

*A KNOT
of BLUE*



*"A TRUE KNOT
A BLUE KNOT
A LOVER'S KNOT OF BLUE"*

WILLIAM R. A. WILSON

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Sept 5/05

A Knot of Blue





A
KNOT *of* BLUE

BY
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"A ROSE OF NORMANDY"

With Illustrations by
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BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
1905

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Published April, 1905

Printed by
S. J. PARKHILL & CO., BOSTON, U. S. A.

TO ANOTHER AIMÉE,
THE HEROINE OF MY OWN LIFE STORY,
MY CHUM, COMPANION, AND
MY WIFE

2228474

Due acknowledgment is hereby made to the publishers of "Vogue" and "Munsey's Magazine" for the use of two of the author's poems, originally appearing in their pages

FORE-WORD

THIS story is old, old as the human heart; and new, new as this morning's sunrise;—the story of man's fickleness and woman's steadfast conquering love. Since Creation's dawn men have wandered away from their better selves, yet without taint or blame, and when they awakened and the mists had rolled away they have returned to find a feminine heart still beating strong and true, patiently awaiting their sure homecoming with a tenderness and compassion almost divine. Thus has it always been. Thus may it always be until the end.



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A Knot of Blue

Chapter One

CONTAINS A STORM AT SEA, A QUARREL, A DEADLY
PERIL, AND A DESERTION

LIKE a tiny speck upon an angry waste of waters the dauntless little ship *L'Écume* fled, quivering in every beam and timber before the coming storm, on her long and tedious voyage from La Rochelle to Quebec. The culminating tempest of a boisterous winter seemed about to be let loose in one last, belated, passionate outburst of wind and wave. The vessel, true to her name, danced lightly upon the crest of each succeeding ridge, dipping down easily into the intervening troughs only to rise again with jaunty bow and dripping sails to meet the next advancing wall of water.

Three days of fog had been succeeded by a day of partial clearing, which gave way toward nightfall to the signs of an impending tempest. The master of the ship had urged its onward course with all the sail he dared, hoping to get within the sheltering entrance of the broad St. Lawrence before the storm broke. This object he was

unable wholly to accomplish, so, one by one, the sails were taken in, and he and his hardy Breton sailors busied themselves in putting the vessel in the best possible trim to withstand the coming trial.

Several hours passed. Daylight had disappeared entirely and blackest night had come. As they sped onward the anxious, watchful eyes of the sailors detected a change in the wind that led them to hope that they might after all escape the full force of the gale. Accordingly a small sail was shaken out which gave additional speed to the little craft in her race against the elements. Soon the waves seemed to shorten, and the pitching and tumbling of the boat changed to a less rough motion, albeit the wind still tore fiercely through the resounding rigging, sweeping the deck with a force difficult for even the seamen to withstand.

The passengers of this the King's ship were all below. They were one hundred and fifty in number, consisting of a few soldiers to recruit the outposts of New France; artisans and farming peasants to aid in developing the natural resources of the Colony; a few gentlemen of Quebec returning from a visit to the gay world of Paris and the Court; girls in charge of quiet-eyed nuns, coming out to find husbands and homes in the new land—all eager for the safe ending of a disagreeable and perilous journey. During the moments

when the vessel's motion was most alarming many prayers were said, beads counted, and votive candles promised upon their safe arrival. But when the force of the storm had somewhat abated many of the passengers fell to work carefully packing up their belongings in anticipation of a speedy sighting of land and dropping of the huge anchor in the peaceful basin before the frowning heights of the queen city of the great continent.

However, in one of the cabins neither prayers were said nor the perils of the deep feared, for here a dozen men, officers and gentlemen passengers, were congregated about a rough table beneath the rays of a dimly burning, swaying ship's-lantern. Sounds of merriment arose as tales of adventure and gallantry were related, and glasses were raised and emptied many times in jovial wishes for the future, as though striving to overwhelm the depressing din of the storm without by the noisy cheer within.

As the night wore on the gaming spirit manifested itself, and at one end of the table five of the men were soon at play. One of them proved himself a steady winner, and the