. My fingers found nothing to cling to, slipping along the wet keel, until I went down again, but this time holding my breath. My water-soaked garments, and heavy shoes made swimming almost impossible, yet I struggled to keep face above water. Two men had reached the canoe, and had somehow found hold. One of these was an Indian, but they were already too far away to aid me, and in another moment had vanished in the white crested waves. Not another of our boat's crew was visible, nor could I be sure of where the shore lay.

Twice I went down, waves breaking over me, and flinging me about like a cork. Yet I was conscious, though strangely dazed and hopeless. I struggled, but more as if in a dream than in reality. Something black, shapeless, seemed to sweep past me through the water; it was borne high on a wave, and I flung up my hands in protection; I felt myself gripped, lifted partially, then the grasp failed, and I dropped back into the churning water. The canoe, or whatever else it was, was gone, swept remorselessly past by the raging wind, but as I came up again to the surface a hand clasped me, drew me close until I had grip on a broad shoulder.

Chapter XVIII

Alone with De Artigny.

Beyond this I knew nothing; with the coming of help, the sense that I was no longer struggling unaided for life in those treacherous waters, all strength and consciousness left me. When I again awoke, dazed, trembling, a strange blur before my eyes, I was lying upon a sandy beach, with a cliff towering above me, its crest tree-lined, and I could hear the dash of waves breaking not far distant. I endeavored to raise myself to look about, but sank back helpless, fairly struggling for breath. An arm lifted my head from the sand, and I stared into a face bending above me, at first without recollection.

"Lie still a moment," said a voice gently. "You will breathe easier shortly, and regain strength."

I knew my fingers closed on the man's hand convulsively, but the water yet blinded my eyes. He must have perceived this for he wiped my face with a cloth, and it was then I perceived his face clearly, and remembered.

"The Sieur de Artigny!" I exclaimed.

"Of course," he answered. "Who else should it be, Madame? Please do not regret my privilege."

"Your privilege; 'tis a strange word you choose, Monsieur," I faltered, not yet having control of myself. "Surely I have granted none."

“Perchance not, as there was small chance,” he answered, evidently attempting to speak lightly. “Nor could I wait to ask your leave; yet surely I may esteem it a privilege to bring you ashore alive.”

“It was you then who saved me? I scarcely understood, Monsieur; I lost consciousness, and am dazed in mind. You leaped into the water from the canoe?”

“Yes; there was no other course left me. My boat was beyond yours, a few yards farther out in the lake, when the storm struck. We were partially prepared, for I felt assured there would be trouble.”

“You told Monsieur Cassion so,” I interrupted, my mind clearing. “It was to bring him warning you returned.”

“I urged him to land until we could be assured of good weather. My Indians agreed with me.”

“And he refused to listen; then you permitted your canoe to fall behind; you endeavored to keep close to the boat I was in—was that not true, Monsieur?”

He laughed, but very softly, and the grave look did not desert his eyes.

“You noted me then! Faith, I had no thought you so much as glanced toward us. Well, and why should I not? Is it not a man’s duty to seek to guard your safety in such an hour? Monsieur Cassion did not realize the peril, for he knows naught of the treachery of this lake, while I have witnessed its sudden storms before, and learned to fear them. So I deemed it best to be near at hand. For that you cannot chide me.”

“No, no, Monsieur,” and I managed to sit up, and escape the pressure of his arm. “To do that would be the height of ingratitude. Surely I should have died but for your help, yet I hardly know now what occurred—you sprang from the canoe?”

“Ay, when I found all else useless. Never did I feel more deadly blast; no craft such as ours could face it. We were to your left and rear when your canoe capsized, and I bore down toward where you struggled in the water. An Indian got grip upon you as we swept by, but the craft dipped so that he let go, and then I jumped, for we could never come back, and that was the only chance. This is the whole story, Madame, except that by God’s help, I got you ashore.”

I looked into his face, impressed by the seriousness with which he spoke.

“I—I thank you, Monsieur,” I said, and held out my hand. “It was most gallant. Are we alone here? Where are the others?”

“I do not know, Madame,” he answered, his tone now that of formal courtesy. “’Tis but a short time since we reached this spot, and the storm yet rages. May I help you to stand, so you may perceive better our situation.”

He lifted me to my feet, and I stood erect, my clothes dripping wet, and my limbs trembling so that I grasped his arm for support, and glanced anxiously about. We were on a narrow sand beach, at the edge of a small cove, so protected the waters were comparatively calm, although the trees above bowed to the blast, and out beyond the headland I could see huge waves, whitened with foam, and perceive the clouds of spray flung up by the rocks. It was a wild scene, the roar of the breakers loud and continuous, and the black clouds flying above with dizzy rapidity. All the horror which I had just passed through seemed typified in the scene, and I covered my face with my hands.

“You—you think they—they are all gone?” I asked, forcing the words from me.

"Oh, no," he answered eagerly, and his hand touched me. "Do not give way to that thought. I doubt if any in your canoe made shore, but the others need not be in great danger. They could run before the storm until they found some opening in the coast line to yield protection. The sergeant was no *voyageur*, and when one of the paddles broke he steered wrong. With an Indian there you would have floated."

"Then what can we do?"

"There is naught that I see, but wait. Monsieur Cassion will be blown south, but will return when the storm subsides to seek you. No doubt he will think you dead, yet will scarcely leave without search. See, the sky grows lighter already, and the wind is less fierce. It would be my thought to attain the woods yonder, and build a fire to dry our clothes; the air chills."

I looked where he pointed, up a narrow rift in the rocks, yet scarcely felt strength or courage to attempt the ascent. He must have read this in my face, and seen my form shiver as the wind struck my wet garments, for he made instant decision.

"Ah, I have a better thought than that, for you are too weak to attempt the climb. Here, lie down, Madame, and I will cover you with the sand. It is warm and dry. Then I will clamber up yonder, and fling wood down; 'twill be but a short time until we have a cheerful blaze here."

I shook my head, but he would listen to no negative, and so, at last, I yielded to his insistence, and he piled the white sand over me until all but my face was covered. To me the position was ridiculous enough, yet I appreciated the warmth and protection, and he toiled with enthusiasm, his tongue as busy as his hands in effort to make me comfortable.

"'Tis the best thing possible; the warmth of your body will dry your clothes. Ah, it is turning out a worthy adventure, but will soon be over with. The storm is done already, although the waves still beat the shore fiercely. 'Tis my thought Monsieur Cassion will be back along this way ere dusk, and a canoe can scarce go past without being seen while daylight lasts, and at night we will keep a fire. There, is that better? You begin to feel warm?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then lie still, and do not worry. All will come out right in a few hours more. Now I will go above, and throw down some dry wood. I shall not be out of sight more than a few minutes."

From where I lay, my head on a hummock of sand, my body completely buried, I could watch him scale the rocks, making use of the rift in the face of the cliff, and finding no great difficulty. At the top he looked back, waved his hand, and then disappeared among the trees. All was silent about me, except for the dash of distant waves, and the rustle of branches far overhead. I gazed up at the sky, where the clouds were thinning, giving glimpses of faintest blue, and began to collect my own thoughts, and realize my situation.

In spite of my promise to Cassion I was here alone with De Artigny, helpless to escape his presence, or to be indifferent for the service he had rendered me. Nor had I slightest wish to escape. Even although it should be proven that the man was the murderer of my uncle, I could not break the influence he had over me, and now, when it was not proven, I simply must struggle to believe that he could be the perpetrator of the deed. All that I seemed truly conscious of was a relief at

being free from the companionship of Cassion. I wanted to be alone, relieved from his attentions, and the fear of what he might attempt next. Beyond this my mind did not go, for I felt weak from the struggle in the water, and a mere desire to lie quiet and rest took possession of all my faculties.

De Artigny appeared at the edge of the cliff, and called to reassure me of his presence. He had his arms filled with broken bits of wood which were tossed to the sand, and, a moment later, he descended the rift in the wall, and paused beside me.

"No sign of anyone up there," he said, and I felt not regretfully. "The canoes must have been blown some distance down the coast."

"Were you able to see far?"

"Ay, several leagues, for we are upon a headland, and there is a wide sweep of bay below. The shore line is abrupt, and the waves still high. Indeed I saw no spot in all that distance where a boat might make safe landing. Are you becoming dry?"

"I am at least warm, and already feel much stronger. Would it not be best, Monsieur, for us to scale the cliff, and wait our rescuers there, where we can keep lookout?"

"If you feel able to climb the rocks, although the passage is not difficult. A boat might pass us by here and never be seen, or know of our presence, unless we keep up a fire."

I held out my hand to him, and he helped me to my feet. The warmth of the sand while it had not entirely dried my clothing, had given me fresh vigor, and I stood erect, requiring no assistance. With this knowledge a new assurance seemed to take possession of me, and I looked about, and smiled.

"I am glad to know you can laugh," he said eagerly. "I have felt that our being thus shipwrecked together was not altogether to your liking."

"And why?" I asked, pretending surprise. "Being shipwrecked, of course, could scarcely appeal to me, but I am surely not ungrateful to you for saving my life."

"As to that, I did no more than any man might be expected to do," he protested. "But you have avoided me for weeks past, and it can scarcely be pleasant now to be alone with me here."

"Avoided you! Rather should I affirm it was your own choice, Monsieur. If I recall aright I gave you my confidence once, long ago on the Ottawa, and you refused my request of assistance. Since then you have scarcely been of our party."

He hesitated, as though doubtful of what he had best say.

"It was never through indifference as to your welfare," he answered at last, "but obedience to orders. I am but an employee on this expedition."

My eyes met his.

"Did Monsieur Cassion command that you keep in advance?" I asked, "and make your night camps beyond those of the main company?"

"Those were his special orders, for which I saw no need, except possibly his desire to keep us separated. Yet I did not know his reason, nor was it my privilege to ask. Had Monsieur Cassion any occasion to distrust me?"

"I know not as to occasion, Monsieur, but he left Quebec disliking you because of our conference there, and some words La Barre spoke gave him fresh suspicion that you and I were friends, and should be watched. I do not altogether blame the man for he learned early that I thought little of him, and held it no honor to be his

wife. Yet that distrust would have died, no doubt, had it not been fanned into flame by accident.

"I was kept in his boat, and every instant guarded by either himself, or Père Allouez, his faithful servitor, until long after we passed Montreal, and entered the wilderness. That day I met you on the bluff was the first opportunity I had found to be alone. Your crew were beyond the rapids, and Cassion felt there could be no danger in yielding me liberty, although, had the père not been ill, 'tis doubtful if I had been permitted to disappear alone."

"But he knew naught of our meeting?"

"You mistake, Monsieur. Scarcely had you gone when he appeared, and, by chance, noted your footprints, and traced them to where you descended the cliff. Of course he had no proof, and I admitted nothing, yet he knew the truth, and sought to pledge me not to speak with you again."

"And you made such pledge?"

"No; I permitted him to believe that I did, for otherwise there would have been an open quarrel. From then until now we have never met."

"No," he burst forth, "but I have been oftentimes nearer you than you thought. I could not forget what you said to me at that last meeting, or the appeal you made for my assistance. I realize the position you are in, Madame, married by force to a man you despise, a wife only in name, and endeavoring to protect yourself by wit alone. I could not forget all this, nor be indifferent. I have been in your camp at night—ay, more than once—dreaming I might be of some aid to you, and to assure myself of your safety."

"You have guarded me?"

"As best I could, without arousing the wrath of Monsieur Cassion. You are not angry? it was but the duty of a friend."

"No, I am not angry, Monsieur, yet it was not needed. I do not fear Cassion, so long as I can protect myself, for if he attempts evil it will find some form of treachery. But, Monsieur, later I gave him the pledge he asked."

"The pledge! What pledge?"

"That I would neither meet, nor communicate with you until our arrival at Fort St. Louis."

My eyes fell before his earnest gaze, and I felt my limbs tremble.

"*Mon Dieu!* Why? There was some special cause?"

"Yes, Monsieur—listen. Do not believe this is my thought, yet I must tell you the truth. Hugo Chevet was found dead, murdered, at St. Ignace. 'Twas the morning of our departure, and your boat had already gone. Cassion accused you of the crime, as some of the men saw you coming from the direction where the body was found late at night, and others reported that you two had quarreled the evening before. Cassion would have tried you offhand, using his authority as commander of the expedition, but promised not to file charges until we reached St. Louis, if I made pledge—'twas then I gave him my word."

De Artigny straightened up, the expression on his face one of profound astonishment.

"He—he accused me," he asked, "of murder to win your promise?"

"No, Monsieur; he believed the charge true, and I pledged myself to assure you a fair trial."

“Then you believed also that I was guilty of the foul crime?”

I caught my breath, yet there was nothing for me to do but give him a frank answer.

“I—I have given no testimony, Monsieur,” I faltered, “but I—I saw you in the moonlight bending over Chevet’s dead body.”

Chapter XIX

We Exchange Confidences.

My eyes fell before his; I could not look into his face, yet I had a sense that he was actually glad to hear my words. There was no anger, rather happiness and relief in the gray eyes.

“And you actually believed I struck the blow? You thought me capable of driving a knife into the man’s back to gain revenge?”

“Monsieur, what could I think?” I urged eagerly. “It did not seem possible, yet I saw you with my own eyes. You knew of the murder, but you made no report, raised no alarm, and in the morning your boat was gone before the body was found by others.”

“True, yet there was a reason which I can confess to you. You also discovered the body that night, yet aroused no alarm. I saw you. Why did you remain silent? Was it to protect me from suspicion?”

I bent my head, but failed to find words with which to answer. De Artigny scarcely permitted me time.

“That is the truth; your silence tells me it was for my sake you remained still. Is it not possible, Adele, that my purpose was the same? Listen to me, my girl, and have faith in my words—I am not guilty of Hugo Chevet’s death. I did not like the man, it is true, and we exchanged words in anger while loading the boats, but I never gave the matter second thought. That was not the first night of this journey that I sought to assure myself of your safety.

“I know Monsieur Cassion, and of what he is capable, and felt that some time there would occur between you a struggle—so at every camping place, where it was possible, I have watched. It was for that purpose I approached the Mission House. I gained glimpse within, and saw Cassion asleep on a bench, and knew you had retired to the chamber above. I was satisfied, and started to return to the camp. On my way back I found Chevet’s body at the edge of the wood. I discovered how he had been killed—a knife thrust in the back.”

“But you made no report; raised no alarm.”

“I was confused, unable to decide what was best for me to do. I had no business being there. My first impulse was to arouse the Mission House; my second to return to camp, and tell the men there. With this last purpose in view I entered the wood to descend the hill, but had hardly done so when I caught sight of you in the moonlight, and remained there hidden, watching your movements with horror. I saw you go straight to the body, assure yourself the man was dead; then return to

the Mission House, and enter your room by way of the kitchen roof. Do you realize what your actions naturally meant to me?"

I stared at him, scarcely able to speak, yet in some way my lips formed words.

"You—you thought I did it?"

"What else could I think? You were hiding there; you examined the body; you crept secretly in through the window, and gave no alarm."

The horror of it all struck me like a blow, and I covered my eyes with my hands, no longer able to restrain my sobs. De Artigny caught my hands, and uncovered my face.

"Do not break down, little girl," he entreated. "It is better so, for now we understand each other. You sought to shield me, and I endeavored to protect you. 'Twas a strange misunderstanding, and, but for the accident to the canoe, might have had a tragic ending."

"You would never have told?"

"Of seeing you there? of suspecting you? Could you think that possible?"

"But you would have been condemned; the evidence was all against you."

"Let us not talk of that now," he insisted. "We have come back to a faith in each other. You believe my word?"

"Yes."

"And I yours."

His hand clasp tightened, and there was that in his eyes which frightened me.

"No, no, Monsieur," I exclaimed, and drew back quickly. "Do not say more, for I am here with you alone, and there will be trouble enough when Cassion returns."

"Do I not know that," he said, yet releasing my hands. "Still it can surely do no harm for us to understand each other. You care nothing for Cassion; you dislike, despise the man, and there is naught sacred in your marriage. We are in the wilderness, not Quebec, and La Barre has little authority here. You have protected me with your silence—was it not because you cared for me?"

"Yes, Monsieur; you have been my friend."

"Your friend! Is that all?"

"Is that not enough, Monsieur? I like you well; I would save you from injustice. You could not respect me if I said more, for I am Monsieur Cassion's wife by rite of Holy Church. I do not fear him—he is a coward; but I fear dishonor, Monsieur, for I am Adele la Chesnayne. I would respect myself, and you."

The light of conquest vanished from the gray eyes. For a moment he stood silent and motionless; then he drew a step backward, and bowed.

"Your rebuke is just, Madame," he said soberly.

"We of the frontier grow careless in a land where might is right, and I have had small training save in camp and field. I crave your pardon for my offense."

So contrite was his expression I had to smile, realizing for the first time the depth of his interest in my good will, yet the feeling which swayed me was not altogether that of pleasure. He was not one to yield so quietly, or to long restrain the words burning his tongue, yet I surrendered to my first impulse, and extended my hand.

"There is nothing to pardon, Sieur de Artigny," I said frankly. "There is no one to whom I owe more of courtesy than you. I trust you fully, and believe your word, and in return I ask the same faith. Under the conditions confronting us we must

aid each other. We have both made mistakes in thus endeavoring to shield one another from suspicion, and, as a result, are both equally in peril. Our being alone together here will enrage Monsieur Cassion, and he will use all his power for revenge. My testimony will only make your case more desperate should I confess what I know, and you might cast suspicion upon me—"

"You do not believe I would."

"No, I do not, and yet, perchance, it might be better for us both if I made full confession. I hesitate merely because Cassion would doubt my word; would conclude that I merely sought to protect you. Before others—fair-minded judges at St. Louis—I should have no hesitancy in telling the whole story, for there is nothing I did of which I am ashamed, but here, where Cassion has full authority, such a confession would mean your death."

"He would not dare; I am an officer of the Sieur de la Salle."

"The more reason why he would. I know Monsieur Cassion even better than you do. He has conversed with me pretty freely in the boat, and made clear his hatred of La Salle, and his desire to do him evil. No fear of your chief will ever deter him, for he believes La Barre has sufficient power now in this country to compel obedience. I overheard the Governor's orders to keep you under close surveillance, and Cassion will jump at the chance of finding you guilty of crime. Now my broken pledge gives him ample excuse."

"But it was not broken except through necessity," he urged. "He surely cannot blame you because I saved your life."

"I doubt if that has slightest weight. All he will care about is our being here alone together. That fact will obscure all else in his mind."

"He believes then that you feel interest in me?"

"I have never denied it; the fact which rankles, however, is his knowledge that I feel no interest whatever in him. But we waste time, Monsieur, in fruitless discussion. Our only course is a discovery of Hugo Chevet's real murderer. Know you anything to warrant suspicion?"

De Artigny did not answer at once, his eyes looking out on the white crested waters of the lake.

"No, Madame," he said at length gravely. "The last time Chevet was seen alive, so far as I now know, was when he left the boats in company with Monsieur Cassion to return to the Mission House."

"At dusk?"

"It was already quite dark."

"They did not arrive together, and Cassion reported that Chevet had remained at the beach in charge of the canoes."

"You saw Cassion when he arrived?"

"Yes, and before; I was at the window, and watched him approach across the open space. He was alone, and appeared at ease."

"What did he do, and say, after he entered the house?"

"Absolutely nothing to attract notice; he seemed very weary, and, as soon as he had eaten, lay down on the bench, and fell asleep."

"Are you sure he slept?"

"I felt no doubt; there was nothing strange about his actions, but as soon as possible I left the room. You surely do not suspect him?"

“He was the last to be seen with Chevet; they left the beach together, yet the murdered man failed to appear at the Mission House, and Cassion falsely reported him left in charge at the beach.”

“But no one could act so indifferent, after just committing such a crime. When you looked in through the window what did you see?”

“Only the priests about the table talking, and Cassion seemingly sound asleep. Could there be any reason why he should desire the death of Chevet?”

“I know of none. My uncle felt bitter over the concealment of my fortune, and no doubt the two had exchanged words, but there was no open quarrel. Chevet was rough and headstrong, yet he was not killed in fight, for the knife thrust was from behind.”

“Ay, a coward’s blow. Chevet possessed no papers of value?”

I shook my head.

“If so, no mention was ever made to me. But, Monsieur, you are still wet, and must be cold in this wind. Why do you not build the fire, and dry your clothing?”

“The wind does have an icy feel,” he admitted, “but this is a poor spot. Up yonder in the wood shadow there is more warmth, and besides it affords better outlook for the canoes. Have you strength now to climb the bluff?”

“The path did not appear difficult, and it is dreary enough here. I will try.”

I did not even require his aid, and was at the top nearly as soon as he. It was a pleasant spot, a heavy forest growing almost to the edge, but with green carpet of grass on which one could rest, and gaze off across the wide waste of waters. Yet there was little to attract the eyes except the ceaseless roll of the waves, and the curve of the coast line, against which the breakers still thundered, casting high in air their white spray. It was a wild, desolate scene, a wilderness wherever the eyes turned.

I stood silent, gazing to the southward, but there were no canoes visible, although the storm had ceased, and the waves were no longer high enough to prevent their return. They must have been driven below the distant point, and possibly so injured as to make repairs necessary. When I finally turned away I found that De Artigny had already lighted a fire with flint and steel in a little hollow within the forest. He called to me to join him.

“There is nothing to see,” he said, “and the warmth is welcome. You had no glimpse of the boats?”

“No,” I admitted. “Do you really believe they survived?”

“There was no reason why they should not, if properly handled. I have controlled canoes in far worse storms. They are doubtless safely ashore beyond the point yonder.”

“And will return seeking us?”

“Seeking you, at least. Cassion will learn what occurred, and certainly will never depart without seeking to discover if you are alive. The thought that you may be with me will only serve to spur him to quicker action. My fear is he may be delayed by some accident, and we might suffer from lack of food.”

“I had not thought how helpless we were.”

“Oh, we are not desperate,” and he laughed, getting up from his knees. “You forget I am bred to this life, and have been alone in the wilderness without arms before. The woods are full of game, and it is not difficult to construct traps, and

the waters are filled with fish which I will devise some means of catching. You are not afraid to be left alone?"

"No," in surprise. "Where are you going?"

"To learn more of our surroundings, and arrange some traps for wild game. I will not be away long but someone should remain here to signal any canoe returning in search."

I watched him disappear among the trees, without regret, or slightest sense of fear at thus being left alone. The fire burned brightly, and I rested where the grateful warmth put new life into my body. The silence was profound, depressing, and a sense of intense loneliness stole over me. I felt a desire to get away from the gloom of the woods, and climbed the bank to where I could look out once more across the waters.

Chapter XX

I Choose My Duty.

The view outspread before me revealed nothing new; the same dread waste of water extended to the horizon, while down the shore no movement was visible. As I rested there, oppressed by the loneliness, I felt little hope that the others of our party had escaped without disaster.

De Artigny's words of cheer had been spoken merely to encourage me, to make me less despondent. Deep down in his heart the man doubted the possibility of those frail canoes withstanding the violence of the storm. It was this thought which had made him so anxious to secure food, for, if the others survived, and would return seeking us, as he asserted, surely they would appear before nightfall, and there would be no necessity for our snaring wild game in order to preserve life.

De Artigny did not believe his own words; I even suspicioned that he had gone now alone to explore the shore-line; seeking to discover the truth, and the real fate of our companions. At first this conception of our situation startled me, and yet, strange as it may seem, my realization brought no deep regret. I was conscious of a feeling of freedom, of liberty, such as had not been mine since we departed from Quebec. I was no longer watched, spied upon, my every movement ordered, my speech criticized. More, I was delivered from the hated presence of Cassion, ever reminding me that I was his wife, and continually threatening to exercise his authority. Ay, and I was with De Artigny, alone with him, and the joy of this was so deep that I came to a sudden realization of the truth—I loved him.

In a way I must have known this before, yet, not until that moment, did the fact dawn upon me in full acknowledgement. I sank my head on my hands, my breath quickened by surprise, by shame, and felt my cheeks burn. I loved him, and believed he loved me. I knew then that all the happiness of life centered in this one fact; while between us arose the shadow of Cassion, my husband. True I loved him not; true I was to him wife only in name; true our marriage was a thing of shame, yet no less a fact, no less a barrier. I was a La Chesnayne to whom honor was a

religion; a Catholic bowing humbly to the vow of Holy Church; a Frenchwoman taught that marriage was a sacred rite.

The knowledge of my love for De Artigny brought me more fear than pleasure. I dare not dream, or hope; I must escape his presence while I retained moral strength to resist temptation. I got to my feet, not knowing what I could do, yet with a wild conception of returning to the beach, and seeking to find a passage southward. I would go now along the shore, before De Artigny came back, and meet those returning canoes. In such action lay my only safety—he would find me gone, would trace me along the sand, yet before I could be caught, I would have met the others, and thus escape the peril of being alone with him again.

Even as I reached this decision, something arose in my throat and choked me, for my eyes saw just outside the curve of the shore-line, a canoe emerge from the shadows of the bluff. I cannot picture the reaction, the sudden shrinking fear which, in that instant, mastered me. They were coming, seeking me; coming to drag me back into slavery; coming to denounce De Artigny of crime, and demand his life.

I know not which thought dominated me—my own case, or his; but I realized instantly what course Cassion would pursue. His hatred of De Artigny would be fanned into flame by discovery that we were alone together. He possessed the power, the authority to put this man forever out of his way. To save him there remained but one possible plan—he must reach Fort St. Louis, and friends before Cassion could bring him to trial. It was in my power to permit his escape from discovery, mine alone. If I did otherwise I should be his murderer.

I sank down out of sight, yet my decision was made in an instant. It did not seem to me then as though any other course could be taken. That De Artigny was innocent I had no doubt. I loved him, this I no longer denied to myself; and I could not possibly betray the man to the mad vengeance of Cassion. I peered forth, across the ridge of earth concealing me from observation, at the distant canoe. It was too far away for me to be certain of its occupants, yet I assured myself that Indians were at the paddles, while three others, whose dress designated them as whites, occupied places in the boat. The craft kept close to the shore, evidently searching for any sign of the lost canoe, and the man in the stern stood up, pointing, and evidently giving orders. There was that about the fellow's movements to convince me he must be Cassion, and the very sight of him strengthened my resolve.

I turned, and ran down the bank to where the fire yet glowed dully in the hollow, emitting a faint spiral of blue smoke, dug dirt up with my hands, and covered the coals, until they were completely extinguished. Then I crept back to the bluff summit, and lay down to watch.

The canoe rounded the curve in the shore, and headed straight across toward where I rested in concealment. Their course would keep them too far away from the little strip of sand on which we had landed to observe the imprint of our feet, or the pile of wood De Artigny had flung down. I observed this with an intense feeling of relief, as I peered cautiously out from my covert.

I could see now clearly the faces of those in the canoe—the dark, expressionless countenances of the Indians, and the three white men, all gazing intently at the shore line, as they swept past, a soldier in the bow, and Père Allouez and Cassion

at the stern, the latter standing, gripping the steering paddle. The sound of his rasping, disagreeable voice reached me first.

"This is the spot," he exclaimed, pointing. "I saw that headland just before the storm struck. But there is no wreck here, no sign of landing. What is your judgment, Père?"

"That further search is useless, Monsieur," answered the priest. "We have covered the entire coast, and found no sign of any survivor; no doubt they were all lost."

"'Tis likely true, for there was small hope for any swimmer in such a sea." Cassion's eyes turned to the others in the boat. "And you, Descartes, you were in the canoe with the Sieur de Artigny, tell us again what happened, and if this be not the place."

The soldier in the bow lifted his head.

"I know little of the place, Monsieur," he answered gruffly, "though it would seem as if I recalled the forked tree yonder, showing through a rift in the fog. All I know is that one of the paddles broke in the sergeant's canoe, and over they went into the water. 'Twas as quick as that," and he snapped his fingers, "and then a head or two bobbed up, but the canoe swept over them, and down they went again. Sieur de Artigny held our steering paddle, and, in an instant, he swung us that way, and there was the lady struggling. I reached out and touched her, but lost hold, and then the Sieur de Artigny leaped overboard, and the storm whirled us off into the fog. I saw no more."

"You do not know that he reached her?"

"No, Monsieur; the lady sank when I lost my grip; I do not even know if she came up again."

Cassion stood motionless, staring intently at the bluff. I almost thought he must have seen me, but there was no outcry, and finally he seated himself.

"Go on, round the long point yonder, and if there is no sign there we will return," he said grimly. "'Tis my thought they were all drowned, and there is no need of our seeking longer. Pull on boys, and let us finish the job."

They rounded the point, the Père talking earnestly, but the canoe so far away I could not overhear his words. Cassion paid small heed to what he urged, but, at last, angrily bade him be still, and, after a glance into the narrow basin beyond, swung the bow of the canoe about, and headed it southward, the return course further off shore. The Indians paddled with renewed energy, and, in a few moments, they were so far away their faces were indistinguishable, and I ventured to sit on the bank, my gaze still on the vanishing canoe.

So intent was I that I heard no sound of approaching footsteps, and knew nothing of De Artigny's presence until he spoke.

"What is that yonder—a canoe?"

I started, shrinking back, suddenly realizing what I had done, and the construction he might place upon my action.

"Yes," I answered faintly, "it—it is a canoe."

"But it is headed south; it is going away," he paused, gazing into my face. "Did it not come this far?"

I hesitated; he had furnished me with an excuse, a reason. I could permit him to believe the boat had not approached close enough to be signaled. It was, for an

instant, a temptation, yet as I looked into his eyes I could not tell the lie. More, I felt the uselessness of any such attempt to deceive; he would discover the fire extinguished by dirt thrown on it, and thus learn the truth. Far better that I confess frankly, and justify my action.

"The canoe came here," I faltered, my voice betraying me. "It went around the point yonder, and then returned."

"And you made no signal? You let them go, believing us dead?"

I could not look at him, and I felt my cheeks burn with shame.

"Yes, Monsieur; but listen. No, do not touch me. Perhaps it was all wrong, yet I thought it right. I lay here, hidden from view, and watched them; I extinguished the fire so they could not see the smoke. They came so near I could hear their voices, and distinguish their words, yet I let them pass."

"Who were in the canoe?"

"Besides the Indians, Cassion, Père Allouez, and the soldier Descartes."

"He was with me."

"So I learned from his tale; 'twas he who sought to lift me from the water, and failed. Do you realize, Monsieur, why I chose to remain unseen? Why I have done what must seem an unwomanly act?"

He was still gazing after the canoe, now a mere speck amid the waste of waters, but turned and looked into my face.

"No, Madame, yet I cannot deem your reason an unworthy one—yet wait; could it be fear for my life?"

"It was that, and that only, Monsieur. The truth came to me in a flash when I first perceived the canoe approaching yonder. I felt that hate rather than love urged Cassion to make search for us. He knew of your attempt at rescue, and if he found us here together alone, he would care for nothing save revenge. He has the power, the authority to condemn you, and have you shot. I saw no way to preserve your life, but to keep you out of his grip, until you were with your friends at Fort St. Louis."

"You sacrificed yourself for me?"

"'Tis no more than you did when you leaped from the canoe."

"*Pah*, that was a man's work; but now you risk more than life; you peril reputation—"

"No, Monsieur; no more, at least, than it was already imperiled. Cassion need never know that I saw his searching party, and surely no one can justly blame me for being rescued from death. One does not ask, in such a moment, who the rescuer is. I feel I have chosen right, Monsieur, and yet I must trust you to never cause me to regret that I am the wife of Monsieur Cassion."

To my surprise his face brightened, his eyes smiling, as he bowed low before me.

"Your confidence shall not be betrayed, Madame," he said gallantly. "I pledge you my discretion whatever circumstances may arise. There is no cur in the De Artigny strain, and I fight my own battles. Some day I shall be face to face with Francois Cassion, and if then I fail to strike home it will be memory of your faith which restrains my hand. And now I rejoice that I can make your sacrifice less grievous."

"In what way, Monsieur?"

"In that we are no longer entirely alone in our wilderness adventure. I have fortunately brought back with me a comrade, whose presence will rob Cassion of some sharpness of tongue. Shall we go meet him?"

"Meet him! a man, you mean? One rescued from the canoe?"

"No, but more likely to serve us a good turn—a soldier under Monsieur de la Durantaye, who has camp below at the portage to the Des Plaines. Out yonder I ran onto him, bearing some message from Green Bay—an odd fellow, but with a gun at his shoulder, and a tongue with which to tell the truth on occasion. Come, Madame, there is naught now you need to fear."

Chapter XXI

We Decide Our Course.

With a feeling of relief in my heart, a sense that my reputation was safe, and that the good God had set the seal of His approval on the choice made, I accepted De Artigny's outstretched hand, and permitted him to assist me down the bank. The new arrival was just within the edge of the forest, bending over a freshly kindled fire, barely commencing to blaze, and beside him on the grass lay a wild fowl, already plucked of its feathers. So intent was the fellow at his task, he did not even lift his head until my companion hailed him.

"Barbeau, here is the lady of whom I spoke—the wife of Monsieur Cassion."

He stood up, and made me a salute as though I were an officer, as odd a looking little man as ever I had seen, with a small, peaked face, a mop of black hair, and a pair of shrewd, humorous eyes. His dress was that of a *courier du bois*, with no trace of uniform save the blue forage cap gripped in one hand, yet he stood stiff as if on parade. In spite of his strange, uncouth appearance there was that in his face which won my favor, and I held out my hand.

"You are a soldier of France, Monsieur de Artigny tells me."

"Yes, Madame, of the Regiment Carignan-Salliers," he answered.

"I wonder have you served long? My father was an officer in that command—Captain la Chesnayne."

The expression on the man's face changed magically.

"You the daughter of Captain la Chesnayne," he exclaimed, the words bursting forth uncontrolled, "and married to Cassion! how can this be?"

"You knew him then—my father?"

"Ay, Madame; I was with him at the Richelieu, at the village of the Mohawks; and at Bois le Blanc, where he died. I am Jacques Barbeau, a soldier for twenty years; did he not speak to you of me?"

"I was but a girl when he was killed, and we seldom met, for he was usually on campaign. Yet what do you mean by thus expressing surprise at my marriage to Monsieur Cassion?"

He hesitated, evidently regretting his impulsive speech, and glancing from my face into the stern eyes of De Artigny.

“Monsieur, Madame, I spoke hastily; it was not my place.”

“That may be true, Barbeau,” replied the Sieur grimly, “yet the words have been said, and the lady has a right to have them explained. Was there quarrel between her father and this Francois Cassion?”

“Ay, there was, and bitter, although I know nothing as to the cause. Cassion, and La Barre—he whom I now hear is Governor of New France—were alike opposed to Captain la Chesnayne, and but for reports they made he would have been the colonel. He struck Cassion in the mess tent, and they were to fight the very morning the Iroquois met us at Bois le Blanc. ’Twas the talk of the men that the captain was shot from behind.”

“By Cassion?”

“That I cannot say; yet the bullet entered behind the ear, for I was first to reach him, and he had no other enemy in the Regiment Carignan-Salliers. The feeling against M. Cassion was so strong that he resigned in a few months. You never heard this?”

I could not answer, but stood silent with bowed head. I felt De Artigny place his hand on my shoulder.

“The lady did not know,” he said gravely, as though he felt the necessity of an explanation. “She was at school in a convent at Quebec, and no rumor reached her. She is thankful to you for what you have said, Barbeau, and can trust you as her father’s friend and comrade. May I tell him the truth, Madame? The man may have other information of value.”

I looked at the soldier, and his eyes were grave and honest.

“Yes,” I answered, “it can do no harm.”

De Artigny’s hand was still on my shoulder, but his glance did not seek my face.

“There is some low trick here, Barbeau,” he began soberly, “but the details are not clear. Madame has trusted me as a friend, and confided all she knows, and I will tell the facts to you as I understand them. False reports were made to France regarding Captain la Chesnayne. We have not learned what they were, or who made them, but they were so serious that Louis, by royal decree, issued order that his estates revert to the crown. Later La Chesnayne’s friends got the ear of the King, no doubt through Frontenac, ever loyal to him, and by royal order the estates were restored to his ownership. This order of restoration reached Quebec soon after La Barre was appointed Governor, and was never made public. It was suppressed by someone, and La Chesnayne was killed three months later, without knowing that he had won the favor of the King.”

“But Cassion knew; he was ever hand in glove with La Barre.”

“We have cause to suspect so, and now, after listening to your tale, to believe that Captain la Chesnayne’s death was part of a carefully formed plot. By accident the lady here learned of the conspiracy, through overhearing a conversation, but was discovered by La Barre hiding behind the curtains of his office. To keep her quiet she was forced into marriage with Francois Cassion, and bidden to accompany him on this journey to Fort St. Louis.”

“I see,” commented Barbeau shrewdly. “Such marriage would place the property in their control by law. Had Cassion sought marriage previously?”

His eyes were upon me as he asked the question, and I answered him frankly.

"He visited often at the home of my Uncle, Hugo Chevet, and, while he never spoke to me directly of marriage, I was told he desired me for his wife and at the palace he so presented me to Monsieur La Barre."

"On pledge of Chevet, no doubt. Your uncle knew of your fortune?"

"No; he supposed me penniless; he thought it a great honor done me by the favorite of the Governor's. 'Twas my belief he expected some reward for persuading me to accept the offer."

"And this Chevet—what became of him?"

"He accompanied us on the journey, also upon order of Monsieur la Barre, who, no doubt, thought he would be safer in the wilderness than in Quebec. He was murdered at St. Ignace."

"Murdered?"

"Ay, struck down from behind with a knife. No one knows who did it, but Cassion has charged the crime against Sieur de Artigny, and circumstances are such he will find it difficult to prove his innocence."

The soldier stood silent, evidently reviewing in his mind all that had been told him, his eyes narrowed into slits as he gazed thoughtfully at us both.

"*Bah*," he exclaimed at last, "the riddle is not so hard to read, although, no doubt the trick has been well played. I know Governor La Barre, and this Francois Cassion, for I have served under both, while Monsieur la Chesnayne was my Captain, and friend. I was not always a soldier, Madame, and once I sought holy orders, but the flesh was weak. However, the experiment gave me education, and led to comradeship with those above me in station—discipline in the wilderness is not rigid. Many a night at the campfire have I talked with my captain. And I have heard before of this Sieur de Artigny, and of how loyally he has served M. de la Salle. Monsieur de Tonty told the tale to M. de la Durantaye, mayhap a month ago, and I overheard. So I possess faith in him as a gallant man, and have desire to serve you both. May I tell you what, in my judgment, seems best for you to do?"

I glanced at De Artigny, and his eyes gave me courage.

"Monsieur, you are a French soldier," I answered, "an educated man also, and my father's friend. I will listen gladly."

His eyes smiled, and he swept the earth with his cap.

"Then my plan is this—leave Monsieur Cassion to go his way, and let me be your guide southward. I know the trails, and the journey is not difficult. M. de la Durantaye is camped at the portage of the Des Plaines, having but a handful of men to be sure, yet he is a gallant officer, and no enemy to La Salle, although he serves the Governor. He will see justice done, and give you both safe convoy to Fort St. Louis, where De Tonty knows how to protect his officers. Faith! I would like to see Francois Cassion try to browbeat that one armed Italian—'twould be one time he would meet his match."

De Artigny laughed.

"Ay, you are right there, my friend. I have felt the iron-hook, and witnessed how he wins his way with white and red. Yet he is no longer in command at Fort St. Louis; I bring him orders now from Sieur de la Salle bidding him not to interfere with the Governor's lieutenants. 'Tis the Chevalier De Baugis with whom we must reckon."

"True, he has control, and men enough, with Cassion's party, to enforce his order. And he is a hothead, conceited, and holding himself a bit better than others, because he bears commission in the King's Dragoons. 'Tis said that he and De Tonty have had many a stiff quarrel since he came; but he dare not go too far. There are good men there ready to draw sword if it ever come to blows—De Tonty, Boisrondet, L'Espirance, De Marle, and the Algonquins camped on the plain below. They would be tigers if the Italian spoke the word; while I doubt not M. de la Durantaye would throw his influence on the side of mercy; he has small love for the Captain of Dragoons."

I spoke quickly, and before De Artigny could voice decision.

"We will accept your guidance, Monsieur. It is the best choice, and now the only one, for the time is past when we can expect the return of the canoes. Can we not at once begin the journey?"

It was an hour later, after we had eaten, that we left the bluff, and turned westward into the great woods. Barbeau led the way, moving along the bank of a small stream, and I followed, with De Artigny close behind. As we had nothing to carry, except the soldier's rifle and blanket, we made rapid progress, and in less than half an hour, we came to the Indian trail, which led southward from Green Bay to the head waters of the Des Plaines. It was so faint and dim, a mere trace through forest depths, that I would have passed it by unseen, but both my companions were woodsmen, and there was no sign their trained eyes overlooked.

Once in the trail, however, there was no difficulty in following it, although it twisted here and there, in the avoiding of obstacles, ever seeking the easier route. Barbeau had passed this way before, and recalled many a land-mark, occasionally turning, and pointing out to us certain peculiarities he had observed on his journey north. Once he held us motionless while he crept aside, through an intervening fringe of trees to the shore of a small lake, coming back with two fine ducks dangling from his shoulder.

Before dark we halted in a little opening, the grass green underfoot, and a bank of trees all about, and made night camp. There was water near at hand, and the fire quickly built gave cheer to the scene, as the men prepared supper. The adventures of the day had wearied me, and I was very content to lie on Barbeau's blanket, and watch them work. While the soldier cooked, De Artigny swiftly erected a shelter of boughs, within which I was to pass the night. After we had eaten, I retired at once, yet for a long time could not sleep, but lay looking out at the two men seated before the fire smoking. I could hear their voices, and scraps of conversation—De Artigny telling the tale of the exploration of the great river to its mouth in the salt sea, and Barbeau relating many a strange adventure in the wilderness. It was a scene long to be remembered—the black shadows all about, the silence of the great woods, the sense of loneliness, the red and yellow flames of the fire, and the two men telling tales of wild adventure amid the unknown.

At last they grew weary also, and lay down, pillowed their heads on their arms, and rested motionless. My own eyes grew heavy, and I fell asleep.

Chapter XXII

We Meet with Danger.

It was late in the afternoon of the second day when we arrived at the forks of the Chicago river. There was a drizzle of rain in the air, and never saw I a more desolate spot; a bare, dreary plain, and away to the eastward a glimpse of the lake.

A hut of logs, a mere shack scarcely fit for shelter, stood on a slight eminence, giving wide view in every direction, but it was unoccupied, the door ajar. Barbeau, in advance, stared at it in surprise, gave utterance to an oath, and ran forward to peer within. Close behind him I caught a glimpse of the interior, my own heart heavy with disappointment.

If this miserable place had been the headquarters of M. de la Durantaye, evidently it was so no longer. Not a vestige of occupancy remained, save a rotten blanket on the floor, and a broken bench in one corner. Rude bunks lined two walls, and a table hewed from a log stood in the center of the dirt floor. On this was a paper pinned to the wood by a broken knife blade. Barbeau grasped it, and read the writing, handing it back to me. It was a scrawl of a few words, yet told the whole story.

> "Francois Cassion, under commission of Governor la Barre, arrived with party of soldiers and Indians. At his orders we accompany the force to Fort St. Louis.
>
> "De la Durantaye."

"Perhaps it is as well," commented De Artigny lightly. "At least as far as my good health goes; but 'tis like to make a hard journey for you, Madame."

"Is it far yet until we attain the fort?"

"A matter of twenty-five leagues; of no moment had we a boat in which to float down stream, but the trail, as I remember, is rough."

"Perchance there may be a boat," interrupted Barbeau. "There was the wreck of an Indian canoe a mile below here on the Des Plaines, not so damaged as to be beyond repair, and here is a hatchet which we will find useful." He stooped and picked it up from under the bench. "One thing is certain—'tis useless to remain here; they have left the place as bare as a desert. 'Tis my choice that we make the Des Plaines before dark."

"And mine also; are you too greatly wearied, Madame?"

"I? Oh, no! to escape this desolate place I will go gladly. Have men really lived here?"

"Ay, more than once," replied De Artigny. "'Tis said the *engagés* of Père Marquette built this hut, and that it sheltered him an entire winter. Twice I have been here before, once for weeks, waiting the arrival of the GRIFFIN, alone with Sieur de la Salle."

"The GRIFFIN?"

"The ship which was to bring us provisions and men. 'Twas a year later we learned that she went down in the sea, with all aboard. How long was M. de la Durantaye on station here?" he turned to Barbeau.

"'Tis three months since we came from St. Ignace—a dreary time enough, and for what purpose I could never guess. In that time all we have seen has been Indian hunters. I cannot bear to remain even for another night. Are we ready, Madame? Shall we go?"

The Des Plaines was a narrow stream, flowing quietly through prairie land, although bordered along its shores by a thin fringe of trees. We moved down along its eastern bank for perhaps a half league, when we came to the edge of a swamp and made camp. De Artigny built a fire, and prepared my tent of boughs, while Barbeau waded out around a point in search of the wrecked canoe. He came back just at dusk towing it behind him through the shallow water, and the two men managed to drag it far enough up the bank to enable the water to drain out. Later, aided by a flaming torch, we looked it over, and decided the canoe could be made to float again. It required two days' work, however, before we ventured to trust ourselves to its safety.

But the dawn of the third day saw us afloat on the sluggish current, the two men plying improvised paddles to increase our speed, while I busied myself in keeping the frail craft free from water by constant use of a tin cup. This oozed in through numerous ill-fitting seams, but not fast enough to swamp us in midstream, although the amount gained steadily on me in spite of every effort, and we occasionally had to make shore to free us of the encumbrance.

Yet this voyage south along the Des Plaines was far from unpleasant, despite the labor involved and the discomfort of the leaking canoe. The men were full of cheer and hope, some of it possibly assumed to strengthen my courage, but no less effective—Barbeau telling many an anecdote of his long service in strange places, exhibiting a sense of humor which kept us in continuous laughter. He was, indeed, a typical adventurer, gay and debonair in presence of peril, and apparently without a care in the world. De Artigny caught something of the fellow's spirit, being young enough himself to love excitement, and related in turn, to the music of the splashing paddles, numerous incidents of his wild exploits with La Salle and De Tonty along the great rivers of the West.

It all interested me, these glimpses of rough forest life, and I questioned them both eagerly, learning many a truth the histories fail to tell. Particularly did I listen breathlessly to the story of their adventurous first voyage along the Illinois, following the trail of raiding Iroquois, amid scenes of death and destruction. The very horrors pictured fascinated me even, although the grim reality was completely beyond my power of imagination.

'Twas thus we passed the hours of daylight, struggling with the current, forcing our way past obstacles, seeking the shore to drain off water, every moment bringing to us a new vista, and a new peril, yet ever encouraged by memory of those who had toiled along this stream before us. At night, under the stars and beside the blaze of campfire, Barbeau sang rollicking soldier songs, and occasionally De Artigny joined him in the choruses. To all appearances we were absolutely alone in the desolation of the wilderness. Not once in all that distance

did we perceive sign of human life, nor had we cause to feel the slightest uneasiness regarding savage enemies.

Both men believed there was peace in the valley, except for the jealousy between the white factions at Fort St. Louis, and that the various Algonquin tribes were living quietly in their villages under protection of the Rock. De Artigny described what a wonderful sight it was, looking down from the high palisades to the broad meadows below, covered with tepees, and alive with peaceful Indians. He named the tribes which had gathered there for protection, trusting in La Salle, and believing De Tonty their friend—Illini, Shawnees, Abenakies, Miamis, Mohegans—at one time reaching a total of twenty thousand souls. There they camped, guarded by the great fort towering above them, on the same sacred spot where years before the Jesuit Marquette had preached to them the gospel of the Christ. So we had no fear of savages, and rested in peace at our night camps, singing aloud, and sleeping without guard. Every day Barbeau went ashore for an hour, with his rifle, tramping along beside us through the shadowing forest screen, seeking game, and always coming back with plenty. We would hear the sharp report of his gun breaking the silence, and turn the prow of our canoe shoreward and pick him up again.

Owing to the leaking of our canoe, and many difficulties experienced, we were three days in reaching the spot where the Illinois and the Fox rivers joined their waters, and swept forward in one broad stream. The time of our arrival at this spot was early in the afternoon, and, as De Artigny said Fort St. Louis was situated scarce ten miles below, our long journey seemed nearly ended. We anticipated reaching there before night, and, in spite of my fear of the reception awaiting us, my heart was light with hope and expectation.

I was but a girl in years, excitement was still to me a delight, and I had listened to so many tales, romantic, wonderful, of this wilderness fortress, perched upon a rock, that my vivid imagination had weaved about it an atmosphere of marvel. The beauty of the view from its palisades, the vast concourse of Indians encamped on the plains below, and those men guarding its safety—the faithful comrades of La Salle in explorations of the unknown, De Tonty, Boisrondet, and all the others, had long since become to my mind the incarnation of romantic adventure. Wilderness born, I could comprehend and appreciate their toils and dangers, and my dreams centered about this great, lonely rock on which they had established a home. But the end was not yet. Just below the confluence of the rivers there was a village of the Tamaroas, and the prow of our canoe touched the bank, while De Artigny stepped ashore amid a tangle of low-growing bushes, that he might have speech with some of the warriors, and thus learn conditions at the fort. With his foot on the bank, he turned laughing, and held out his hand to me.

“Come, Madame,” he said pleasantly, “you have never seen a village of our western tribes; it will interest you.”

I joined him gladly, my limbs feeling awkward under me, from long cramping in the boat, yet the climb was not difficult, and he held back the boughs to give me easy passage. Beyond the fringe of brush there was an open space, but as we reached this, both paused, stricken dumb by horror at the sight which met our view. The ground before us was strewn with dead, and mutilated bodies, and was

black with ashes where the tepees had been burned, and their contents scattered broadcast.

Never before had I seen such view of devastation, of relentless, savage cruelty, and I gave utterance to a sudden sob, and shrank back against De Artigny's arm, hiding my eyes with my hand. He stood and stared, motionless, breathing heavily, unconsciously gripping my arm.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he burst forth, at last. "What meaneth this? Are the wolves again loose in the valley?"

He drew me back, until we were both concealed behind a fringe of leaves, his whole manner alert, every instinct of the woodsman instantly awakened.

"Remain here hidden," he whispered, "until I learn the truth; we may face grave peril below."

He left me trembling, and white-lipped, yet I made no effort to restrain him. The horror of those dead bodies gripped me, but I would not have him know the terror which held me captive. With utmost caution he crept forth, and I lay in the shadow of the covert, watching his movements. Body after body he approached seeking some victim alive, and able to tell the story. But there was none. At last he stood erect, satisfied that none beside the dead were on that awful spot, and came back to me.

"Not one lives," he said soberly, "and there are men, women and children there. The story is one easily told—an attack at daylight from the woods yonder. There has been no fighting; a massacre of the helpless and unarmed."

"But who did such deed of blood?"

"'Tis the work of the Iroquois; the way they scalped tells that, and besides I saw other signs."

"The Iroquois," I echoed incredulous, for that name was the terror of my childhood. "How came these savages so far to the westward?"

"Their war parties range to the great river," he answered. "We followed their bloody trail when first we came to this valley. It was to gain protection from these raiders that the Algonquins gathered about the fort. We fought the fiends twice, and drove them back, yet now they are here again. Come, Adele, we must return to the canoe, and consult with Barbeau. He has seen much of Indian war."

The canoe rode close in under the bank, Barbeau holding it with grasp on a great root. He must have read in our faces some message of alarm, for he exclaimed before either of us could speak.

"What is it?—the Iroquois?"

"Yes; why did you guess that?"

"I have seen signs for an hour past which made me fear this might be true. That was why I held the boat so close to the bank. The village has been attacked?"

"Ay, surprised, and massacred; the ground is covered with the dead, and the tepees are burned. Madame is half crazed with the shock."

Barbeau took no heed, his eyes scarce glancing at me, so eager was he to learn details.

"The fiends were in force then?"

"Their moccasin tracks were everywhere. I could not be sure where they entered the village, but they left by way of the Fox. I counted on the sand the imprint of ten canoes."

“Deep and broad?”

“Ay, war boats; ’tis likely some of them would hold twenty warriors; the beasts are here in force.”

It was all so still, so peaceful about us that I felt dazed, incapable of comprehending our great danger. The river swept past, its waters murmuring gently, and the wooded banks were cool and green. Not a sound awoke the echoes, and the horror I had just witnessed seemed almost a dream.

“Where are they now?” I questioned faintly. “Have they gone back to their own country?”

“Small hope of that,” answered De Artigny, “or we would have met with them before this, or other signs of their passage. They are below, either at the fort, or planning attack on the Indian villages beyond. What think you, Barbeau?”

“I have never been here,” he said slowly, “so cannot tell what chance the red devils might have against the white men at St. Louis. But they are below us on the river, no doubt of that, and engaged in some hell act. I know the Iroquois, and how they conduct war. ’Twill be well for us to think it all out with care before we venture farther. Come, De Artigny, tell me what you know—is the fort one to be defended against Iroquois raiders?”

“’Tis strong; built on a high rock, and approachable only at the rear. Given time they might starve the garrison, or drive them mad with thirst, for I doubt if there be men enough there to make sortie against a large war party.”

“But the Indian allies—the Algonquins?”

“One war whoop of an Iroquois would scatter them 265 like sheep. They are no fighters, save under white leadership, and ’tis likely enough their villages are already like this one yonder, scenes of horror. I have seen all this before, Barbeau, and this is no mere raid of a few scattered warriors, seeking adventure and scalps; ’tis an organized war party. The Iroquois have learned of the trouble in New France, of La Salle’s absence from this valley; they know of the few fighting men at the Rock, and that De Tonty is no longer in command. They are here to sweep the French out of this Illinois country, and have given no warning. They surprised the Indian villages first, killed every Algonquin they could find, and are now besieging the Rock. And what have they to oppose them? More than they thought, no doubt, for Cassion and De la Durantaye must have reached there safely, yet at the best, the white defenders will scarcely number fifty men, and quarreling among themselves like mad dogs. There is but one thing for us to do, Barbeau—reach the fort.”

“Ay, but how? There will be death now, haunting us every foot of the way.”

De Artigny turned his head, and his eyes met mine questioningly.

“There is a passage I know,” he said gravely, “below the south banks yonder, but there will be peril in it—a peril to which I dread to expose the lady.”

I stood erect, no longer paralyzed by fear, realizing my duty.

“Do not hesitate because of me, Monsieur,” I said calmly. “French women have always done their part, and I shall not fail. Explain to us your plan.”

Chapter XXIII

The Words of Love.

His eyes brightened, and his hand sought mine.

"The spirit of the old days; the words of a soldier's daughter, hey, Barbeau?"

"A La Chesnayne could make no other choice," he answered loyally. "But we have no time to waste here in compliment. You know a safe passage, you say?"

"Not a safe one, yet a trail which may still remain open, for it is known to but few. Let us aboard, and cross to the opposite shore, where we will hide the canoe, and make our way through the forest. Once safely afoot yonder I will make my purpose clear."

A dozen strokes landed us on the other bank, where the canoe was drawn up, and concealed among the bushes, while we descended a slight declivity, and found ourselves in the silence of a great wood. Here De Artigny paused to make certain his sense of direction.

"I will go forward slightly in advance," he said, at last, evidently having determined upon his course.

"And we will move slowly, and as noiselessly as possible. No one ever knows where the enemy are to be met with in Indian campaign, and we are without arms, except for Barbeau's gun."

"I retain my pistol," I interrupted.

"Of small value since its immersion in the lake; as to myself I must trust to my knife. Madame you will follow me, but merely close enough to make sure of your course through the woods, while Barbeau will guard the rear. Are both ready?"

"Perhaps it might be well to explain more clearly what you propose," said the soldier. "Then if we become separated we could figure out the proper direction to follow."

"Not a bad thought that. It is a rough road ahead, heavily wooded, and across broken land. My route is almost directly west, except that we bear slightly south to keep well away from the river. Three leagues will bring us to a small stream which empties into the Illinois. There is a faint trail along its eastern bank which leads to the rear of the Rock, where it is possible for one knowing the way to attain the palisades of the fort. If we can attain this trail before dark we can make the remaining distance by night. Here, let me show you," and he drew with a sharp stick a hasty map on the ground. "Now you understand; if we become separated, keep steadily westward until you reach a stream flowing north."

In this order we took up the march, and as I had nothing to bear except a blanket, which I twisted about my shoulders, I found little difficulty in following my leader. At first the underbrush was heavy, and the ground very broken, so that oftentimes I lost sight entirely of De Artigny, but as he constantly broke branches to mark his passage, and the sun served as guidance, I had small difficulty in keeping the proper direction. To our right along the river appeared masses of isolated rock, and these we skirted closely, always in the shadow and silence of

great trees. Within half an hour we had emerged from the retarding underbrush, and came out into an open wood, where the walking was much easier.

I could look down the aisles of the trees for long distances, and no longer experienced any difficulty in keeping within sight of my leader. All sense of fear had passed away, we seemed so alone in the silent forest, although once I thought I heard the report of a distant gun, which brought back to mind a vision of that camp of death we had left behind. It was a wearisome tramp over the rough ground, for while De Artigny found passage through the hollows wherever possible, yet we were obliged to climb many hills, and once to pick our way cautiously through a sickly swamp, springing from hummock to hummock to keep from sinking deep in slimy ooze.

De Artigny came back and aided me here, speaking words of encouragement, and assuring me that the trail we sought was only a short distance beyond. I laughed at his solicitude, claiming to be good for many a mile yet, and he left me, never realizing that I already staggered from weariness.

However we must have made excellent progress, for the sun had not entirely disappeared when we emerged from the dark wood shadows into a narrow, grassy valley, through which flowed a silvery stream, not broad, but deep. Assured that this must be the water we sought, I sank to the ground, eager for a moment's rest, but De Artigny, tireless still, moved back and forward along the edge of the forest to assure himself of the safety of our surroundings. Barbeau joined him, and questioned.

"We have reached the trail?"

"Ay, beside the shore yonder; see you anything of Indian tepees across the stream to the left?"

"Below, there are wigwams there just in the edge of the grove. You can see the outlines from here; but I make out no moving figures."

"Deserted then; the cowards have run away. They could not have been attacked, or the tepees would have been burned."

"An Algonquin village?"

"Miamis. I had hoped we might gain assistance there, but they have either joined the whites in the fort, or are hiding in the woods. 'Tis evident we must save ourselves."

"And how far is it?"

"To the fort? A league or two, and a rough climb at the farther end through the dark. We will wait here until after dusk, eat such food as we have without fire, and rest up for a bit of venture. The next trip will test us all, and Madame is weary enough already."

"An hour will put me right," I said, smiling at him, yet making no attempt to rise. "I have been in a boat so long I have lost all strength in my limbs."

"We feel that, all of us," cheerily, "but come Barbeau, unpack, and let us have what cheer we can."

I know not when food was ever more welcome, although it was simple enough to be sure—a bit of hard cracker, and some jerked deer meat, washed down by water from the stream—yet hunger served to make these welcome. We were at the edge of the wood, already growing dark and dreary with the shadows of approaching night. The wind, what there was, was from the south, and, if there was any firing

at the fort, no sound of it reached us. Once we imagined we saw a skulking figure on the opposite bank—an Indian Barbeau insisted—but it disappeared so suddenly as to make us doubt our own eyes.

The loneliness and peril of our situation had tendency to keep us silent, although De Artigny endeavored to cheer me with kindly speech, and gave Barbeau careful description of the trail leading to the fort gate. If aught happened to him, we were to press on until we attained shelter. The way in which the words were said brought a lump into my throat, and before I knew the significance of the action, my hand clasped his. I felt the grip of his fingers, and saw his face turn toward me in the dusk. Barbeau got to his feet, gun in hand, and stood shading his eyes.

"I would like a closer view of that village yonder," he said, "and will go down the bank a hundred yards or so."

"'Twill do no harm," returned De Artigny, still clasping my hand. "There is time yet before we make our venture."

He disappeared in the shadows, leaving us alone, and I glanced aside at De Artigny's face, my heart beating fiercely.

"You did not like to hear me speak as I did?" he questioned quietly.

"No," I answered honestly, "the thought startled me. If—if anything happened to you, I—I should be all alone."

He bent lower, still grasping my fingers, and seeking to compel my eyes to meet his.

"Adele," he whispered, "why is it necessary for us to keep up this masquerade?"

"What masquerade, Monsieur?"

"This pretense at mere friendship," he insisted, "when we could serve each other better by a frank confession of the truth. You love me—"

"Monsieur," and I tried to draw my hand away. "I am the wife of Francois Cassion."

"I care nothing for that unholy alliance. You are his only by form. Do you know what that marriage has cost me? Insults, ever since we left Quebec. The coward knew I dare not lay hand upon him, because he was your husband. We would have crossed steel a hundred times, but for my memory of you. I could not kill the cur, for to do so would separate us forever. So I bore his taunts, his reviling, his curses, his orders that were insults. You think it was easy? I am a woodsman, a lieutenant of La Salle's, and it has never before been my way to receive insult without a blow. We are not of that breed. Yet I bore it for your sake—why? Because I loved you."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"'Tis naught to the shame of either of us," he continued, now speaking with a calmness which held me silent. "And I wish you to know the truth, so far as I can make it clear. This has been in my mind for weeks, and I say it to you now as solemnly as though I knelt before a father confessor. You have been to me a memory of inspiration ever since we first met years ago at that convent in Quebec. I dreamed of you in the wilderness, in the canoe on the great river, and here at St. Louis. Never did voyageur go eastward but I asked him to bring me word from you, and each one, bore from me a message of greeting."

"I received none, Monsieur."

"I know that; even Sieur de la Salle failed to learn your dwelling place. Yet when he finally chose me as his comrade on this last journey, while I would have followed him gladly even to death, the one hope which held me to the hardships of the trail, was the chance thus given of seeking you myself."

"It was I you sought then at the home of Hugo Chevet? not service under Francois Cassion? Yet, when we met, you knew me not."

"Nay; I had no thought that you were there. 'Twas told me in Quebec—for what cause I cannot decide—that you had returned to France. I had given up all hope, and that very fact made me blind to your identity. Indeed, I scarce comprehended that you were really Adele la Chesnayne, until we were alone together in the palace of the Intendant. After I left you there, left you facing La Barre; left you knowing of your forced engagement to his commissaire, I reached a decision—I meant to accompany his party to Montreal, find some excuse on the way for quarrel, and return to Quebec—and you."

He paused, but I uttered no word, conscious that my cheeks were burning hotly, and afraid to lift my eyes to his face.

"You know the rest. I have made the whole journey; I have borne insult, the charge of crime, merely that I might remain, and serve you. Why do I say this? Because tonight—if we succeed in getting through the Indian lines—I shall be again among my old comrades, and shall be no longer a servant to Francois Cassion. I shall stand before him a man, an equal, ready to prove myself with the steel—"

"No, Monsieur," I burst forth, "that must not be; for my sake you will not quarrel!"

"For your sake? You would have me spare him?"

"Oh, why do you put it thus, Monsieur! It is so hard for me to explain. You say you love me, and—and the words bring me joy. Ay, I confess that. But do you not see that a blow from your hand struck at Francois Cassion would separate us forever? Surely that is not the end you seek. I would not have you bear affront longer, yet no open quarrel will serve to better our affairs. Certainly no clash of swords. Perhaps it cannot be avoided, for Cassion may so insult you when he sees us together, as to let his insolence go beyond restraint. But I beg of you, Monsieur, to hold your hand, to restrain your temper—for my sake."

"You make it a trial, a test?"

"Yes—it is a test. But, Monsieur, there is more involved here than mere happiness. You must be cleared of the charge of crime, and I must learn the truth of what caused my marriage. Without these facts the future can hold out no hope for either of us. And there is only one way in which this end can be accomplished––a confession by Cassion. He alone knows the entire story of the conspiracy, and there is but one way in which he can be induced to talk."

"You mean the same method you proposed to me back on the Ottawa?"

I faced him frankly, my eyes meeting his, no shade of hesitation in my voice.

"Yes, Monsieur, I mean that. You refused me before, but I see no harm, no wrong in the suggestion. If the men we fought were honorable I might hesitate—but they have shown no sense of honor. They have made me their victim, and I am fully justified in turning their own weapons against them. I have never hesitated in my purpose, and I shall not now. I shall use the weapons which God has put into

my hands to wring from him the bitter truth—the weapons of a woman, love, and jealousy. Monsieur, am I to fight this fight alone?"

At first I thought he would not answer me, although his hand grip tightened, and his eyes looked down into mine, as though he would read the very secret of my heart.

"Perhaps I did not understand before," he said at last, "all that was involved in your decision. I must know now the truth from your own lips before I pledge myself."

"Ask me what you please; I am not too proud to answer."

"I think there must be back of this choice of yours something more vital than hate, more impelling than revenge."

"There is, Monsieur."

"May I ask you what?"

"Yes, Monsieur, and I feel no shame in answering; I love you! Is that enough?"

"Enough! my sweetheart—"

"Hush!" I interrupted, "not now—Barbeau returns yonder."

Chapter XXIV

We Attack the Savages.

It was already so dark that the soldier was almost upon us before I perceived his shadow, but it was evident enough from his first words that he had overheard none of our conversation.

"There are no Indians in the village," he said gruffly, leaning on his gun, and staring at us. "I got across to a small island, along the trunk of a dead tree, and had good view of the whole bank yonder. The tepees stand, but not a squaw, nor a dog is left."

"Were there any canoes in sight along the shore?"

"Only one, broken beyond repair."

"Then, as I read the story, the tribe fled down the stream, either to join the others on the Illinois, or the whites at the fort. They were evidently not attacked, but had news of the coming of the Iroquois, and escaped without waiting to give battle. 'Tis not likely the wolves will overlook this village long. Are we ready to go forward?"

"Ay, the venture must be made, and it is dark enough now."

De Artigny's hand pressed my shoulder.

"I would that I could remain with you, Madame," he said quietly, "but as I know the way my place is in advance. Barbeau must be your protector."

"Nor could I ask for a braver. Do not permit any thought of me to make you less vigilant, Monsieur. You expect to gain the fort unseen?"

"'Tis merely a chance we take—the only one," he explained briefly. "I cannot even be certain the fort is in state of siege, yet, without doubt those warriors who went down the river would be in position to prevent our approaching the rock by

canoe. There is a secret path here, known only to La Salle's officers, which, however, should give us entrance, unless some wandering Iroquois has discovered it by accident. We must approach with the utmost caution, yet I do not anticipate great peril. Barbeau, do not become separated from Madame, but let me precede you by a hundred paces—you will have no trouble following the trail."

He disappeared in the darkness, vanishing silently, and we stood motionless waiting our turn to advance. Neither spoke, Barbeau leaning forward, his gun extended, alert and ready. The intense darkness, the quiet night, the mystery lurking amid those shadows beyond, all combined to arouse within me a sense of danger. I could feel the swift pounding of my heart, and I clasped the sleeve of the soldier's jacket merely to assure myself of his actual presence. The pressure of my fingers caused him to glance about.

"Do not be frightened, Madame," he whispered encouragingly. "There would be firing yonder if the Iroquois blocked our path."

"Fear not for me," I answered, surprised at the steadiness of my voice. "It is the lonely silence which makes me shrink; as soon as we advance I shall have my nerve again. Have we not waited long enough?"

"Ay, come; but be careful where you place your feet."

He led the way, walking with such slow caution, that, although I followed step by step, not a sound reached my ears. Dark as the night was, our eyes, accustomed to the gloom, were able to distinguish the marks of the trail, and follow its windings without much difficulty. Many a moccasined foot had passed that way before us, beating down a hard path through the sod, and pressing aside the low bushes which helped to conceal the passage. At first we followed rather closely the bank of the stream; then the narrow trail swerved to the right, entering a gap between two hills, ever tending to a higher altitude. We circled about large rocks, and up a ravine, through which we found barely room for passage, the walls rising steep and high on either side. It was intensely dark down there, yet impossible for us to escape the trail, and at the end of that passage we emerged into an open space, enclosed with woods, and having a grit of sand under foot. Here the trail seemed to disappear, but Barbeau struck straight across, and in the forest shade beyond we found De Artigny waiting.

"Do not shoot," he whispered. "I was afraid you might misjudge the way here, as the sand leaves no clear trace. The rest of the passage is through the woods, and up a steep hill. You are not greatly wearied, Madame?"

"Oh, no; I have made some false steps in the dark, but the pace has been slow. Do we approach the fort?"

"A half league beyond; a hundred yards more, and we begin the climb. There we will be in the zone of danger, although thus far I perceive no sign of Indian presence. Have you, Barbeau?"

"None except this feather of a war bonnet I picked up at the big rock below."

"A feather! Is it Iroquois?"

"It is cut square, and no Algonquin ever does that."

"Ay, let me see! You are right, Barbeau; 'twas dropped from a Tuscarora war bonnet. Then the wolves have been this way."

"Could it not be possible," I asked, "that the feather was spoil of war dropped by some Miami in flight?"

He shook his head.

"Possible perhaps, but not probable; some white man may have passed this way with trophy, but no Illinois Indian would dare such venture. I have seen them before in Iroquois foray. I like not the sign, Barbeau, yet there is naught for us to do now, but go on. We dare not be found without the fort at daybreak. Keep within thirty paces of me, and guard the lady well."

It was a dense woods we entered, and how Barbeau kept to the trail will ever be to me a mystery. No doubt the instinct of a woodsman guided him somewhat, and then, with his moccasined feet, he could feel the slight depression in the earth, and thus cling to the narrow path. I would have been lost in a moment, had I not clung to him, and we moved forward like two snails, scarcely venturing to breathe, our motions as silent as a wild panther stalking its prey.

Except for a faint rustling of leaves overhead no sound was distinguishable, although once we were startled by some wild thing scurrying across our path, the sudden noise it made causing me to give utterance to a half-stifled cry. I could feel how tense was every muscle in the soldier's body, as he advanced steadily step by step, his gun flung forward, each nerve strained to the utmost.

We crossed the wood, and began to climb among loose stones, finally finding solid rock beneath our feet, the path skirting the edge of what seemed to be a deep gash in the earth, and winding about wherever it could find passage. The way grew steeper and steeper, and more difficult to traverse, although, as we thus rose above the tree limit, the shadows became less dense, and we were able dimly to perceive objects a yard or two in advance. I strained my eyes over Barbeau's shoulder, but could gain no glimpse of De Artigny. Then we rounded a sharp edge of rock, and met him blocking the narrow way.

"The red devils are there," he said, his voice barely audible. "Beyond the curve in the bank. 'Twas God's mercy I had glimpse in time, or I would have walked straight into their midst. A stone dropping into the ravine warned me, and I crept on all fours to where I could see."

"You counted them?"

"Hardly that in this darkness; yet 'tis no small party. 'Twould be my judgment there are twenty warriors there."

"And the fort?"

"Short rifle shot away. Once past this party, and the way is easy. Here is my thought Barbeau. There is no firing, and this party of wolves are evidently hidden in ambush. They have found the trail, and expect some party from the fort to pass this way."

"Or else," said the other thoughtfully, "they lie in wait for an assault at daylight––that would be Indian war."

"True, such might be their purpose, but in either case one thing remains true—they anticipate no attack from below. All their vigilance is in the other direction. A swift attack, a surprise will drive them into panic. 'Tis a grave risk I know, but there is no other passage to the fort."

"If we had arms, it might be done."

"We'll give them no time to discover what we have—a shot, a yell, a rush forward. 'Twill all be over with before a devil among them gets his second breath. Then 'tis not likely the garrison is asleep. If we once get by there will be help in

plenty to hold back pursuit. 'Tis a desperate chance I admit, but have you better to propose?"

The soldier stood silent, fingering his gun, until De Artigny asked impatiently:

"You have none?"

"I know not the passage; is there no way around?"

"No; this trail leads alone to the fort gate. I anticipated this, and thought it all out as I came along. In the surprise at the first attack, the savages will never know whether we be two or a dozen. They will have no guard in this direction, and we can creep almost upon them before attempting a rush. The two in advance should be safely past before they recover sufficiently to make any fight. It will be all done in the dark, you know."

"You will go first, with the lady?"

"No; that is to be your task; I will cover the rear."

I heard these words, yet it was not my privilege to protest. Indeed, I felt that he was right, and my courage made response to his decision.

"If this be the best way possible," I said quietly, for both men glanced questioningly at me, "then do not think of me as helpless, or a burden. I will do all I can to aid you."

"Never have I doubted that," exclaimed De Artigny heartily. "So then the affair is settled. Barbeau, creep forward about the bank; be a savage now, and make no noise until I give the word. You next, Madame, and keep close enough to touch your leader. The instant I yell, and Barbeau fires, the two of you leap up, and rush forward. Pay no heed to me."

"You would have us desert you, Monsieur?"

"It will be every one for himself," he answered shortly. "I take my chance, but shall not be far behind."

We clasped hands, and then, as Barbeau advanced to the corner, I followed, my only thought now to do all that was required of me. I did not glance backward, yet was aware that De Artigny was close behind. My heart beat fiercely, but I was not conscious of fear, although a moment later, I could perceive the dim figures of savages. They were but mere vague shadows in the night, and I made no attempt to count them, only realizing that they were grouped together in the trail. I could not have told how they faced, but there was a faint sound of guttural speech, which proved them unsuspicious of danger. Barbeau, lying low like a snake, crept cautiously forward, making not the slightest noise, and closely hugging the deeper shadow of the bank. I endeavored to imitate his every motion, almost dragging my body forward by gripping my fingers into the rock-strewn earth.

We advanced by inches, pausing now and then to listen breathlessly to the low murmur of the Indian voices, and endeavoring to note any change in the posture of the barely distinguishable figures. There was no alarm, no changing of places, and the success of our approach brought to us new confidence. Once a savage form, appearing grotesque in its blanket, suddenly stood erect, and we shrunk close to the ground in terror of discovery. An instant of agony followed, in which we held our breath, staring through the dark, every nerve throbbing. But the fellow merely stretched his arms lazily, uttered some guttural word, and resumed his place.

Once the gleam of a star reflected from a rifle barrel as its owner shifted position; but nothing else occurred to halt our steady advance. We were within a very few yards of them, so close, indeed, I could distinguish the individual forms, when Barbeau paused, and, with deliberate caution, rose on one knee. Realizing instantly that he was preparing for the desperate leap, I also lifted my body, and braced myself for the effort. De Artigny touched me, and spoke, but his voice was so low it scarcely reached my ears.

"Do not hesitate; run swift, and straight. Give Barbeau the signal."

What followed is to me a delirium of fever, and remains in memory indistinct and uncertain. I reached out, and touched Barbeau; I heard the sudden roar of De Artigny's voice, the sharp report of the soldier's rifle. The flame cut the dark as though it was the blade of a knife, and, in the swift red glare, I saw a savage fling up his arms and fall headlong. Then all was chaos, confusion, death. Nothing touched me, not even a gripping hand, but there were Indian shots, giving me glimpse of the hellish scene, of naked bodies, long waving hair, eyes mad with terror, and red arms brandished, the rifles they bore shining in the red glare.

I saw Barbeau grip his gun by the barrel and strike as he ran. Again and again it fell crunching against flesh. A savage hand slashed at him with a gleaming knife, but I struck the red arm with my pistol butt, and the Indian fell flat, leaving the way open. We dashed through, but Barbeau grasped me, and thrust me ahead of him, and whirled about, with uplifted rifle to aid De Artigny who faced two warriors, naked knife in hand.

"Run, Madame, for the fort," he shouted above the uproar. "To my help, Barbeau!"

Chapter XXV

Within the Fort.

I doubt if I paused a second, yet that was enough to give me glimpse of the weird scene. I saw De Artigny lunge with his knife, a huge savage reeling beneath the stroke, and Barbeau cleave passage to the rescue, the stock of his gun shattered as he struck fiercely at the red devils who blocked his path.

Outnumbered, helpless for long in that narrow space, their only hope lay in a sortie by the garrison, and it was my part to give the alarm. Even as I sprang forward, a savage leaped from the ruck, but I escaped his hand, and raced up the dark trail, the one thought urging me on. God knows how I made it—to me 'tis but a memory of falls over unseen obstacles, of reckless running; yet the distance could have been scarce more than a hundred yards, before my eyes saw the darker shadow of the stockade outlined against the sky.

Crying out with full strength of my voice I burst into the little open space, then tripped and fell just as the gate swung wide, and I saw a dozen dark forms emerge. One leaped forward and grasped me, lifting me partly to my feet.

"*Mon Dieu!* a woman!" he exclaimed in startled voice. "What means this, in Heaven's name?"

"Quick," I gasped, breaking away, able now to stand on my own feet. "They are fighting there—two white men—De Artigny—"

"What, Rene! Ay, lads, to the rescue! Cartier, take the lady within. Come with me you others."

They swept past me, the leader well in advance. I felt the rush as they passed, and had glimpse of vague figures 'ere they disappeared in the darkness. Then I was alone, except for the bearded soldier who grasped my arm.

"Who was that?" I asked, "the man who led?"

"Boisrondet, Francois de Boisrondet."

"An officer of La Salle's? You then are of his company?"

"I am," a bit proudly, "but most of the lads yonder belong with De Baugis. Now we fight a common foe, and forget our own quarrel. Did you say Rene de Artigny was in the fighting yonder?"

"Yes; he and a soldier named Barbeau."

The fellow stood silent, shifting his feet.

"'Twas told us he was dead," he said finally, with effort. "Some more of La Barre's men arrived three days ago by boat, under a popinjay they call Cassion to recruit De Baugis' forces. De la Durantaye was with him from the portage, so that now they outnumber us three to one. You know this Cassion, Madame?"

"Ay, I traveled with his party from Montreal."

"Ah, then you will know the truth no doubt. De Tonty and Cassion were at swords points over a charge the latter made against Rene de Artigny—that he had murdered one of the party at St. Ignace."

"Hugo Chevet, the fur trader."

"Ay, that was the name. We of La Salle's company know it to be a lie. *Sacre!* I have served with that lad two years, and 'tis not in his nature to knife any man in the back. And so De Tonty said, and he gave Cassion the lie straight in his teeth. I heard their words, and but for De Baugis and De la Durantaye, Francois Cassion would have paid well for his false tongue. Now you can tell him the truth."

"I shall do that, but even my word, I fear, will not clear De Artigny of the charge. I believe the man to be innocent; in my heart there is no doubt, yet there is so little to be proven."

"Cassion speaks bitterly; he is an enemy."

"Monsieur Cassion is my husband," I said regretfully.

"Your pardon, Madame. Ah, I understand it all now. You were supposed to have been drowned in the great lake, but were saved by De Artigny. 'Twill be a surprise for Monsieur, but in this land, we witness strange things. *Mon Dieu!* see, they come yonder; 'tis Boisrondet and his men."

They approached in silence, mere shadowy figures, whose numbers I could not count, but those in advance bore a helpless body in their arms, and my heart seemed to stop its beating, until I heard De Artigny's voice in cheerful greeting.

"What, still here, Madame, and the gate beyond open," he took my hand, and lifted it to his lips. "My congratulations; your work was well done, and our lives thank you. Madame Cassion, this is my comrade, Francois Boisrondet, whose

voice I was never more glad to hear than this night. I commend him to your mercy."

Boisrondet, a mere shadow in the night, swept the earth with his hat.

"I mind me the time," he said courteously, "when Rene did me equal service."

"The savages have fled?"

"'Twas short, and sweet, Madame, and those who failed to fly are lying yonder."

"Yet some among you are hurt?"

"Barbeau hath an ugly wound—ay, bear him along, lads, and have the cut looked to—but as for the rest of us, there is no serious harm done."

I was gazing at De Artigny, and marked how he held one hand to his side.

"And you, Monsieur; you are unscathed?"

"Except for a small wound here, and a head which rings yet from savage blows––no more than a night's rest will remedy. Come, Madame 'tis time we were within, and the gates closed."

"Is there still danger then? Surely now that we are under protection there will be no attack?"

"Not from those we have passed, but 'tis told me there are more than a thousand Iroquois warriors in the valley, and the garrison has less than fifty men all told. It was luck we got through so easily. Ay, Boisrondet, we are ready."

That was my first glimpse of the interior of a frontier fort, and, although I saw only the little open space lighted by a few waving torches, the memory abides with distinctness. A body of men met us at the gate, dim, indistinct figures, a few among them evidently soldiers from their dress, but the majority clothed in the ordinary garb of the wilderness. Save for one Indian squaw, not a woman was visible, nor did I recognize a familiar face, as the fellows, each man bearing a rifle, surged about us in noisy welcome, eagerly questioning those who had gone forth to our rescue. Yet we were scarcely within, and the gates closed, when a man pressed his way forward through the throng, in voice of authority bidding them stand aside. A blazing torch cast its red light over him, revealing a slender figure attired in frontier garb, a dark face, made alive by a pair of dense brown eyes, which met mine in a stare of surprise.

"Back safe, Boisrondet," he exclaimed sharply, "and have brought in a woman. 'Tis a strange sight in this land. Were any of our lads hurt?"

"None worth reporting, Monsieur. The man they carried was a soldier of M. de la Durantaye. He was struck down before we reached the party. There is an old comrade here."

"An old comrade! Lift the torch, Jacques. Faith, there are so few left I would not miss the sight of such a face."

He stared about at us, for an instant uncertain; then took a quick step forward, his hand outstretched.

"Rene de Artigny!" he cried, his joy finding expression in his face. "Ay, an old comrade, indeed, and only less welcome here than M. de la Salle himself. 'Twas a bold trick you played tonight, but not unlike many another I have seen you venture. You bring me message from Monsieur?"

"Only that he has sailed safely for France to have audience with Louis. I saw him aboard ship, and was bidden to tell you to bide here in patience, and seek no quarrel with De Baugis."

"Easy enough to say; but in all truth I need not seek quarrel—it comes my way without seeking. De Baugis was not so bad—a bit high strung, perhaps, and boastful of his rank, yet not so ill a comrade—but there is a newcomer here, a popinjay named Cassion, with whom I cannot abide. Ah, but you know the beast, for you journeyed west in his company. *Sacre!* the man charged you with murder, and I gave him the lie to his teeth. Not two hours ago we had our swords out, but now you can answer for yourself."

De Artigny hesitated, his eyes meeting mine.

"I fear, Monsieur de Tonty," he said finally, "the answer may not be so easily made. If it were point of sword now, I could laugh at the man, but he possesses some ugly facts difficult to explain."

"Yet 'twas not your hand which did the deed?"

"I pledge you my word to that. Yet this is no time to talk of the matter. I have wounds to be looked to, and would learn first how Barbeau fares. You know not the lady; but of course not, or your tongue would never have spoken so freely—Monsieur de Tonty, Madame Cassion."

He straightened up, his eyes on my face. For an instant he stood motionless; then swept the hat from his head, and bent low.

"Your pardon, Madame; we of the wilderness become rough of speech. I should have known, for a rumor reached me of your accident. You owe life, no doubt, to Sieur de Artigny."

"Yes, Monsieur; he has been my kind friend."

"He would not be the one I love else. We know men on this frontier, Madame, and this lad hath seen years of service by my side." His hand rested on De Artigny's shoulder. "'Twas only natural then that I should resent M. Cassion's charge of murder."

"I share your faith in the innocence of M. de Artigny," I answered firmly enough, "but beyond this assertion I can say nothing."

"Naturally not, Madame. Yet we must move along. You can walk, Rene?"

"Ay, my hurts are mostly bruises."

The torches led the way, the dancing flames lighting up the scene. There was hard, packed earth under our feet, nor did I realize yet that this Fort St. Louis occupied the summit of a great rock, protected on three sides by precipices, towering high above the river. Sharpened palisades of logs surrounded us on every side, with low log houses built against them, on the roofs of which riflemen could stand in safety to guard the valley below.

The central space was open except for two small buildings, one from its shape a chapel, and the other, as I learned later, the guardhouse. A fire blazed at the farther end of the enclosure, with a number of men lounging about it, and illumined the front of a more pretentious building, which apparently extended across that entire end. This building, having the appearance of a barrack, exhibited numerous doors and windows, with a narrow porch in front, on which I perceived a group of men.

As we approached more closely, De Tonty walking between De Artigny and myself, a soldier ran up the steps, and made some report. Instantly the group broke, and two men strode past the fire, and met us. One was a tall, imposing figure in dragoon uniform, a sword at his thigh, his face full bearded; the other

whom I recognized instantly with a swift intake of breath, was Monsieur Cassion. He was a stride in advance, his eyes searching me out in the dim light, his face flushed from excitement.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is this I hear," he exclaimed, staring at the three of us as though doubting the evidence of his own eyes. "My wife alive? Ay, by my faith, it is indeed Adele." He grasped me by the arm, but even at that instant his glance fell upon De Artigny, and his manner changed.

"Saint Anne! and what means this! So 'tis with this rogue you have been wandering the wilderness!"

He tugged at his sword, but the dragoon caught his arm.

"Nay, wait, Cassion. 'Twill be best to learn the truth before resorting to blows. Perchance Monsieur Tonty can explain clearly what has happened."

"It is explained already," answered the Italian, and he took a step forward as though to protect us. "These two, with a soldier of M. de la Durantaye, endeavored to reach the fort, and were attacked by Iroquois. We dispatched men to their rescue, and have all now safe within the palisades. What more would you learn, Messieurs?"

Cassion pressed forward, and fronted him, angered beyond control.

"We know all that," he roared savagely. "But I would learn why they hid themselves from me. Ay, Madame, but I will make you talk when once we are alone! But now I denounce this man as the murderer of Hugo Chevet, and order him under arrest. Here, lads, seize the fellow."

Chapter XXVI

In De Baugis' Quarters.

De Tonty never gave way an inch, as a dozen soldiers advanced at Cassion's order.

"Wait men!" he said sternly. "'Tis no time, with Iroquois about, to start a quarrel, yet if a hand be laid on this lad here in anger, we, who are of La Salle's Company, will protect him with our lives—"

"You defend a murderer?"

"No; a comrade. Listen to me, Cassion, and you De Baugis. I have held quiet to your dictation, but no injustice shall be done to comrade of mine save by force of arms. I know naught of your quarrel, or your charges of crime against De Artigny, but the lad is going to have fair play. He is no *courier du bois* to be killed for your vengeance, but an officer under Sieur de la Salle, entitled to trial and judgment."

"He was my guide; I have authority."

"Not now, Monsieur. 'Tis true he served you, and was your engagé on the voyage hither. But even in that service, he obeyed the orders of La Salle. Now, within these palisades, he is an officer of this garrison, and subject only to me."

De Baugis spoke, his voice cold, contemptuous.

"You refuse obedience to the Governor of New France?"

“No, Monsieur; I am under orders to obey. There will be no trouble between us if you are just to my men. La Barre is not here to decide this, but I am.” He put his hand on De Artigny’s shoulder. “Monsieur Cassion charges this man with murder. He is an officer of my command, and I arrest him. He shall be protected, and given a fair trial. What more can you ask?”

“You will protect him! help him to escape, rather!” burst out Cassion. “That is the scheme, De Baugis.”

“Your words are insult, Monsieur, and I bear no more. If you seek quarrel, you shall have it. I am your equal, Monsieur, and my commission comes from the King. Ah, M. de la Durantaye, what say you of this matter?”

A man, broad shouldered, in the dress of a woodsman, elbowed his way through the throng of soldiers. He had a strong, good-humored face.

“In faith, I heard little of the controversy, yet ’tis like I know the gist of it, as I have just conversed with a wounded soldier of mine, Barbeau, who repeated the story as he understood it. My hand to you, Sieur de Artigny, and it seems to me, Messieurs, that De Tonty hath the right of it.”

“You take his side against us who hath the authority of the Governor?”

“Pah! that is not the issue. Tis merely a question of justice to this lad here. I stand for fair trial with Henri de Tonty, and will back my judgment with my sword.”

They stood eye to eye, the four of them, and the group of soldiers seemed to divide, each company drawing together. Cassion growled some vague threat, but De Baugis took another course, gripping his companion by the arm.

“No, Francois, ’tis not worth the danger,” he expostulated. “There will be no crossing of steel. Monsieur Cassion, no doubt, hath reason to be angered—but not I. The man shall have his trial, and we will learn the right and wrong of all this presently. Monsieur Tonty, the prisoner is left in your charge. Fall back men—to your barracks. Madame, permit me to offer you my escort.”

“To where, Monsieur?”

“To the only quarters fitted for your reception,” he said gallantly, “those I have occupied since arrival here.”

“You vacate them for me?”

“With the utmost pleasure,” bowing gallantly. “I beg of you their acceptance; your husband has been my guest, and will join with me in exile.”

I glanced at De Tonty, who yet stood with hand on De Artigny’s shoulder, a little cordon of his own men gathered closely about them. My eyes encountered those of the younger officer. As I turned away I found myself confronted by Cassion. The very sight of his face brought me instant decision, and I spoke my acceptance before he could utter the words trembling on his lips.

“I will use your quarters gladly, Captain de Baugis,” I said quietly, “but will ask to be left there undisturbed.”

“Most assuredly, Madame—my servant will accompany you.”

“Then good-night, Messieurs,” I faced Cassion, meeting his eyes frankly. “I am greatly wearied, and would rest; tomorrow I will speak with you, Monsieur. Permit me to pass.”

He stood aside, unable to affront me, although the anger in his face, was evidence enough of brewing trouble. No doubt he had boasted of me to De Baugis,

and felt no desire now to have our true relations exposed thus publicly. I passed him, glancing at none of the others, and followed the soldier across the beaten parade. A moment later I was safely hidden within a two-roomed cabin.

Everything within had an appearance of neatness, almost as if a woman had arranged its furnishings. I glanced about in pleased surprise, as the soldier placed fresh fuel on the cheerful fire blazing in the fireplace, and drew closer the drapery over the single window.

"Madame will find it comfortable?" he said, pausing at the door.

"Quite so," I answered. "One could scarcely anticipate so delightful a spot in this Indian land."

"Monsieur de Baugis has the privilege of Sieur de la Salle's quarters," he answered, eager to explain, "and besides brought with him many comforts of his own. But for the Iroquois we would be quite happy."

"They have proven dangerous?"

"Not to us within the fort. A few white men were surprised without and killed, but, except for shortness of provisions and powder and ball, we are safe enough here. Tomorrow you will see how impregnable is the Rock from savage attack."

"I have heard there are a thousand Iroquois in the valley."

"Ay, and possibly more, and we are but a handful in defense, yet their only approach is along that path you came tonight. The cowardly Illini fled down the river; had they remained here we would have driven the vermin out before this, for 'tis said they fight well with white leaders."

I made no reply, and the man disappeared into the darkness, closing the heavy door behind him, and leaving me alone. I made it secure with an oaken bar, and sank down before the fire on a great shaggy bear skin. I was alone at last, safe from immediate danger, able to think of the strange conditions surrounding me, and plan for the future. The seriousness of the situation I realized clearly, and also the fact that all depended on my action—even the life of Rene de Artigny.

I sat staring into the fire, no longer aware of fatigue, or feeling any sense of sleepiness. The thick log walls of the cabin shut out all noise; I was conscious of a sense of security, of protection, and yet comprehended clearly what the new day would bring. I should have to face Cassion, and in what spirit could I meet him best? Thus far I had been fortunate in escaping his denunciation, but I realized the reason which had compelled his silence—pride, the fear of ridicule, had sealed his lips. I was legally his wife, given to him by Holy Church, yet for weeks, months, during all our long wilderness journey, I had held aloof from him, mocking his efforts, and making light of his endeavors. It had been maddening, no doubt, and rendered worse by his growing jealousy of De Artigny.

Then I had vanished, supposedly drowned in the great lake. He had sought me vainly along the shore, and finally turned away, convinced of my death, and that De Artigny had also perished.

Once at the fort, companioning with De Baugis, and with no one to deny the truth of his words, his very nature would compel him to boast of his marriage to Adele la Chesnayne. No doubt he had told many a vivid tale of happiness since we left Quebec. Ay, not only had he thus boasted of conquests over me, but he had openly charged De Artigny with murder, feeling safe enough in the belief that we were both dead. And now when we appeared before him alive and together, he had

been for the moment too dazed for expression. Before De Baugis he dare not confess the truth, yet this very fact would only leave him the more furious. And I knew instinctively the course the man would pursue. His one thought, his one purpose, would be revenge—nothing would satisfy him except the death of De Artigny. Personally I had little to fear; I knew his cowardice, and that he would never venture to use physical force with me. Even if he did I could rely upon the gallantry of De Tonty, and of De Baugis for protection. No, he would try threats, entreaties, slyness, cajolery, but his real weapon to overcome my opposition would be De Artigny. And there he possessed power.

I felt in no way deceived as to this. The ugly facts, as Cassion was able to present them, would without doubt, condemn the younger man. He had no defense to offer, except his own assertion of innocence. Even if I told what I knew it would only strengthen the chain of circumstance, and make his guilt appear clearer.

De Tonty would be his friend, faithful to the end; and I possessed faith in the justice of De Baugis, yet the facts of the case could not be ignored—and these, unexplained, tipped with the venom of Cassion's hatred, were sufficient to condemn the prisoner. And he was helpless to aid himself; if he was to be saved, I must save him. How? There was but one possible way—discovery of proof that some other committed the crime. I faced the situation hopelessly, confessing frankly to myself that I loved the man accused; that I would willingly sacrifice myself to save him.

I felt no shame at this acknowledgment, and in my heart there was no shadow of regret. Yet I sat there stunned, helpless, gazing with heavy eyes into the fire, unable to determine a course of action, or devise any method of escape.

Unable longer to remain quiet, I got to my feet, and my eyes surveyed the room. So immersed in thought I had not before really noted my surroundings, but now I glanced about, actuated by a vague curiosity. The hut contained two rooms, the walls of squared logs, partially concealed by the skins of wild animals, the roof so low I could almost touch it with my hand.

A table and two chairs, rudely made with axe and knife, comprised the entire furniture, but a small mirror, unframed, hung suspended against the farther wall. I glanced at my reflection in the glass, surprised to learn how little change the weeks had made in my appearance. It was still the face of a girl which gazed back at me, with clear, wide-open eyes, and cheeks flushed in the firelight. Strange to say the very sight of my youthfulness was a disappointment and brought with it doubt. How could I fight these men? how could I hope to win against their schemes, and plans of vengeance?

I opened the single window, and leaned out, grateful for the fresh air blowing against my face, but unable to perceive the scene below shrouded in darkness. Far away, down the valley, was the red glow of a fire, its flame reflecting over the surface of the river. I knew I stared down into a great void, but could hear no sound except a faint gurgle of water directly beneath. I closed the window shutter, and, urged by some impulse, crossed over to the door leading to the other apartment. It was a sleeping room, scarcely more than a large closet, with garments hanging on pegs against the logs, and two rude bunks opposite the door. But the thing which captured my eyes was a bag of brown leather lying on the

floor at the head of one of the bunks—a shapeless bag, having no distinctive mark about it, and yet which I instantly recognized—since we left Quebec it had been in our boat.

As I stood staring at it, I remembered the words of De Baugis, "your husband has been my guest." Ay, that was it—this had been Cassion's quarters since his arrival, and this was his bag, the one he kept beside him in the canoe, his private property. My heart beat wildly in the excitement of discovery, yet there was no hesitation; instantly I was upon my knees tugging at the straps. They yielded easily, and I forced the leather aside, gaining glimpse of the contents.

Chapter XXVII

I Send for De Tonty.

I discovered nothing but clothes at first—moccasins, and numerous undergarments—together with a uniform, evidently new, and quite gorgeous. The removal of these, however, revealed a pocket in the leather side, securely fastened, and on opening this with trembling fingers, a number of papers were disclosed.

Scarcely venturing to breathe, hardly knowing what I hoped to find, I drew these forth, and glanced hastily at them. Surely the man would bear nothing unimportant with him on such a journey; these must be papers of value, for I had noted with what care he had guarded the bag all the way. Yet at first I discovered nothing to reward my search—there was a package of letters, carefully bound with a strong cord, a commission from La Barre, creating Cassion a Major of Infantry, a number of receipts issued in Montreal, a list of goods purchased at St. Ignace, and a roster of men composing the expedition.

At last from one corner of the pocket, I drew forth a number of closely written pages, evidently the Governor's instruction. They were traced in so fine a hand that I was obliged to return beside the fire to decipher their contents. They were written in detail, largely concerned with matters of routine, especially referring to relations with the garrison of the fort, and Cassion's authority over De Baugis, but the closing paragraph had evidently been added later, and had personal interest. It read: "Use your discretion as to De Artigny, but violence will hardly be safe; he is thought too well of by La Salle, and that fox may get Louis' ear again. We had best be cautious. Chevet, however, has no friends, and, I am told, possesses a list of the La Chesnayne property, and other documents which had best be destroyed. Do not fail in this, nor fear results. We have gone too far to hesitate now."

I took this page, and thrust it into my breast. It was not much, and yet it might prove the one needed link. I ran through the packet of letters, but they apparently had no bearing on the case. Several were from women; others from officers, mere gossipy epistles of camp and field. Only one was from La Barre, and that contained nothing of importance, except the writer urged Cassion to postpone marriage until his return from the West, adding, "there is no suspicion, and I can easily keep things quiet until then."

Assured that I had overlooked nothing, I thrust the various articles back, restrapped the bag, and returned to the outer room. As I paused before the fire, someone rapped at the door. I stood erect, my fingers gripping the pistol which I still retained. Again the raps sounded, clearly enough defined in the night, yet not violent, or threatening.

"Who is there?" I asked.

"Your husband, my dear—Francois Cassion."

"But why do you come? It was the pledge of De Baugis that I was to be left here alone."

"A fair pledge enough, although I was not consulted. From the look of your eyes little difference if I had been. You are as sweet in disposition as ever, my dear; yet never mind that—we'll soon settle our case now, I warrant you. Meanwhile I am content to wait until my time comes. 'Tis not you I seek tonight, but my dressing case."

"Your dressing case?"

"Ay, you know it well, a brown leather bag I bore with me during our journey."

"And where is it, Monsieur?"

"Beneath the bunk in the sleeping room. Pass it out to me, and I will ask no more."

"'Twill be safer if you keep your word," I said quietly, "for I still carry Hugo Chevet's pistol, and know how to use it. Draw away from the door, Monsieur, and I will thrust out the bag."

I lowered the bar, opening the door barely wide enough to permit the bag's passage. The light from the fire gleamed on the barrel of the pistol held in my hand. It was the work of an instant, and I saw nothing of Cassion, but, as the door closed, he laughed scornfully.

"Tis your game tonight, Madame," he said spitefully, "but tomorrow I play my hand. I thank you for the bag, as it contains my commission. By virtue of it I shall assume command of this Fort St. Louis, and I know how to deal with murderers. I congratulate you on your lover, Madame—good night."

I dropped into the nearest seat, trembling in every limb. It was not personal fear, nor did I in my heart resent the insult of his last words. De Artigny was my lover, not in mere lip service, but in fact. I was not ashamed, but proud, to know this was true. The only thing of which I was ashamed was my relationship with Cassion; and my only thought now was how that relationship could be ended, and De Artigny's life saved. The paper I had found was indeed of value, yet I realized it alone was not enough to offset the charges which Cassion would support by his own evidence and that of his men. This mere suggestion in La Barre's handwriting meant nothing unless we could discover also in Cassion's possession the documents taken from Chevet And these, beyond doubt, had been destroyed. Over and over again in my mind I turned these thoughts, but only to grow more confused and uncertain. All the powers of hate were arrayed against us, and I felt helpless and alone.

I must have slept finally from sheer exhaustion, although I made no attempt to lie down. It was broad daylight, when I awoke, aroused by pounding on the door. To my inquiry a voice announced food, and I lowered the bar, permitting an

orderly to enter bearing a tray, which he deposited on the table. Without speaking he turned to leave the room, but I suddenly felt courage to address him.

"You were not of our party," I said gravely. "Are you a soldier of M. de Baugis?"

"No, Madame," and he turned facing me, his countenance a pleasant one. "I am not a soldier at all, but I serve M. de Tonty."

"Ah, I am glad of that. You will bear to your master a message?"

"Perhaps, Madame," his tone somewhat doubtful. "You are the wife of Monsieur Cassion?"

"Do not hesitate because of that," I hastened to say, believing I understood his meaning. "While it is true I am legally the wife of Francois Cassion, my sympathies now are altogether with the Sieur de Artigny. I would have you ask M. de Tonty to confer with me."

"Yes, Madame."

"You have served with De Artigny? You know him well?"

"Three years, Madame; twice he saved my life on the great river. M. de Tonty shall receive your message."

I could not eat, although I made the endeavor, and finally crossed to the window, opened the heavy wooden shutters, and gazed without. What a marvelous scene that was! Never before had my eyes looked upon so fair a view, and I stood silent, and fascinated. My window opened to the westward, and I gazed down from the very edge of the vast rock into the wide valley. Great tree tops were below, and I had to lean far out to see the silvery waters lapping the base of the precipice, but, a little beyond, the full width of the noble stream became visible, decked with islands, and winding here and there between green-clad banks, until it disappeared in the far distance. The sun touched all with gold; the wide meadows opposite were vivid green, while many of the trees crowning the bluffs had already taken on rich autumnal coloring. Nor was there anywhere in all that broad expanse, sign of war or death. It was a scene of peace, so silent, so beautiful, that I could not conceive this as a land of savage cruelty. Far away, well beyond rifle shot, two loaded canoes appeared, skimming the surface of the river. Beyond these, where the meadows swept down to the stream, I could perceive black heaps of ashes, and here and there spirals of smoke, the only visible symbols of destruction. A haze hid the distant hills, giving to them a purple tinge, like a frame encircling the picture. It was all so soft in coloring my mind could not grasp the fact that we were besieged by warriors of the Iroquois, and that this valley was even now being swept and harried by those wild raiders of the woods.

I had neglected to bar the door, and as I stood there gazing in breathless fascination, a sudden step on the floor caused me to turn in alarm. My eyes encountered those of De Tonty, who stood hat in hand.

"Tis a fair view, Madame," he said politely. "In all my travels I have seen no nobler domain."

"It hath a peaceful look," I answered, still struggling with the memory. "Can it be true the savages hold the valley?"

"All too true—see, yonder, where the smoke still shows, dwelt the Kaskaskias. Not a lodge is left, and the bodies of their dead strew the ground. Along those meadows three weeks since there were the happy villages of twelve tribes of peaceful Indians; today those who yet live are fleeing for their lives."

"And this fort, Monsieur?"

"Safe enough, I think, although no one of us can venture ten yards beyond the gate. The Rock protects us, Madame, yet we are greatly outnumbered, and with no ammunition to waste. 'Twas the surprise of the raid which left us thus helpless. Could we have been given time to gather our friendly Indians together the story would be different."

"They are not cowards then?"

"Not with proper leadership. We have seen them fight often since we invaded this land. 'Tis my thought many of them are hiding now beyond those hills, and may find some way to reach us. I suspected such an effort last night, when I sent out the rescue party which brought you in. Ah, that reminds me, Madame; you sent for me?"

"Yes, M. de Tonty. I can speak to you frankly? You are the friend of Sieur de Artigny?"

"Faith, I hope I am, Madame, but I know not what has got into the lad—he will tell me nothing."

"I suspected as much, Monsieur. It was for that reason I have sent for you. He has not even told you the story of our journey?"

"Ay, as brief as a military report—not a fact I could not have guessed. There is a secret here, which I have not discovered. Why is M. Cassion so wild for the lad's blood? and how came there to be trouble between Rene, and the fur trader? Bah! I know the lad is no murderer, but no one will tell me the facts."

"Then I will, Monsieur," I said gravely. "It was because of my belief that Sieur de Artigny would refuse explanation that I sent for you. The truth need not be concealed; not from you, at least, the commander of Fort St. Louis—"

"Pardon, Madame, but I am not that. La Salle left me in command with less than a dozen men. De Baugis came later, under commission from La Barre, but he also had but a handful of followers. To save quarrel we agreed to divide authority, and so got along fairly well, until M. Cassion arrived with his party. Then the odds were altogether on the other side, and De Baugis assumed command by sheer force of rifles. 'Twas La Salle's wish that no resistance be made, but, faith, with the Indians scattered, I had no power. This morning things have taken a new phase. An hour ago M. Cassion assumed command of the garrison by virtue of a commission he produced from the Governor La Barre, naming him major of infantry. This gives him rank above Captain de Baugis, and, besides, he bore also a letter authorizing him to take command of all French troops in this valley, if, in his judgment, circumstances rendered it necessary. No doubt he deemed this the proper occasion."

"To assure the conviction, and death of De Artigny?" I asked, as he paused. "That is your meaning, Monsieur?"

"I cannot see it otherwise," he answered slowly, "although I hesitate to make so grave a charge in your presence, Madame. Our situation here is scarcely grave enough to warrant his action, for the fort is in no serious danger from the Iroquois. De Baugis, while no friend of mine, is still a fair minded man, and merciful. He cannot be made a tool for any purpose of revenge. This truth Major Cassion has doubtless learned, and hence assumes command himself to carry out his plans."

I looked into the soldier's dark, clear-cut face, feeling a confidence in him, which impelled me to hold out my hand.

"M. de Tonty," I said, determined now to address him in all frankness. "It is true that I am legally the wife of this man of whom you speak, but this only enables me to know his motives better. This condemnation of Sieur de Artigny is not his plan alone; it was born in the brain of La Barre, and Cassion merely executes his orders. I have here the written instructions under which he operates."

I held out to him the page from La Barre's letter.

Chapter XXVIII

The Court Martial.

De Tonty took the paper from my hand, glanced at it, then lifted his eyes inquiringly to mine.

"'Tis in the governor's own hand. How came this in your possession?"

"I found it in Cassion's private bag last night, under the berth yonder. Later he came and carried the bag away, never suspecting it had been opened. His commission was there also. Read it, Monsieur."

He did so slowly, carefully, seeming to weigh every word, his eyes darkening, and a flush creeping into his swarthy cheeks.

"Madame," he exclaimed at last. "I care not whether the man be your husband, but this is a damnable conspiracy, hatched months ago in Quebec."

I bowed my head.

"Beyond doubt, Monsieur."

"And you found nothing more? no documents taken from Hugo Chevet?"

"None, Monsieur; they were either destroyed in accordance with La Barre's instructions, or else M. Cassion has them on his person."

"But I do not understand the reason for such foul treachery. What occurred back in New France to cause the murder of Chevet, and this attempt to convict De Artigny of the crime?"

"Sit here, Monsieur," I said, my voice trembling, "and I will tell you the whole story. I must tell you, for there is no one else in Fort St. Louis whom I can trust."

He sat silent, and bareheaded, his eyes never leaving my face as I spoke. At first I hesitated, my words hard to control, but as I continued, and felt his sympathy, speech became easier. All unconsciously his hand reached out and rested on mine, as though in encouragement, and only twice did he interrupt my narrative with questions. I told the tale simply, concealing nothing, not even my growing love for De Artigny. The man listening inspired my utmost confidence—I sought his respect and faith. As I came to the end his hand grasp tightened, but, for a moment, he remained motionless and silent, his eyes grave with thought.

"'Tis a strange, sad case," he said finally, "and the end is hard to determine. I believe you, Madame, and honor your choice. The case is strong against De

Artigny; even your testimony is not for his defense. Does M. Cassion know you saw the young man that night?"

"He has dropped a remark, or two, which shows suspicion. Possibly some one of the men saw me outside the Mission House, and made report."

"Then he will call you as witness. If I know the nature of Cassion his plan of trial is a mere form, although doubtless he will ask the presence of Captain de Baugis, and M. de la Durantaye. Neither will oppose him, so long as he furnishes the proof necessary to convict. He will give his evidence, and call the Indian, and perchance a soldier or two, who will swear to whatever he wishes. If needed he may bring you in also to strengthen the case. De Artigny will make no defense, because he has no witnesses, and because he has a fool notion that he might compromise you by telling the whole truth."

"Then there is no hope? nothing we can do?"

"No, Madame; not now. I shall not be consulted, nor asked to be present. I am under strict order from La Salle not to oppose La Barre's officers, and, even if I were disposed to disobey my chief, I possess no force with which to act. I have but ten men on whom I could rely, while they number over forty." He leaned closer, whispering, "Our policy is to wait, and act after the prisoner has been condemned."

"How? You mean a rescue?"

"Ay, there lies the only hope. There is one man here who can turn the trick. He is De Artigny's comrade and friend. Already he has outlined a plan to me, but I gave no encouragement. Yet, now, that I know the truth, I shall not oppose. Have you courage, Madame, to give him your assistance? 'Tis like to be a desperate venture."

I drew a deep breath, but with no sense of fear.

"Yes, Monsieur. Who is the man I am to trust?"

"Francois de Boisrondet, the one who led the rescue party last night."

"A gallant lad."

"Ay, a gentleman of France, a daring heart. Tonight—"

The door opened, and the figure of a man stood outlined against the brighter glow without. De Tonty was on his feet fronting the newcomer, ere I even realized it was Cassion who stood there, glaring at us. Behind him two soldiers waited in the sunshine.

"What is the meaning of this, M. de Tonty?" he exclaimed, with no pretense at friendliness. "A rather early morning call, regarding which I was not even consulted. Have husbands no rights in this wilderness paradise?"

"Such rights as they uphold," returned the Italian, erect and motionless. "I am always at your service, M. Cassion. Madame and I have conversed without permission. If that be crime I answer for it now, or when you will."

It was in Cassion's heart to strike. I read the desire in his eyes, in the swift clutch at his sword hilt; but the sarcastic smile on De Tonty's thin lips robbed him of courage.

"'Tis best you curb your tongue," he snarled, "or I will have you in the guardhouse with De Artigny. I command now."

"So I hear. Doubtless you could convict me as easily."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that your whole case is a tissue of lies."

"Pah! you have her word for it, no doubt. But you will all sing a different song presently. Ay, and it will be her testimony which will hang the villain."

"What is this you say, Monsieur—my testimony?"

"Just that—the tale of what you saw in the Mission garden at St. Ignace. *Sacre*, that shot hits, does it! You thought me asleep, and with no knowledge of your escapade, but I had other eyes open that night, my lady. Now will you confess the truth?"

"I shall conceal nothing, Monsieur."

"'Twill be best that you make no attempt," he sneered, his old braggart spirit reasserting itself as De Tonty kept silent. "I have guard here to escort you to the Commandant's office."

"You do me honor." I turned to De Tonty. "Shall I go, Monsieur?"

"I think it best, Madame," he replied soberly, his dark eyes contemptuously surveying Cassion. "To refuse would only strengthen the case against the prisoner. M. Cassion will not, I am sure, deny me the privilege of accompanying you. Permit me to offer my arm."

I did not glance toward Cassion, but felt no doubt as to the look on his face; yet he would think twice before laying hand on this stern soldier who had offered me protection. The guard at the door fell aside promptly, and permitted us to pass. Some order was spoken, in a low tone, and they fell in behind with rifles at trail. Once in the open I became, for the first time, aware of irregular rifle firing, and observed in surprise, men posted upon a narrow staging along the side of the log stockade.

"Is the fort being attacked?" I asked.

"There has been firing for some days," he answered, "but no real attack. The savages merely hide yonder amid the rocks and woods, and strive to keep us from venturing down the trail. Twice we have made sortie, and driven them away, but 'tis a useless waste of fighting." He called to a man posted above the gate. "How is it this morning, Jules?"

The soldier glanced about cautiously, keeping his head below cover.

"Thick as flies out there, Monsieur," he answered, "and with a marksman or two among them. Not ten minutes since Bowain got a ball in his head."

"And no orders to clear the devils out?"

"No, Monsieur—only to watch that they do not form for a rush."

The Commandant's office was built against the last stockade—a log hut no more pretentious than the others. A sentry stood at each side of the closed door, but De Tonty ignored them, and ushered me into the room. It was not large, and was already well filled, a table littered with papers occupying the central space, De Baugis and De la Durantaye seated beside it, while numerous other figures were standing pressed against the walls. I recognized the familiar faces of several of our party, but before I recovered from my first embarrassment De Baugis arose, and with much politeness offered me a chair.

De Tonty remained beside me, his hand resting on my chair back, as he coolly surveyed the scene. Cassion pushed past, and occupied a vacant chair, between the other officers, laying his sword on the table. My eyes swept about the circle of

faces seeking De Artigny, but he was not present. But for a slight shuffling of feet, the silence was oppressive. Cassion's unpleasant voice broke the stillness.

"M. de Tonty, there is a chair yonder reserved for your use."

"I prefer remaining beside Madame Cassion," he answered calmly. "It would seem she has few friends in this company."

"We are all her friends," broke in De Baugis, his face flushing, "but we are here to do justice, and avenge a foul crime. 'Tis told us that madame possesses certain knowledge which has not been revealed. Other witnesses have testified, and we would now listen to her word. Sergeant of the guard, bring in the prisoner."

He entered by way of the rear door, manacled, and with an armed soldier on either side. Coatless and bareheaded, he stood erect in the place assigned him, and as his eyes swept the faces, his stern look changed to a smile as his glance met mine. My eyes were still upon him, seeking eagerly for some message of guidance, when Cassion spoke.

"M. de Baugis will question the witness."

"The court will pardon me," said De Artigny. "The witness to be heard is Madame?"

"Certainly; what means your interruption?"

"To spare the lady unnecessary embarrassment. She is my friend, and, no doubt, may find it difficult to testify against me. I merely venture to ask her to give this court the exact truth."

"Your words are impertinent."

"No, M. de Baugis," I broke in, understanding all that was meant. "Sieur de Artigny has spoken in kindness, and has my thanks. I am ready now to bear witness frankly."

Cassion leaned over whispering, but De Baugis merely frowned, and shook his head, his eyes on my face. I felt the friendly touch of M. de Tonty's hand on my shoulder, and the slight pressure brought me courage.

"What is it you desire me to tell, Monsieur?"

"The story of your midnight visit to the Mission garden at St. Ignace, the night Hugo Chevet was killed. Tell it in your own words, Madame."

As I began my voice trembled, and I was obliged to grip the arms of the chair to keep myself firm. There was a mist before my eyes, and I saw only De Artigny's face, as he leaned forward eagerly listening. Not even he realized all I had witnessed that night, and yet I must tell the truth—the whole truth, even though the telling cost his life. The words came faster, and my nerves ceased to throb. I read sympathy in De Baugis' eyes, and addressed him alone. Twice he asked me questions, in so kindly a manner as to win instant reply, and once he checked Cassion when he attempted to interrupt, his voice stern with authority. I told the story simply, plainly, with no attempt at equivocation, and when I ceased speaking the room was as silent as a tomb. De Baugis sat motionless, but Cassion stared at me across the table, his face dark with passion.

"Wait," he cried as though thinking me about to rise. "There are questions yet."

"Monsieur," said De Baugis coldly. "If there are questions it is my place to ask them."

"Ay," angrily beating his hand on the board, "but it is plain to be seen the woman has bewitched you. No, I will not be denied; I am Commandant here, and

with force enough behind me to make my will law. Scowl if you will, but here is La Barre's commission, and I dare you ignore it. So answer me, Madame—you saw De Artigny bend over the body of Chevet—was your uncle then dead?"

"I know not, Monsieur; but there was no movement."

"Why did you make no report?—was it to shield De Artigny?"

I hesitated, yet the answer had to be made.

"The Sieur de Artigny was my friend, Monsieur. I did not believe him guilty, yet my evidence would have cast suspicion upon him. I felt it best to remain still, and wait."

"You suspected another?"

"Not then, Monsieur, but since."

Cassion sat silent, not overly pleased with my reply, but De Baugis smiled grimly.

"By my faith," he said, "the tale gathers interest. You have grown to suspicion another since, Madame—dare you name the man?"

My eyes sought the face of De Tonty, and he nodded gravely.

"It can do no harm, Madame," he muttered softly. "Put the paper in De Baugis' hand."

I drew it, crumpled, from out the bosom of my dress, rose to my feet, and held it forth to the Captain of Dragoons. He grasped it wonderingly.

"What is this, Madame?"

"One page from a letter of instruction. Read it, Monsieur; you will recognize the handwriting."

Chapter XXIX

Condemned.

He opened the paper gravely, shadowing the page with one hand so that Cassion was prevented from seeing the words. He read slowly, a frown on his face.

"'Tis the writing of Governor La Barre, although unsigned," he said at last.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"How came the page in your possession?"

"I removed it last night from a leather bag found beneath the sleeping bunk in the quarters assigned me."

"Do you know whose bag it was?"

"Certainly; it was in the canoe with me all the way from Quebec—M. Cassion's."

"Your husband?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

De Baugis' eyes seemed to darken as he gazed at me; then his glance fell upon Cassion, who was leaning forward, his mouth open, his face ashen gray. He straightened up as he met De Baugis' eyes, and gave vent to an irritating laugh.

"*Sacre*, 'tis quite melodramatic," he exclaimed harshly. "But of little value else. I acknowledge the letter, M. de Baugis, but it bears no relation to this affair.

Perchance it was unhappily worded, so that this woman, eager to save her lover from punishment—"

De Tonty was on his feet, his sword half drawn.

"'Tis a foul lie," he thundered hotly. "I will not stand silent before such words."

"Messieurs," and De Baugis struck the table. "This is a court, not a mess room. Be seated, M. de Tonty; no one in my presence will be permitted to besmirch the honor of Captain la Chesnayne's daughter. Yet I must agree with Major Cassion that this letter in no way proves that he resorted to violence, or was even urged to do so. The governor in all probability suggested other means. I could not be led to believe he countenanced the commission of crime, and shall ask to read the remainder of his letter before rendering decision. You found no other documents, Madame?"

"None bearing on this case."

"The papers supposed to be taken from the dead body of Chevet?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Then I cannot see that the status of the prisoner is changed, or that we have any reason to charge the crime to another. You are excused, Madame, while we listen to such other witnesses as may be called."

"You wish me to retire?"

"I would prefer you do so."

I arose to my feet, hesitating and uncertain. It was evident enough that the court intended to convict the prisoner. All the hatred and dislike engendered by years of controversy with La Salle, all the quarrels and misunderstandings of the past few months between the two rival commanders at the fort, was now finding natural outlet in this trial of Rene de Artigny. He was officer of La Salle, friend of De Tonty, and through his conviction they could strike at the men they both hated and feared. More, they realized also that such action would please La Barre. Whatever else had been accomplished by my exhibit of the governor's letter, it had clearly shown De Baugis that his master desired the overthrow of the young explorer. And while he felt slight friendship for Cassion, he was still La Barre's man, and would obey his orders. He wished me out of the way for a purpose. What purpose? That I might not hear the lying testimony of those soldiers and Indians, who would swear as they were told.

Tears misted my eyes, so the faces about me were blurred, but, before I could find words in which to voice my indignation, De Tonty stood beside me, and grasped my arm.

"There is no use, Madame," he said coldly enough, although his voice shook. "You only invite insult when you deal with such curs. They represent their master, and have made verdict already—let us go."

De Baugis, Cassion, De la Durantaye were upon their feet, but the dragoon first found voice.

"Were those words addressed to me, M. de Tonty?"

"Ay, and why not! You are no more than La Barre's dog. Listen to me, all three of you. 'Twas Sieur de la Salle's orders that I open the gates of this fort to your entrance, and that I treat you courteously. I have done so, although you took my kindness to be sign of weakness, and have lorded it mightily since you came. But this is the end; from now it is war between us, Messieurs, and we will fight in the

open. Convict Rene de Artigny from the lies of these hirelings, and you pay the reckoning at the point of my sword. I make no threat, but this is the pledged word of Henri de Tonty. Make passage there! Come, Madame."

No one stopped us; no voice answered him. Almost before I realized the action, we were outside in the sunlight, and he was smiling into my face, his dark eyes full of cheer.

"It will make them pause and think—what I said," he exclaimed, "yet will not change the result."

"They will convict?"

"Beyond doubt, Madame. They are La Barre's men, and hold commission only at his pleasure. With M. de la Durantaye it is different, for he was soldier of Frontenac's, yet I have no hope he will dare stand out against the rest. We must find another way to save the lad, but when I leave you at the door yonder I am out of it."

"You, Monsieur! what can I hope to accomplish without your aid?"

"Far more than with it, especially if I furnish a good substitute. I shall be watched now, every step I take. 'Tis like enough De Baugis will send me challenge, though the danger that Cassion would do so is slight. It is the latter who will have me watched. No, Madame, Boisrondet is the lad who must find a way out for the prisoner; they will never suspicion him, and the boy will enjoy the trick. Tonight, when the fort becomes quiet, he will find way to explain his plans. Have your room dark, and the window open."

"There is but one, Monsieur, outward, above the precipice."

"That will be his choice; he can reach you thus unseen. 'Tis quite possible a guard may be placed at your door."

He left me, and walked straight across the parade to his own quarters, an erect, manly figure in the sun, his long black hair falling to his shoulders. I drew a chair beside the door, which I left partially open, so that I might view the scene without. There was no firing now, although soldiers were grouped along the western stockade, keeping guard over the gate. I sat there for perhaps an hour, my thoughts sad enough, yet unconsciously gaining courage and hope from the memory of De Tonty's words of confidence. He was not a man to fail in any deed of daring, and I had already seen enough of this young Boisrondet, and heard enough of his exploits, to feel implicit trust in his plans of rescue. Occasionally a soldier of the garrison, or a *courier du bois*, of La Salle's company, passed, glancing at me curiously, yet I recognized no familiar face, and made no attempt to speak, lest the man might prove an enemy. I could see the door of the guardhouse, and, at last, those in attendance at the trial emerged, talking gravely, as they scattered in various directions. The three officers came forth together, proceeding directly across toward De Tonty's office, evidently with some purpose in view. No doubt, angered at his words, they sought satisfaction. I watched until they disappeared within the distant doorway, De Baugis the first to enter. A moment later one of the soldiers who had accompanied us from Quebec, a rather pleasant-faced lad, whose injured hand I had dressed at St. Ignace, approached where I sat, and lifted his hand in salute.

"A moment, Jules," I said swiftly. "You were at the trial?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And the result?"

"The Sieur de Artigny was held guilty, Madame," he said regretfully, glancing about as though to assure himself alone. "The three officers agreed on the verdict, although I know some of the witnesses lied."

"You know—who?"

"My own mate for one—Georges Descartes; he swore to seeing De Artigny follow Chevet from the boats, and that was not true, for we were together all that day. I would have said so, but the court bade me be still."

"Ay, they were not seeking such testimony. No matter what you said, Jules, De Artigny would have been condemned—it was La Barre's orders."

"Yes, Madame, so I thought."

"Did the Sieur de Artigny speak?"

"A few words, Madame, until M. Cassion ordered him to remain still. Then M. de Baugis pronounced sentence—it was that he be shot tomorrow."

"The hour?"

"I heard none mentioned, Madame."

"And a purpose in that also to my mind. This gives them twenty-four hours in which to consummate murder. They fear De Tonty and his men may attempt rescue; 'tis to find out the three have gone now to his quarters. That is all, Jules; you had best not be seen talking here with me."

I closed the door, and dropped the bar securely into place. I knew the worst now, and felt sick and faint. Tears would not come to relieve, yet it seemed as though my brain ceased working, as if I had lost all physical and mental power. I know not how long I sat there, dazed, incompetent to even express the vague thoughts which flashed through my brain. A rapping on the door aroused me. The noise, the insistent raps awoke me as from sleep.

"Who wishes entrance?"

"I—Cassion; I demand speech with you."

"For what purpose, Monsieur?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Does a man have to give excuse for desiring to speak with his own wife? Open the door, or I'll have it broken in. Have you not yet learned I am master here?"

I drew the bar, no longer with any sense of fear, but impelled by a desire to hear the man's message. I stepped back, taking refuge behind the table, as the door opened, and he strode in, glancing first at me, then suspiciously about the apartment.

"You are alone?"

"Assuredly, Monsieur; did you suspect others to be present?"

"Hell's fire! How did I know; you have time enough to spare for others, although I have had no word with you since you came. I come now only to tell you the news."

"If it be the condemnation of Sieur de Artigny, you may spare your words."

"You know that! Who brought you the message?"

"What difference, Monsieur? I would know the result without messenger. You have done your master's will. What said De Tonty when you told him?"

Cassion laughed, as though the memory was pleasant.

"Faith, Madame, if you base your hopes there on rescue you'll scarce meet with great result. De Tonty is all bark. *Mon Dieu!* I went in to hold him to account for his insult, and the fellow met us with such gracious speech, that the four of us drank together like old comrades. The others are there yet, but I had a proposition to make you—so I left them."

"A proposition, Monsieur?"

"Ay, a declaration of peace, if you will. Listen Adele, for this is the last time I speak you thus fairly. I have this De Artigny just where I want him now. His life is in my hands. I can squeeze it out like that; or I can open my fingers, and let him go. Now you are to decide which it is to be. Here is where you choose, between that forest brat and me."

"Choose between you? Monsieur you must make your meaning more clear."

"*Mon Dieu*, is it not clear already? Then I will make it so. You are my wife by law of Holy Church. Never have you loved me, yet I can pass that by, if you grant me a husband's right. This De Artigny has come between us, and now his life is in my hands. I know not that you love the brat, yet you have that interest in him which would prevent forgiveness of me if I show no mercy. So now I come and offer you his life, if you consent to be my wife in truth. Is that fair?"

"It may so sound," I answered calmly, "yet the sacrifice is all mine. How would you save the man?"

"By affording him opportunity to escape during the night; first accepting his pledge never to see you again."

"Think you he would give such pledge?"

Cassion laughed sarcastically.

"Bah, what man would not to save his life! It is for you to speak the word."

I stood silent, hesitating to give final answer. Had I truly believed De Artigny's case hopeless I might have yielded, and made pledge. But as I gazed into Cassion's face, smiling with assurance of victory, all my dislike of the man returned, and I shrank back in horror. The sacrifice was too much, too terrible; besides I had faith in the promises of De Tonty, in the daring of Boisrondet. I would trust them, aye, and myself, to find some other way of rescue.

"Monsieur," I said firmly, "I understand your proposition, and refuse it. I will make no pledge."

"You leave him to die?"

"If it be God's will. I cannot dishonor myself, even to save life. You have my answer. I bid you go."

Never did I see such look of beastly rage in the face of any man. He had lost power of speech, but his fingers clutched as though he had my throat in their grip. Frightened, I stepped back, and Chevet's pistol gleamed in my hand.

"You hear me, Monsieur—go!"

Chapter XXX

I Choose My Future.

He backed out the door, growling and threatening. I caught little of what he said, nor did I in the least care. All I asked, or desired, was to be alone, to be free of his presence. I swung the door in his very face, and fastened the bar. Through the thick wood his voice still penetrated in words of hatred. Then it ceased, and I was alone in the silence, sinking down nerveless beside the table, my face buried in my hands.

I had done right; I knew I had done right, yet the reaction left me weak and pulseless. I saw now clearly what must be done. Never could I live with this Cassion; never again could I acknowledge him as husband. Right or wrong, whatever the Church might do, or the world might say, I had come to the parting of the ways; here and now I must choose my own life, obey the dictates of my own conscience. I had been wedded by fraud to a man I despised; my hatred had grown until now I knew that I would rather be dead than live in his presence.

If this state of mind was sin, it was beyond my power to rid myself of the curse; if I was already condemned of Holy Church because of failure to abide by her decree, then there was naught left but for me to seek my own happiness, and the happiness of the man I loved.

I lifted my head, strengthened by the very thought, the red blood tingling again through my veins. The truth was mine; I felt no inclination to obscure it. The time had come for rejoicing, and action. I loved Rene de Artigny, and, although he had never spoken the word, I knew he loved me. Tomorrow he would be in exile, a wanderer of the woods, an escaped prisoner, under condemnation of death, never again safe within reach of French authority. Ay, but he should not go alone; in the depths of those forests, beyond the arm of the law, beyond even the grasp of the Church, we should be together. In our own hearts love would justify. Without a qualm of conscience, without even a lingering doubt, I made the choice, the final decision.

I know not how long it took me to think this all out, until I had accepted fate; but I do know the decision brought happiness and courage. Food was brought me by a strange Indian, apparently unable to speak French; nor would he even enter the room, silently handing me the platter through the open door. Two sentries stood just without—soldiers of De Baugis, I guessed, as their features were unfamiliar. They gazed at me curiously, as I stood in the doorway, but without changing their attitudes. Plainly I was held prisoner also; M. Cassion's threat was being put into execution. This knowledge merely served to strengthen my decision, and I closed, and barred the door again, smiling as I did so.

It grew dusk while I made almost vain effort to eat, and, at last, pushing the pewter plate away, I crossed over, and cautiously opened the wooden shutter of the window. The red light of the sunset still illumined the western sky, and found glorious reflection along the surface of the river. It was a dizzy drop to the bed of the stream below, but Indians were on the opposite bank, beyond rifle shot, in considerable force, a half-dozen canoes drawn up on the sandy shore, and several fires burning. They were too far away for me to judge their tribe, yet a number among them sported war bonnets, and I had no doubt they were Iroquois.

So far as I could perceive elsewhere there was no movement, as my eyes traveled the half circle, over a wide vista of hill and dale, green valley and dark

woods, although to the left I could occasionally hear the sharp report of a rifle, in evidence that besieging savages were still watchful of the fort entrance. I could not lean out far enough to see in that direction, yet as the night grew darker the vicious spits of fire became visible. Above me the solid log walls arose but a few feet—a tall man might stand upon the window ledge, and find grip of the roof; but below was the sheer drop to the river—perchance two hundred feet beneath. Already darkness shrouded the water, as the broad valley faded into the gloom of the night.

There was naught for me to do but sit and wait. The guard which M. Cassion had stationed at the door prevented my leaving the room, but its more probable purpose was to keep others from communicating with me. De Tonty had evidently resorted to diplomacy, and instead of quarreling with the three officers when they approached him, had greeted them all so genially as to leave the impression that he was disposed to permit matters to take their natural course. He might be watched of course, yet was no longer suspicioned as likely to help rescue the prisoner. All their fear now was centered upon me, and my possible influence.

If I could be kept from any further communication with either De Artigny, or De Tonty, it was scarcely probable that any of the garrison would make serious effort to interfere with their plans. De Tonty's apparent indifference, and his sudden friendliness with De Baugis and Cassion, did not worry me greatly. I realized his purpose in thus diverting suspicion. His pledge of assistance had been given me, and his was the word of a soldier and gentleman. In some manner, and soon—before midnight certainly—I would receive message from Boisrondet.

Yet my heart failed me more than once as I waited. How long the time seemed, and how deadly silent was the night. Crouched close beside the door I could barely hear the muttered conversation of the soldiers on guard; and when I crossed to the open window I looked out upon a black void, utterly soundless. Not even the distant crack of a rifle now broke the solemn stillness, and the only spot of color visible was the dull red glow of a campfire on the opposite bank of the river. I had no way of computing time, and the lagging hours seemed centuries long, as terrifying doubts assailed me.

Every new thought became an agony of suspense. Had the plans failed? Had Boisrondet discovered the prisoner so closely guarded as to make rescue impossible? Had his nerve, his daring, vanished before the real danger of the venture? Had De Artigny refused to accept the chance? What had happened; what was happening out there in the mystery?

All I could do was pray, and wait. Perhaps no word would be given me—the escape might already be accomplished, and I left here to my fate. Boisrondet knew nothing of my decision to accompany De Artigny in his exile. If the way was difficult and dangerous, he might not consider it essential to communicate with me at all. De Tonty had promised, to be sure, yet he might have failed to so instruct the younger man. I clung to the window, the agony of this possibility, driving me wild.

Mon Dieu! was that a noise overhead? I could see nothing, yet, as I leaned further out, a cord touched my face. I grasped it, and drew the dangling end in. It was weighted with a bit of wood. A single coal glowed in the fireplace, and from

this I ignited a splinter, barely yielding me light enough to decipher the few words traced on the white surface: “Safe so far; have you any word?”

My veins throbbed; I could have screamed in delight, or sobbed in sudden joy and relief. I fairly crept to the window on hands and knees, animated now with but one thought, one hope—the desire not to be left here behind, alone. I hung far out, my face upturned, staring into the darkness. The distance was not great, only a few feet to the roof above, yet so black was the night that the edge above me blended imperceptibly against the sky. I could perceive no movement, no outline. Could they have already gone? Was it possible that they merely dropped this brief message, and instantly vanished? No, the cord still dangled; somewhere in that dense gloom, the two men peered over the roof edge waiting my response.

“Monsieur,” I called up softly, unable to restrain my eagerness.

“Yes, Madame,” it was De Artigny’s voice, although 347 a mere whisper. “You have some word for me?”

“Ay, listen; is there any way by which I can join you?”

“Join me—here?” astonishment at my request made him incoherent. “Why, Madame, the risk is great—”

“Never mind that; my reason is worthy, nor have we time now to discuss the matter. Monsieur Boisrondet is there a way?”

I heard them speak to each other, a mere murmur of sound; then another voice reached my ears clearly.

“We have a strong grass rope, Madame, which will safely bear your weight. The risk will not be great. I have made a noose, and will lower it.”

I reached it with my hand, but felt a doubt as my fingers clasped it.

“’Tis very small, Monsieur.”

“But strong enough for double your weight, as ’twas Indian woven. Put foot in the noose, and hold tight. There are two of us holding it above.”

The memory of the depth below frightened me, yet I crept forth on the narrow sill, clinging desperately to the taut rope, until I felt my foot safely pressed into the noose, which tightened firmly about it.

“Now,” I said, barely able to make my lips speak. “I am ready.”

“Then swing clear, Madame; we’ll hold you safe.”

I doubt if it was a full minute in which I swung out over that gulf amid the black night. My heart seemed to stop beating, and I retained no sense other than to cling desperately to the swaying cord which alone held me from being dashed to death on the jagged rocks below. Inch by inch they drew me up, the continuous jerks yielding a sickening sensation, but the distance was so short, I could scarcely realize the full danger, before De Artigny grasped me with his hands, and drew me in beside him on the roof. I stood upon my feet, trembling from excitement, yet encouraged in my purpose, by his first words of welcome.

“Adele,” he exclaimed, forgetful of the presence of his comrade. “Surely you had serious cause for joining us here.”

“Am I welcome, Monsieur?”

“Can you doubt? Yet surely it was not merely to say farewell that you assumed such risk?”

“No, Monsieur, it was not to say farewell. I would accompany you in your flight. Do not start like that at my words; I cannot see your face—perhaps if I could I

should lose courage. I have made my choice, Monsieur. I will not remain the slave of M. Cassion. Whether for good or evil I give you my faith."

"You—you," his hands grasped mine. "You mean you will go with me into exile, into the woods?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"But do you realize what it all means? I am a fugitive, a hunted man; never again can I venture within French civilization. I must live among savages. No, no, Adele, the sacrifice is too great. I cannot accept of it."

"Do you love me, Monsieur?"

"*Mon Dieu*—yes."

"Then there is no sacrifice. My heart would break here. God! Would you doom me to live out my life with that brute—that murderer? I am a young woman, a mere girl, and this is my one chance to save myself from hell. I am not afraid of the woods, of exile, of anything, so I am with you. I would rather die than go to him—to confess him husband."

"The lady is right, Rene," Boisrondet said earnestly. "You must think of her as well as yourself."

"Think of her! *Mon Dieu*, of whom else do I think. Adele, do you mean your words? Would you give up all for me?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"But do you know what your choice means?"

I stood before him, brave in the darkness.

"Monsieur I have faced it all. I know; the choice is made—will you take me?"

Then I was in his strong arms, and for the first time, his lips met mine.

Chapter XXXI

We Reach the River.

It was the voice of Boisrondet which recalled us to a sense of danger.

"It is late, and we must not linger here," he insisted, touching De Artigny's sleeve. "The guard may discover your absence, Rene, before we get beyond the stockade. Come, we must move quickly."

"Ay, and with more than ever to give us courage, Francois. Yet how can we get Madame safely over the logs?"

"She must venture the same as we. Follow me closely, and tread with care."

So dark was the night I was obliged to trust entirely to De Artigny's guidance, but it was evident that both men were familiar with the way, and had thoroughly considered the best method of escape. No doubt De Tonty and his young lieutenant had arranged all details, so as to assure success. We traversed the flat roofs of the chain of log houses along the west side of the stockade until we came to the end. The only light visible was a dull glow of embers before the guardhouse near the center of the parade, which revealed a group of soldiers on duty. The stockade extended some distance beyond where we halted, crouched low on the

flat roof to escape being seen. There would be armed men along that wall, especially near the gates, guarding against attack, but the darkness gave us no glimpse. There was no firing, no movement to be perceived. The two men crept to the edge, and looked cautiously over, and I clung close to De Artigny, nervous from the silence, and afraid to become separated. Below us was the dense blackness of the gorge.

"This is the spot," whispered De Artigny, "and no alarm yet. How far to the rocks?"

"De Tonty figured the distance at forty feet below the stockade; we have fifty feet of rope here. The rock shelf is narrow, and the great risk will be not to step off in the darkness. There should be an iron ring here somewhere—ay, here it is; help me draw the knot taut, Rene."

"Do we—do we go down here, Monsieur?" I questioned, my voice faltering.

"Here, or not at all; there are guards posted yonder every two yards. This is our only chance to escape unseen." Boisrondet tested the rope, letting it slip slowly through his hands down into the darkness below, until it hung at full length. "It does not touch," he said, "yet it cannot lack more than a foot or two. Faith! We must take the risk. I go first Rene—hush! 'tis best so—the lady would prefer that you remain, while I test the passage. The devil himself may be waiting there." He gazed down, balancing himself on the edge, the cord gripped in his hands.

"Now mind my word; once on the rock below I will signal with three jerks on the cord. Haul up then slowly, so as to make no noise; make a noose for the lady's foot, and lower her with care. You have the strength?"

"Ay, for twice her weight."

"Good; there will be naught to fear, Madame, for I will be below to aid your footing. When I give the signal again Rene will descend and join us."

"The rope is to be left dangling?"

"Only until I return. Once I leave you safe beyond the Iroquois, 'tis my part to climb this rope again. Some task that," cheerfully, "yet De Tonty deems it best that no evidence connect us with this escape. What make you the hour?"

"Between one and two."

"Which will give me time before daydawn; so here, I chance it."

He swung himself over the edge, and slipped silently down into the black mystery. We leaned over to watch, but could see nothing, our only evidence of his progress, the jerking of the cord. De Artigny's hand closed on mine.

"Dear," he whispered tenderly, "we are alone now—you are sorry?"

"I am happier than I have ever been in my life," I answered honestly. "I have done what I believe to be right, and trust God. All I care to know now is that you love me."

"With every throb of my heart," he said solemnly. "It is my love which makes me dread lest you regret."

"That will never be, Monsieur; I am of the frontier, and do not fear the woods. Ah! he has reached the rock safely—'tis the signal."

De Artigny drew up the cord, testing it to make sure the strands held firm, and made careful noose, into which he slipped my foot.

"Now, Adele, you are ready?"

"Yes, sweetheart; kiss me first."

"You have no fear?"

"Not with your strong hands to support, but do not keep me waiting long below."

Ay, but I was frightened as I swung off into the black void, clinging desperately to that slight rope, steadily sinking downward. My body rubbed against the rough logs, and then against rock. Once a jagged edge wounded me, yet I dare not release my grip, or utter a sound. I sank down, down, the strain ever greater on my nerves. I retained no knowledge of distance, but grew apprehensive of what awaited me below. Would the rope reach to the rock? Would I swing clear? Even as these thoughts began to horrify, I felt a hand grip me, and Boisrondet's whisper gave cheerful greeting.

"It is all right, Madame; release your foot, and trust me. Good, now do not venture to move, until Rene joins us. Faith, he wastes little time; he is coming now."

I could see nothing, not even the outlines of my companion, who stood holding the cord taut. I could feel the jagged face of the rock, against which I stood, and ventured, by reaching out with one foot, to explore my immediate surroundings. The groping toe touched the edge of the narrow shelf, and I drew back startled at thought of another sheer drop into the black depths. My heart was still pounding when De Artigny found foothold beside me. As he swung free from the cord, his fingers touched my dress.

"A fine test of courage that, Adele," he whispered, "but with Francois here below there was small peril. Now what next?"

"A ticklish passage for a few yards. Stand close until I get by; now cling to the wall, and follow me. Once off this shelf we can plan our journey. Madame, take hold of my jacket. Rene, you have walked this path before."

"Ay, years since, but I recall its peril."

We crept forward, so cautiously it seemed we scarcely moved, the rock shelf we traversed so narrow in places that I could scarce find space in which to plant my feet firmly. Boisrondet whispered words of guidance back to me, and I could feel De Artigny touch my skirt as he followed, ready to grip me if I fell. Yet then I experienced no fear, no shrinking, my every thought centered on the task. Nor was the way long. Suddenly we clambered onto a flat rock, crossed it, and came to the edge of a wood, with a murmur of water not far away. Here Boisrondet paused, and we came close about him. There seemed to be more light here, although the tree shadows were grim, and the night rested about us in impressive silence.

"Here is where the river trail comes down," and Boisrondet made motion to the left. "You should remember that well, Rene."

"I was first to pass over it; it leads to the water edge."

"Yes; not so easily followed in the night, yet you are woodsman enough to make it. So far as we know from above the Iroquois have not discovered there is a passage here. Listen, Rene; I leave you now, for those were De Tonty's orders. He said that from now on you would be safe alone. Of course he knew nothing of Madame's purpose."

"Monsieur shall not find me a burden," I interrupted.

"I am sure of that," he said gallantly, "and so think it best to return while the night conceals my movements. There will be hot words when M. Cassion discovers

your escape, and my chief may need my sword beside him, if it comes to blows. Is my decision to return right, Rene?"

"Ay, right; would that I might be with you. But what plan did M. de Tonty outline for me to follow?"

"'Twas what I started to tell. At the edge of the water, but concealed from the river by rocks, is a small hut where we keep hidden a canoe ready fitted for any secret service. 'Twas Sieur de la Salle's thought that it might prove of great use in time of siege. No doubt it is there now just as we left it, undiscovered of the Iroquois. This will bear you down the river until daylight, when you can hide along shore."

"There is a rifle?"

"Two of them, with powder and ball." He laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "There is nothing more to say, and time is of value. Farewell, my friend."

"Farewell," their fingers clasped. "There will be other days, Francois; my gratitude to M. de Tonty." Boisrondet stepped back, and, hat in hand, bowed to me.

"Adieu, Madame; a pleasant journey."

"A moment, Monsieur," I said, a falter in my voice. "You are M. de Artigny's friend, an officer of France, and a Catholic."

"Yes, Madame."

"And you think that I am right in my choice? that I am doing naught unworthy of my womanhood?"

Even in the darkness I saw him make the symbol of the cross, before he bent forward and kissed my hand.

"Madame," he said gravely, "I am but a plain soldier, with all my service on the frontier. I leave to the priests the discussion of doctrines, and to God my punishment and reward. I can only answer you as De Artigny's friend, and an officer of France. I give you honor, and respect, and deem your love and trust far more holy than your marriage. My faith, and my sword are yours, Madame."

I felt his lips upon my hand, yet knew not he had gone. I stood there, my eyes blinded with tears at his gallant words, only becoming conscious of his disappearance, when De Artigny drew me to him, his cheek pressed against my hair.

"He has gone! we are alone!"

"Yes, dear one; but I thank God for those last words. They have given me courage, and faith. So my old comrades believe us right the criticism of others does not move me. You love me, Adele? you do not regret?"

My arms found way about his neck; my lips uplifted to his.

"Monsieur, I shall never regret; I trust God, and you."

How he ever found his way along that dim trail I shall never know. Some memory of its windings, together with the instinct of a woodsman, must have given guidance, while no doubt his feet, clad in soft Indian moccasins, enabled him to feel the faint track, imperceivable in the darkness. It led along a steep bank, through low, tangled bushes, and about great trees, with here and there a rock thrust across the path, compelling detour. The branches scratched my face, and tore my dress, confusing me so that had I not clung to his arm, I should have been instantly lost in the gloom. Our advance was slow and cautious, every step

taken in silence. Snakes could not have moved with less noise, and the precaution was well taken. Suddenly De Artigny stopped, gripping me in warning. For a moment there was no sound, except the distant murmur of waters, and the chatter of some night bird. Yet some instinct of the woods held the man motionless, listening. A twig cracked to our left, and then a voice spoke, low and rumbling. It sounded so close at hand the fellow could scarcely have been five yards away. Another voice answered, and we were aware of bodies, stealing along through the wood; there was a faint rustling of dead leaves, and the occasional swish of a branch. We crouched low in the trail, fairly holding our breath, every nerve tense. There was no sound from below, but in the other direction one warrior—I could see the dim outline of his naked figure—passed within reach of my outstretched hand.

Assured that all had passed beyond hearing De Artigny rose to his feet, and assisted me to rise, his hand still grasping mine.

"Iroquois, by the look of that warrior," he whispered, "and enough of them to mean mischief. I would I knew their language."

"'Twas the tongue of the Tuscaroras," I answered. "My father taught me a little of it years ago. The first words spoken were a warning to be still; the other answered that the white men are all asleep."

"And I am not sure but that is true. If De Tonty was in command the walls would be well guarded, but De Baugis and Cassion know nothing of Indian war."

"You believe it to be an assault?"

"It hath the look; 'tis not Indian nature to gather thus at this night hour, without a purpose. But, *pouf*, there is little they can do against that stockade of logs for all their numbers. It is our duty to be well away by daylight."

The remaining distance to the water's edge was not far—a direct descent amid a litter of rocks, shadowed by great trees. Nothing opposed our passage, nor did we hear any sound from the savages concealed in the forest above. De Artigny led the way along the shore until we reached the log hut. Its door stood open; the canoe was gone.

Chapter XXXII

We Meet Surprise.

Not until we had felt carefully from wall to wall did we admit our disappointment. There were no overshadowing trees here, and what small glimmer of light came from the dull skies found reflection on river and rocks, so that we could perceive each other, and gain dim view of our surroundings.

Of the canoe there was absolutely no trace, and, if arms had been hidden there also, they had likewise disappeared. The very fact that the door stood wide open, its wooden lock broken, told the story clearly. I remained silent, staring about through the semi-darkness of the interior, rendered speechless by a feeling of utter helplessness. De Artigny, after an utterance of disappointment, felt his way along

the walls; as he came back to the open door our eyes met, and he must have read despair in mine, for he smiled encouragingly.

"Swept bare, little girl," he said. "Not so much as an ounce of powder left. The savages got here before us, it seems. Never mind; we shall have to travel a ways on woodcraft, and it will not be the first wilderness journey I have made without arms. Did De Tonty mention to you where he believed the Illini were in hiding?"

"No, Monsieur—are they Indians?"

"Yes; the river tribes, the most loyal of all to La Salle. It was one of their villages we saw on the bank of the stream as we approached the fort from the west, I told Boisrondet that it stood there deserted, but not destroyed, and it was our judgment the inhabitants were hiding among the river bluffs. Without canoes they could not travel far, and are probably concealed out yonder. If we can find them our greatest peril is past."

"They are friendly?"

"Ay, and have never shed white blood. I know them well, and with leadership they would be a match even for the Iroquois. De Tonty led them once against these same warriors, and they fought like fiends. Come, we will follow the stream, and see if we cannot find trace of their covert."

It was but a cluster of rocks where the hut stood, and a few yards below we found the forest creeping down to the very bank of the river. The sky had lightened above us, the obscuring clouds opening to let the silver gleam of stars through, and we paused a moment gazing back, and upward at the vast rock on which perched the beleaguered fort. We could dimly perceive the vague outline of it silhouetted against the lighter arch of sky. In massive gloom and silence it seemed to dominate the night, the grim forest sweeping up to its very walls. Not a gleam of light appeared; not a sound reached us. I felt De Artigny's arm about me.

"I would that I really knew what was going on yonder 'neath the screen of trees," he said gravely. "Some Indian trick, perchance, which it might be in my power to circumvent—at least bear to the lads fair warning."

"You would risk life for that?"

"Ay, my own readily. That is a lesson of the wilderness; the duty of a comrade. But for your presence I should be climbing the hill seeking to learn the purpose of those savages—else I was no true soldier of France."

"What think you their purpose is, Monsieur?"

"An attack in force at dawn. Those who passed us were heavily armed, and crept forward stealthily, stripped and painted for war. There were other parties, no doubt, creeping up through the woods from all sides. 'Tis my thought the hour has struck for them to make their great effort. They have scattered the friendly Indians, killed them, or driven them in terror down the river. Their villages have been destroyed. Now all the warriors who have been at that business have returned, filled with blood lust, and eager to strike at the French."

"But they cannot win? Surely they cannot capture the fort, Monsieur? Why it is all rock?"

"On three sides—yes; but to the south there is ample space for attack in force. Those woods yonder would conceal a thousand savages within a few hundred yards of the fort gates. And what of the defense? Opposing them is one hundred and fifty feet of stockade, protected at best by fifty rifles. There are no more in the

fort, officers, Indians, and all; and Boisrondet says scarcely a dozen rounds of powder and ball to a man. If the Iroquois know this—and why should they not?—'twill be no great feat of arms to batter their way in. I would do that which is right, Adele, if I saw clearly."

I clung to his hands, staring back still at the grim outline of the silent fort. I understood his thoughts, his desire to aid his comrades; but, for a moment, my mind was a blank. I could not let him go, alone, to almost certain death. No, nor would he abandon me on such a mission! Was there no other way by which we could serve? Suddenly a thought crept into my mind.

"Monsieur," I asked breathlessly, "where do you suppose those Illini Indians to be?"

"Back from the river, in a glen of caves and rocks."

"How far from here?"

"Four or five miles; there is a trail from the mouth of the creek."

"And you know the way? and there might be many warriors there? they will remember you, and obey your orders?"

He straightened up, aroused as the full meaning of my questioning occurred to him.

"Ay, there is a chance there, if we find them in time, and in force enough to make foray. *Sacre!* I know not why such thought has not come to me before. Could we but fall on those devils from the rear in surprise, even with a third their number, they would run like cats. *Mon Dieu!* I thank you for the thought."

We plunged into the forest, no longer endeavoring to advance silently, but inspired with a desire to achieve our goal as soon as possible. At the mouth of a stream entering the river, De Artigny picked me up in his arms, and waded across. On the opposite bank he sought eagerly on hands and knees for the old trace he dimly remembered. At last he stood erect.

"Ay, lass, it's here, and to be easily followed. What hour do you make it now?"

"About three."

"So I would have said; and 'tis not daylight until after five. We can scarce make it, yet we will try."

It was not as dark here away from the gloom of the Rock; the forest was open, and yet I will never know how De Artigny succeeded in following that dim trail at so rapid a gait. As for me I could see nothing of any path, and merely followed him blindly, not even certain of the nature of the ground under my feet. Again and again I tripped over some obstacles—a root, a tuft of grass—and continually unnoted branches flapped against my face. Once I fell prone, yet so noiselessly that Rene passed beyond view before he realized my misfortune, and returned to help me regain my feet. Not until then, I think, did he comprehend the rapidity of his movements.

"Your pardon, dear girl," and his lips brushed my hair, as he held me in his arms. "I forgot all but our comrades yonder. The night is dark to your eyes."

"I can see nothing," I confessed regretfully, "yet you have no difficulty."

"'Tis a woodsman's training. I have followed many a dim trail in dark forests, and this is so plain I could keep to it on a run if necessary. Ah! the fort is awake and vigilant—that was rifle fire."

I had not only heard the sharp reports, but seen the flash of fire cleaving the darkness.

"The discharges came from the woods yonder—they were Indian guns, Monsieur. See! those two last were from the stockade; I could perceive the logs in the flare."

"Ay, and that is all; the lads will waste no ammunition in the gloom, except to tell the savages they are awake and ready."

"How far have we traveled, Monsieur?"

"A mile, perhaps. At the crooked oak yonder we leave the stream. You met with no harm when you fell?"

"No more than a bruise. I can go on now."

We turned to the right, and plunged into the thicket, the way now so black that I grasped his jacket in fear of becoming lost. We were clambering up a slight hill, careless of everything but our footing, when there was a sudden rustling of the low branches on either side our path. De Artigny stopped, thrusting me back, while at that very instant, indistinct forms seemed to leap forth from the covert. It occurred so quickly, so silently, that before I even realized danger, he was struggling madly with the assailants. I heard the crash of blows, an oath of surprise, a guttural exclamation, a groan of pain. Hands gripped me savagely; I felt naked bodies, struggled wildly to escape, but was flung helplessly to the ground, a hand grasping my hair. I could see nothing only a confused mass of legs and arms, but De Artigny was still on his feet, struggling desperately. From some hand he had grabbed a rifle, and swung it crashing into the faces of those grappling him. Back he came step by step, fighting like a fiend, until he stood over me. With one wide sweep of his clutched weapon he struck me free, a blow which shattered the gun stock, and left him armed only with the iron bar. But the battle fury was on him; dimly I could see him towering above me, bareheaded, his clothes torn to rags, the grim barrel poised for a blow.

"St. Ann!" he cried exultantly. "'Tis a good fight so far—would you have more of it?"

"Hold!" broke in a French voice from out the darkness. "What means this? Are you of white blood?"

"I have always supposed so."

"A renegade consorting with devils of the Iroquois?"

"*Mon Dieu!* No! an officer of Fort St. Louis."

I could see the white man thrust aside the Indian circle, and strike through. His face was invisible, although I was upon my knees now, but he was a short, heavily built fellow.

"Stand back! ay, make room. Saint Guise, we are fighting our own friends. If you are of the garrison name yourself."

De Artigny, still clasping his rifle barrel, reached out his other hand, and lifted me to my feet.

"Perchance," he said coolly, "if I were a stickler for etiquette, I might ask you first for some explanation of this attack. However, we have made some heads ring, so I waive that privilege. I am the Sieur de Artigny, a lieutenant of La Salle's."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the other stepped forward, his hand outstretched. "'Tis no unknown name to me, although we have never before met by some chance—I am Francois de la Forest."

"La Forest! You were in France three months ago."

"Aye; I was there when Sieur de la Salle landed. He told me the whole tale. I was with him when he had audience with Louis. I am here now bearing the orders of the King, countersigned by La Barre at Quebec, restoring De Tonty to command at Fort St. Louis, and bidding De Baugis and that fool Cassion return to New France."

De Artigny crushed the man's hand in both his own, dropping the rifle barrel to the ground. His voice trembled as he made answer.

"He won the King's favor? he convinced Louis?"

"No doubt of that—never saw I a greater miracle."

"And the Sieur de la Salle—has he returned?"

"Nay; he remains in France, to fit out an expedition to sail for the mouth of the Great River. He hath special commission from the King. To me was given the honor of bearing his message. Ah! but La Barre raved like a mad bull when I handed him the King's order. I thought he would burst a blood vessel, and give us a new governor. But no such luck. Pah! I stood there, struggling to keep a straight face, for he had no choice but obey. 'Twas a hard dose to swallow, but there was Louis' orders in his own hand, all duly sealed; and a command that I be dispatched hither with the message."

"How made you the journey in so short a time?"

"Overland from Detroit, the same trail you traveled with La Salle; 'tis much the shorter."

"Alone?"

"With two *couriers de bois*; they are with me now. But what is this De Artigny you have with you—a woman?"

Chapter XXXIII

Warriors of the Illini.

"Yes, M. de la Forest," I said, stepping forward to save Rene from a question which would embarrass him. "I am the daughter of Captain la Chesnayne, whom the Sieur de Artigny hath taken under his protection."

"La Chesnayne's daughter! Ah, I heard the story told in Quebec—'twas La Barre's aid who gave me the facts with many a chuckle as though he held it an excellent joke. But why are you here, Madame? Is not M. Cassion in the fort yonder?"

"'Tis a long tale, La Forest," broke in De Artigny, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "and will bide a better time for telling. I am a soldier, and you may trust my word. We are La Salle's men; let it go at that, for there is graver duty fronting

us now than the retelling of camp gossip. Madame is my friend, and my hand will defend her reputation. Is that enough, comrade?"

"Ay, enough. My best regards, Madame," and he bowed low before me, his words ringing true. "Whoever Sieur de la Salle has learned to trust hath my faith also. You have come from the fort I take it, De Artigny? How are matters there?"

"Ill enough; the officers at swords' points, and the men divided into three camps, for where De la Durantaye stands there is no evidence. M. Cassion holds command by virtue of La Barre's commission, and knows no more of Indian war than a Quebec storekeeper. The garrison numbers fifty men all told; two-thirds soldiers, and a poor lot."

"With ammunition, and food?"

"Ample to eat, so far as I know, but Boisrondet tells me with scarce a dozen rounds per man. The Iroquois are at the gates, and will attack at daylight."

"You know this?"

"The signs are plain. We passed one party clambering up the cliff—no less than fifty warriors, naked and painted for war. Tuscaroras, Madame said from the words she overheard as they slipped past where we hid. 'Tis not likely they made reconnoissance alone. The fiends have been a week in this valley, and have swept all clear of our Indian allies; now they can bring their full force against the fort."

"No doubt you are right."

"'Twas my judgment, at least, and we sought help when we ran into you. What Indians have you?"

"Illini, mostly, with a handful of Miamis and Kickapoos. We met them at the crossing, hiding in the hills. They were sadly demoralized, and filled with horror at what they had seen, yet agreed to return here under my leadership."

"Who is their chief?"

"Old Sequitah—you know him?"

"Ay, a real warrior. 'Tis better than I dared hope, for I have been in battle with him before. Do you number a hundred?"

"And fifty more, though indifferently armed. Never have I seen the Illini in action, De Artigny; they seem to me a poor lot, so frightened of the wolves as to be valueless."

"So they are if left to themselves, but under white leadership they stiffen. They will fight if given the Indian style. They will never stand in defense, but if we lead them to a surprise, they'll give good account of themselves. That is my plan La Forest—that we creep up through the woods behind the Iroquois lines. They will expect no attack from the rear, and will have no guard. If we move quickly while it remains dark, we ought to get within a few yards of the red demons without discovery. They will fight desperately, no doubt, for their only hope of escape would be to either plunge down the rocky banks on either side, or cut a way through. You have been at the fort?"

"Twice before."

"Then you know the nature of the ground. 'Tis all woodland until within a few hundred yards of the gates. You recall the great rock beside the trail?"

"Ay, and the view from the top."

"My plan would be to creep up that far, with flanking parties on the slopes below. In front, as you may remember, there is an open space, then a fringe of

forest hiding the clearing before the stockade. The Iroquois will be gathered behind that fringe of trees waiting daylight. Is my thought right?"

"'Tis the most likely spot."

"Then listen; I have thought this all out. You and I, with Sequitah, will take a hundred of your Indians, cross the small river, and advance up the trail. That leaves fifty warriors to creep through the woods on either slope, twenty-five to a side, led by your two *couriers de bois*. We will wait at the great rock, and give the signal."

La Forest stood silent a moment, thinking; then rested his hand on De Artigny's shoulder.

"It looks feasible enough, but the flanking parties may not reach their positions in time."

"The one from the west will not have as far to travel as we do. The other does not make so much difference, for if the Iroquois break they will come in this direction—the other side of the trail is sheer rock."

"True; and what about the lady?"

"I shall go with you, Messieurs," I said quietly. "There will be no more danger there than here; besides you would not leave me alone without a guard, and you will need every fighting man."

I felt the grip of Rene's hand but it was La Forest's voice that spoke.

"The right ring to that, hey, De Artigny! Madame answers my last argument. But first, let us have word with the chief."

He addressed a word into the crowd of indistinguishable figures, and an Indian came forward. Dim as the light was I was impressed with the dignity of his carriage, the firm character of his facial outline.

"I am Sequitah, Chief of the Mascoutins," he said gravely, "for whom the white chief sent."

De Artigny stepped forth, standing as erect as the other.

"Sequitah is great chief," he said quietly, "a warrior of many battles, the friend of La Salle. We have smoked the peace-pipe together, and walked side by side on the war-trail. Sequitah knows who speaks?"

"The French warrior they call De Artigny."

"Right; 'tis not the first time you and I have met the Iroquois! The wolves are here again; they have burned the villages of the Illini, and killed your women and children. The valley is black with smoke, and red with blood. What says the war chief of the Mascoutins—will his warriors fight? Will they strike with us a blow against the beasts?"

The chief swept his hand in wide circle.

"We are warriors; we have tasted blood. What are the white man's words of wisdom?"

Briefly, in quick, ringing sentences, De Artigny outlined his plan. Sequitah listened motionless, his face unexpressive of emotion. Twice, confused by some French phrase, he asked grave questions, and once a *courier de bois* spoke up in his own tongue, to make the meaning clear. As De Artigny ceased the chief stood for a moment silent.

"We leap upon them from cover?" he asked calmly, "and the white men will sally forth to aid us?"

"'Tis so we expect—M. de Tonty is never averse to a fight."

"I believe in the Iron Hand; but 'tis told me others command now. If they fail we are but few against many."

"They will not fail, Sequitah; they are Frenchmen."

The Indian folded his hands across his breast, his eyes on the two men facing him. There was silence, but for the slight rustle of moving bodies in the darkness.

"Sequitah hears the voice of his friend," he announced at last, "and his words sound wise. The warriors of the Illini will fight beside the white men."

There was no time lost although I know but little of what occurred, being left alone there while La Forest and De Artigny divided the men, and arranged the plans of advance. The dense night shrouded much of this hasty preparation, for all I could perceive were flitting figures, or the black shadow of warriors being grouped together. I could hear voices, never loud, giving swift orders, or calling to this or that individual through the gloom.

A party tramped by me, and disappeared, twenty or more naked warriors, headed by a black-bearded Frenchman, bearing a long rifle—the detachment, no doubt, dispatched to guard the slope east of the trail, and hurried forth to cover the greater distance. Yet these could have scarcely advanced far through that jungle when the others were also in line, waiting the word.

The very silence in which all this was accomplished, the noiseless bodies, the almost breathless attention, scarcely enabled me to realize the true meaning of it all. These men were going into battle, into a death grapple. They meant to attack five times their own number. This was no boy's play; it was war, savage, relentless war. The stern horror of it seemed to suddenly grip me as with icy fingers. Here was what I had read of, dreamed of, being enacted before my very eyes. I was even a part of it, for I was going with them to the field of blood.

Yet how different everything was from those former pictures of imagination. There was no noise, no excitement, no shrinking—just those silent, motionless men standing in the positions assigned them, the dim light gleaming on their naked bodies, their ready weapons. I heard the voices of the white men, speaking quietly, giving last instructions as they passed along the lines. Sequitah took his place, not two yards from me, standing like a statue, his face stern and emotionless.

It was like a dream, rather than a reality. I was conscious of no thrill, no sense of fear. It was as though I viewed a picture in which I had no personal interest. Out of the darkness came De Artigny, pausing an instant before the chief.

"All is well, Sequitah?"

"Good—'tis as the white chief wishes."

"Then we move at once; La Forest will guide the rear; you and I will march together. Give your warriors the word."

He turned and took my hand.

"You will walk with me, dear one; you are not afraid?"

"Not of the peril of coming battle," I answered. 379 "I—I think I hardly realize what that all means; but the risk you run. Rene! If—if you win, you will be a prisoner condemned to death."

He laughed, and bent low, so I felt his lips brush my cheek.

“You do not understand, dear girl. A moment and I will explain—once we are beyond the stream. Now I must see that all move together.”

Chapter XXXIV

We Wait in Ambush.

We advanced through the woods down a slight incline, the Indians moving like so many phantoms. Not a branch rattled as they glided silently forward, not a leaf rustled beneath the soft tread of moccasined feet. De Artigny led me by the hand, aiding me to move quietly over the uneven ground, but made no effort to speak. Beside us, not unlike a shadow, strode the chief Sequitah, his stern face uplifted, shadowed by long black hair, a rifle gripped in his sinewy arms. We crossed the little river, De Artigny bearing me easily in his grasp, and, on the opposite shore, waited for the others to follow. They came, a long line of dark, shadowy forms, wading cautiously through the shallow water, and ranged themselves just below the bank, many still standing in the stream. What light there was flickered over naked bodies, and revealed savage eyes gleaming from out masses of black hair.

De Artigny stepped forward on the exposed root of a tree to where he could see his dusky followers, and La Forest climbed the bank, and joined him. A moment the two men conferred, turning about to question Sequitah. As they separated I could distinguish De Artigny’s final words.

“Very well, then, if it is your wish I take command. Sequitah, a hundred warriors will follow you along the trail—you know it well. Have your best scouts in advance, and circle your braves so as to make attack impossible. Your scouts will not go beyond the great rock except on my order. M. la Forest will accompany them. This is clear?”

The Indian muttered response in his own tongue; then spoke more sharply, and the mass of warriors below changed formation, the greater number climbing the bank, and grouping themselves in the darker shadow of the woods.

“Who has charge of the others?” asked De Artigny.

“Bastian Courtray,” replied La Forest. “He is yonder.”

“Then Courtray, listen; you follow the stream, but do not venture from cover. Post your men below the stockade and wait to intercept fugitives. We will do the fighting above. Are the warriors with you armed?”

“All but ten have rifles, Monsieur, but I know not if they be of value.”

“You must make the best use of them you can. Above all things be quiet, and do nothing to alarm the Iroquois. You may go.”

I leaned forward watching them as they waded down stream, and then climbed the bank, disappearing in the undergrowth. Sequitah had moved past me, and I heard his voice speaking in Indian dialect. Along the forest aisles his warriors glided by where I stood, noiselessly as shadows. In another moment De Artigny and I were alone, the black night all about us, and not a sound reaching our ears

to tell of those vanished allies. He took my hand, a caress in his touch, a suggestion of pride in his voice.

"The old chief is warrior still," he said, "and, unless all signs fail, the Iroquois will long remember this day. Come, Adele, 'twill not do for us to be far behind, and we have walked this trail before together."

Had I not tested it with my own ears never would I have believed a hundred men could have made way so noiselessly in the dark, through such thick forest, rock strewn and deeply rutted. Yet not a sound of their stealthy passage was wafted back to us on the wind—no echo of voice, no rasping of foot, no rustle of leaves. Ghosts could not have moved more silently. Some way the very thought that these grim savages were thus creeping forward to attack, and kill, their hearts mad with hate, wild beasts of prey stalking their victims, yielded me a strange feeling of horror. I clung to De Artigny's arm, shrinking from the shadows, my mind filled with nameless fear.

"Adele," he whispered, tenderly, "you still fear for me in this venture?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"There is no need. You heard La Forest say he bore orders of the King which gave De Tonty command once more of Fort St. Louis."

"Yes, Monsieur; but you have already been tried and condemned. Even if they have not authority to shoot you here, they have power to transport to Quebec."

"There would be battle first, if I know my old comrades well. No, as to that there is no cause to fear. I shall be given fair trial now, and welcome it. My fear has been for you—the vengeance of Cassion, if ever you came within his grasp again. But that also is settled."

"Settled? What is it you would tell me?"

"This, sweetheart; you should know, although I would that some other might tell you. La Forest whispered it to me while we were alone yonder, for he knew not you were estranged from your husband. He bears with him the King's order for the arrest of M. Cassion. Captain de Baugis is commissioned by La Barre to return him safely to Quebec for trial."

"On what charge?"

"Treason to France; the giving of false testimony against a King's officer, and the concealing of official records."

"*Mon Dieu!* was it the case of my father?"

"Yes; the truth has been made clear. There is, as I understand from what La Forest told me, not sufficient evidence against La Barre to convict, yet 'tis believed the case will cost him his office. But M. Cassion was his agent, and is guilty beyond a doubt."

"But, Monsieur, who made the charges? Who brought the matter to the attention of Louis?"

"The Comte de Frontenac; he was your father's friend, and won him restoration of his property. Not until La Forest met him in France was he aware of the wrong done Captain la Chesnayne. Later he had converse with La Salle, a Franciscan once stationed at Montreal, and two officers of the regiment Carignan-Salliers. Armed with information thus gained he made appeal to Louis. 'Tis told me the King was so angry he signed the order of arrest with his own hand, and handed it to La Forest to execute."

“The Governor knows?”

“Not yet. La Forest felt it best to keep the secret, fearing he might be detained, or possibly ambushed on the way hither.”

I cannot describe my feelings—joy, sorrow, memory of the past, overwhelming me. My eyes were wet with tears, and I could find no words. De Artigny seemed to understand, yet he made no effort to speak, merely holding me close with his strong arm. So in silence, our minds upon the past and the future, we followed the savages through the black night along the dim trail. For the time I forgot where I was, my weird, ghastly surroundings, the purpose of our stealthy advance, and remembered only my father, and the scenes of childhood. He must have comprehended, for he made no attempt to interrupt my reverie, and his silence drew me closer—the steady pressure of his arm brought me peace.

Suddenly before us loomed the shadow of the great rock, which rose a mighty barrier across the trail, its crest outlined against the sky. The Indians had halted here, and we pressed forward through them, until we came to where the chief and La Forest waited. There was a growing tinge of light in the eastern sky, enabling us to perceive each other’s faces. All was tense, expectant, the Indians scarcely venturing to breathe, the two white men conversing in whispers. Sequitah stood motionless as a statue, his lips tightly closed.

“Your scouts ventured no further?” questioned De Artigny.

“No, ’twas not safe; one man scaled the rock, and reports the Iroquois just beyond.”

“They hide in covert where I suspected then; but I would see with my own eyes. There is crevice here, as I remember, to give foothold. Ay, here it is, an easy passage enough. Come, La Forest, a glance ahead will make clear my plans.”

The two clambered up noiselessly, and outstretched themselves on the flat surface above. The dawn brightened, almost imperceptibly, so I could distinguish the savage forms on either side, some standing, some squatting on the grass, all motionless, but alert, their weapons gleaming, their cruel eyes glittering from excitement. La Forest descended cautiously, and touched the arm of the chief.

“You see?”

The Indian shook his head.

“Sequitah know now; he not need see. We do what white chief says.”

La Forest turned toward me.

“And you, Madame, De Artigny would have you join him.”

Surprised at the request I rested my foot in his hand, and crept forward along the smooth surface until I lay beside Rene. He glanced aside into my face.

“Do not lift your head,” he whispered. “Peer through this cleft in the stone.”

Had I the talent I could sketch that scene now from memory. It must ever abide in my mind, distinct in every detail. The sky overcast with cloud masses, a dense mist rising from the valley, the pallid spectral light barely making visible the strange, grotesque shapes of rocks, trees and men. Before us was a narrow opening, devoid of vegetation, a sterile patch of stone and sand, and beyond this a fringe of trees, matted with underbrush below so as to make good screen, but sufficiently thinned out above, so that, from our elevation, we could look through the interlaced branches across the cleared space where the timber had been chopped away to the palisades of the fort. The first space was filled with warriors,

crouching behind the cover of underbrush. Most of these were lying down, or upon their knees, watchfully peering through toward the fort gates, but a few were standing, or moving cautiously about bearing word of command. The attention of all was in front riveted upon the silent, seemingly deserted fort. Not a face did I note turned in our direction, not a movement to indicate our presence was suspected. It was a line, in many places two deep, of naked red bodies, stretching down the slope on either side; the coarse black hair of the warriors gave them savage look, while here and there a chief sported gaudy war bonnet, and all along was the gleam of weapons. The number of them caused me to gasp for breath.

"Monsieur," I whispered timidly, "you can never attack; there are too many."

"They appear more numerous than they are," he answered confidently, "but it will be a stiff fight. Not all Tuscaroras either; there are Eries yonder to the right, and a few renegade Mohawks with them. Look, by the foot of that big tree, the fellow in war bonnet, and deerskin shirt—what make you of him?"

"A white man in spite of his paint."

"'Twas my guess also. I thought it likely they had a renegade with them, for this is not Indian strategy. La Forest was of the same opinion, although 'twas too dark when he was here for us to make sure."

"For what are they waiting, and watching?"

"The gates to open, no doubt. If they suspect nothing within, they will send out a party soon to reconnoiter the trail, and reach the river below for water. It is the custom, and, no doubt, these devils know, and will wait their chance. They urge the laggards now."

We lay and watched them, his hand clasping mine. Those warriors who had been lying prone, rose to their knees, and weapons in hand, crouched for a spring; the chiefs scattered, careful to keep concealed behind cover. Not a sound reached us, every movement noiseless, the orders conveyed by gesture of the hand. De Artigny pressed my fingers.

"Action will come soon," he said, his lips at my ear, "and I must be ready below to take the lead. You can serve us best here, Adele; there is no safer spot if you lie low. You have a bit of cloth—a handkerchief?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then watch the fort gates, and if you see them open drop the cloth over the edge of the rock there in signal. I will wait just below, but from where we are we can see nothing. You understand?"

"Surely, Monsieur; I am to remain here and watch; then signal you when the fort gates open."

"Ay, that is it; or if those savages advance into the open—they may not wait."

"Yes, Monsieur."

His lips touched mine, and I heard him whisper a word of endearment.

"You are a brave girl."

"No, Monsieur; I am frightened, terribly frightened, but—but I love you, and am a Frenchwoman."

He crept back silently, and I was left alone on the great rock, gazing out anxiously into the gray morning.

Chapter XXXV

The Charge of the Illini.

It seemed a long time, yet it could scarcely have exceeded a few moments, for the light of early dawn was still dim and spectral, making those savage figures below appear strange and inhuman, while, through the tree barrier, the more distant stockade was little more than a vague shadow. I could barely distinguish the sharp pointed logs, and if any guard passed, his movements were indistinguishable.

Had I not known where they were even the position of the gates would have been a mystery. Yet I lay there, my eyes peering through the cleft in the rock, every nerve in my body throbbing. All had been entrusted to me; it was to be my signal which would send De Artigny, La Forest, and their Indian allies forward. I must not fail them; I must do my part. Whatever the cost—even though it be his life—nothing could absolve me from this duty.

The Iroquois were massing toward the center, directly in front of the closed gates. The change in formation was made with all the stealthiness of Indian cunning, the warriors creeping silently behind the concealing bushes, and taking up their new positions according to motions of their chiefs. Those having rifles loaded their weapons, while others drew knives and tomahawks from their belts, and held them glittering in the gray light. The white leader remained beside the big tree, paying no apparent heed to anything excepting the stockade in front. The daylight brightened, but mist clouds overhung the valley, while floating wreaths of fog drifted between the great rock and the fort gates, occasionally even obscuring the Iroquois in vaporous folds. There was no sound, no sight, of those hidden below, waiting my word. I seemed utterly alone.

Suddenly I started, lifting myself slightly, on one arm so as to see more clearly. Ay, the gates were opening, slowly at first as though the great wooden hinges made resistance; then the two leaves parted, and I had glimpse within. Two soldiers pushed against the heavy logs, and, as they opened wider, a dozen, or more men were revealed, leaning carelessly on their rifles. Boisrondet, bearing gun in the hollow of his arm stepped forward into the opening, and gazed carelessly about over the gray, mist shrouded scene.

It was evident enough he felt no suspicion that anything more serious than the usual Indian picket would be encountered. He turned and spoke to the soldiers, waiting while they shouldered their rifles, and tramped forth to join him. His back was toward the fringe of wood. The arm of the white renegade shot into the air, and behind him the massed Iroquois arose to their feet, crouching behind their cover ready to spring. I reached over the rock edge, and dropped the handkerchief.

I must have seen what followed, yet I do not know; the incidents seem burned on my memory, yet are so confused I can place them in no order. The white renegade seemed waiting, his arm upraised. Ere it fell in signal to dispatch his wild crew to the slaughter, there was a crash of rifles all about me, the red flare

leaping into the gray mist—a savage yell from a hundred throats, and a wild rush of naked bodies.

I saw warriors of the Iroquois fling up their arms and fall; I saw them shrink, and shrivel, break ranks and run. Surprised, stricken, terrified by the war-whoops of the maddened Illini, realizing only that they were caught between enemies, their one and only thought was escape. Two of their chiefs were down, and the white renegade, stumbling and falling as though also hurt, dived into the underbrush.

Before they could rally, or even comprehend what had occurred, their assailants were upon them. Leaping across the open, over rock and sand, yelling like fiends, weapons gleaming in the dull light, the frenzied Illini, enflamed with revenge, maddened with hate, flung themselves straight at them. Rifles flashed in their faces, tomahawks whirled in the air, but nothing stopped that rush. Warriors fell, but the others stumbled over the naked bodies. I saw De Artigny, stripped to his shirt, and that in rags from the bushes he had plunged through, his rifle barrel gripped, a yard in front of them all. I saw La Forest, bareheaded, and Sequitah, his Indian stoicism forgotten in mad blood lust.

Then they struck and were lost in the fierce maelstrom of struggle, striking, falling, red hands gripping at red throats, rifle butts flung high, tomahawks dealing the death blow, knives gleaming as sinewy arms drove them home. I could no longer distinguish enemy from friend; they were interlocked, struggling like mad dogs, fighting as devils might, a wild tangled mass of bodies, of waving hair, of blazing eyes, of uplifted steel.

The Iroquois had rallied from their first shock; already they realized the small number of the attackers. Those who had fled were turning back; those on either flank were running toward the scene of fight. I saw the white renegade burst from the press, urging these laggards forward. Scarcely had he attained the outer edge, when De Artigny fought his way forth also, tearing the mass asunder with sweep of rifle. They stood face to face, glaring into each other's eyes.

The rifle in De Artigny's hand was but a twisted bar of iron; this renegade's only weapon was a murderous knife, its point reddened with blood. What word was said, I know not, but I saw De Artigny fling his bar aside, and draw the knife at his belt. *Mon Dieu!* I could not look; I know not how they fought; I hid my eyes and prayed. When I glanced up again both were gone, the fighting mass was surging over the spot—but the Iroquois were in flight, seeking only some means of escape, while out through the fort gates the soldiers of the garrison were coming on a run, pouring volleys of lead into the fleeing savages. I saw De Tonty, De Baugis, De la Durantaye—ay! and there was M. Cassion, back among the stragglers, waving his sword gallantly in the air. It was all over with so quickly I could but sit and stare; they ran past me in pursuit, wild yells echoing through the woods, but all I thought of then was M. de Artigny. I scrambled down the rock, falling heavily in my haste, yet once upon my feet again, rushed forth, reckless of danger. The ground was strewn with dead and wounded, the victorious Illini already scattered in merciless, headlong pursuit. Only a group of soldiers remained at the edge of the forest. Among these were De Tonty and La Forest. Neither noticed my approach until I faced them.

"What, Madame," exclaimed De Tonty, "you here also?" he paused as though in doubt, "and the Sieur de Artigny—had he part in this feat of arms?"

“A very important part, Monsieur,” returned La Forest, staunching a wound on his forehead, yet bowing gallantly to me. “’Twas indeed his plan, and I permitted him command as he knows these Illini Indians better than I.”

“But does he live, Monsieur?” I broke in anxiously.

“Live! ay, very much alive—see, he comes yonder now. Faith, he fought Jules Lescalles knife to knife, and ended the career of that renegade. Is that not a recommendation, M. de Tonty?”

The other did not answer; he was watching De Artigny approach, his eyes filled with doubt. I also had scarce thought otherwise, and stepped forward to greet him, with hands outstretched. He was rags from head to foot, spattered with blood, an ugly wound showing on one cheek, yet his lips and eyes smiled.

“’Twas good work, well done,” he said cheerily. “’Twill be a while before the Iroquois besiege this fort again. Is that not your thought, M. de Tonty?”

“I appreciate the service rendered,” replied the other gravely. “But you are in peril here. M. Cassion is yonder, and still in command.”

De Artigny glanced inquiringly at La Forest, and the latter stepped forward, a leather bound packet in his hands.

“Your pardon, M. de Tonty,” he said. “I had forgotten my true mission here. I bear orders from the King of France.”

“From Louis? La Salle has reached the King’s ear?”

“Ay, to good results. These are for you, Monsieur.”

De Tonty took them, yet his thought was not upon their contents, but with his absent chief.

“You saw Sieur de la Salle in France? you left him well?”

“More than well—triumphant over all his enemies. He sails for the mouth of the Great River with a French colony; Louis authorized the expedition.”

“And is that all?”

“All, except it was rumored at the court that La Barre would not for long remain Governor of New France.”

The face of the Italian did not change expression; slowly he opened the papers, and glanced at their contents; then folded them once more, and lifted his eyes to our faces.

“By Grace of the King,” he said simply, “I am again in command of Fort St. Louis. I see the order is countersigned by La Barre.”

“Yes, Monsieur; he had no choice—’twas not done happily.”

“I presume not. But Messieurs, it may be well for us to return within the fort. Madame, may I have the pleasure of escorting you?”

We made our way slowly through the fringe of woods, and across the open space before the fort gates which still stood open. The dead bodies of savages were on all sides, so horribly mutilated, many of them, that I hid my eyes from the sight. De Tonty tried to speak of other things, and to shield me from the view, but I was so sick at heart I could hardly answer him. De la Durantaye, with a dozen men to aid, was already busily engaged in seeking the wounded, and I caught sight of De Baugis far down the western slope clambering up, a body of Indians at his heels. Cassion had disappeared; indeed there was not so much as a single guard at the gate when we entered, yet we were greeted instantly by his voice.

"'Tis well you return, M. de Tonty," he said loudly. "I was about to call those soldiers yonder, and close the gates. 'Tis hardly safe to have them left thus with all these strange Indians about."

"They are Illini, Monsieur—our allies."

"Pah! an Indian is an Indian to my mind; bid M. de la Durantaye come hither." He stared at De Artigny and me, seeing us first as he stepped forward. A moment he gasped, his voice failing; then anger conquered, and he strode forward, sword in hand.

"*Mon Dieu!* What is this? You here again, you bastard wood ranger? I had hopes I was rid of you, even at the cost of a wife. Well, I soon will be. Here, Durantaye, bring your men; we have a prisoner here to stretch rope. De Tonty, I command you in the name of France!"

Chapter XXXVI

The Clearing of Mystery.

The point of his sword was at De Artigny's breast, but the younger man stood motionless, his lips smiling, his eyes on the other's face.

"Perchance, Monsieur," he said quietly, "it might be best for you first to speak with this friend of mine."

"What friend? *Sacre!* What is the fellow to me? Who is he? another one of La Salle's spawn?"

La Forest, still bareheaded, his forehead bleeding, pressed down the swordblade.

"The company is a good one," he said bluntly enough, "and just now well worth belonging to. I am Francois de la Forest, Monsieur, one time commandant at Detroit; at present messenger from the King of France."

"King's messenger—you! *Mon Dieu!* you look it. Come, man, what mummery is this?"

"No mummery, Monsieur. I left France two months since, bearing the King's own word to M. la Barre. 'Tis with his endorsement I journeyed hither to restore Henri de Tonty to his rightful command of Fort St. Louis."

"You lie!" Cassion cried hotly, eyes blazing hatred and anger, "'tis some hellish trick."

"Monsieur, never before did man say that to me, and live. Were you not felon, and thief I would strike you where you stand. Ay, I mean the words—now listen; lift that sword point and I shoot you dead. Monsieur de Tonty, show the man the papers."

Cassion took them as though in a daze, his hand trembling, his eyes burning with malignant rage. I doubt if he ever saw clearly the printed and written words of the document, but he seemed to grasp vaguely the fact of La Barre's signature.

"A forgery," he gasped. "Ah, De Baugis, see here; these damned curs of La Salle would play trick on me. Look at the paper."

The dragoon took it, and smoothed it out in his hands. His face was grave, as his eyes searched the printed lines.

"'Tis the great seal of France," he said soberly, looking about at the faces surrounding him, "and the signature of the governor. How came it here?"

"By my hand," returned La Forest proudly. "You know me—Monsieur Francois la Forest."

"Ay, I know you, ever a follower of La Salle, and friend of Frontenac. 'Twas through his influence you got this. 'Tis little use for us to quarrel, M. Cassion—the order is genuine."

"*Mon Dieu*, I care not for such an order; it does not supersede my commission; I outrank this De Tonty."

"Hush, do not play the fool."

"Better the fool than the coward."

"Wait," said La Forest sharply, "the matter is not ended. You are Francois Cassion, of Quebec?"

"Major of Infantry, Commissaire of the Governor La Barre."

"So the titles read in this document. I arrest you by King's order for treason to France, and mutilation of official records. Here is the warrant, M. de Baugis, and your orders to convey the prisoner to Quebec for trial."

Cassion's face went white, and he struggled madly for breath. De Baugis grasped the paper, so startled at this new development as to be incapable of comprehension.

"Under arrest? for what, Monsieur? Treason, and mutilation of official records? What does it mean?"

"This—the man knows, and will not deny the charge. False testimony sworn to, and signed by this Francois Cassion, charged Captain la Chesnayne with cowardice and treason. In consequence the latter was broken of his command, and his estates forfeited to the Crown. Later, through the efforts of Frontenac, the King was convinced of injustice, and the estates were restored by royal order. This order reached Quebec, but was never recorded. This Cassion was then private secretary to the governor, and the paper came into his hands. Later, to hush up the scandal, he married Captain la Chesnayne's daughter against her will. The day this was accomplished the lost order was placed on file."

"You saw it?"

"Yes, I had the files searched secretly. The order was dispatched from France five years ago, but was stamped as received the day Cassion departed from Quebec."

My eyes were upon the speaker and I failed to note how the accused man met this damning charge. It was his voice which drew my attention—high pitched, harsh, unnatural.

"*Mon Dieu!* 'twas not I—'twas La Barre!"

"Tell that in Quebec; though little good 'twill do you. M. de Baugis, in the King's name I order this man's arrest."

I saw De Baugis step forward, his hand outstretched; then all was confusion and struggle. With the hoarse snarl of a beast, Cassion leaped forward, struck La Forest with his shoulder, and drove sword point into De Artigny. De Tonty gripped him, but was hurled aside by insane strength, reeling back so that the weight of

his body struck me to my knees. The next instant, his sword-point dripping blood, the runner was beyond reach, speeding for the open gate. What followed I know from word of others, and no view I had of it.

De Artigny had fallen, huddled in a heap on the grass, and I dragged myself across to him on my knees. I heard oaths, a shuffling of feet, a rush of bodies, a voice I did not recognize shouting some order—then the sharp crack of a rifle, and silence. I cared not what had occurred; I had De Artigny's head in my arms, and his eyes opened and smiled up at me full of courage.

"You are badly hurt?"

"No, I think not; the thrust was too high. Lift me, and I breathe better. The man must have been mad."

"Surely yes, Monsieur; think you he had hope of escape?"

"'Tis likely he thought only of revenge. Ah, you are here also, De Tonty."

"Yes, lad; there is small use for me yonder. You are not seriously struck?"

"I bleed freely, but the thrust was in the shoulder. I could stand, I think, with your aid."

On his feet he leaned heavily on us both, yet would not be led away, until La Forest joined us. He held in his hand some papers, yet neither of us questioned him.

"Monsieur de Tonty," he said, "I would have private word with you."

"When I help De Artigny to his bed, and have look at his wound. Yet is it not matter of interest to these as well?"

"I take it so."

"Then speak your message—M. Cassion is dead?"

"The sentry's bullet found his heart, Monsieur."

"I saw him fall. Those papers were upon him—are they of value?"

"That I know not; they possess no meaning to me, but they were addressed to the man killed at St. Ignace."

"Hugo Chevet?" I exclaimed. "My uncle; may I not see them, Monsieur?"

De Tonty placed them in my hands—a letter from a lawyer in Quebec, with a form of petition to the King, and a report of his search of the archives of New France. The other document was the sworn affidavit of Jules Beaubaou, a clerk of records, that he had seen and read a paper purporting to be a restoration from the King to the heirs of Captain la Chesnayne. It was signed and sealed. I looked up at the faces surrounding me; startled and frightened at this witness from the dead.

"They are papers belonging to Chevet?" asked De Tonty.

"Yes, Monsieur—see. He must have known, suspected the truth before our departure, yet had no thought such villainy was the work of M. Cassion. He sought evidence."

"That is the whole story, no doubt. La Barre learned of his search, for he would have spies in plenty, and wrote his letter of warning to Cassion. The latter, fearing the worst, and desperate, did not even hesitate at murder to gain possession of these documents. Fate served him well, and gave him De Artigny as victim. I wonder only that he did not long ago destroy the papers."

"There is always some weakness in crime," commented La Forest, "and the man has paid penalty for his. It would be my guess he desired to place them in La

Barre's hands in proof of his loyalty. But, Messieurs, De Artigny needs to have his wound dressed. We can discuss all this later."

It was two days later, and the bright sunshine rested on Fort St. Louis flecking the sides of the great rock with gold, and bridging the broad valley below. De Artigny, yet too weak to rise unaided, sat in a chair Barbeau had made beside the open window, and to his call I joined him, my arm on his shoulder as I also gazed down upon the scene below. It was one of peace now, the silvery Illinois winding hither and yon among its green islands, the shadowy woods darkening one bank, and the vast meadows stretching northward from the other. Below the bend an Indian village, already rebuilt and occupied, slept in the sun, and I could see children and dogs playing before the tepees.

Down the sharp trail from the fort a line of Indian packers were toiling slowly, their backs supporting heavy burdens which they bore to two canoes resting against the bank. About these were grouped a little party of white men, and when at last the supplies were all aboard, several took their places at the paddles, and pushed off into the stream.

There was waving of hands, and shouts, and one among them—even at that distance I could tell La Forest—looked up at our window, and raised his hat in gesture of farewell. I watched until they rounded the rock and disappeared on their long journey to Quebec, until the others—exiles of the wilderness—turned away and began to climb upward to the fort gates. De Artigny's hand closed softly over mine.

"You are sad, sweetheart; you long too for New France?"

"No, Dear One," I answered, and he read the truth in my eyes. "Wherever you are is my home. On this rock in the great valley we will serve each other—and France."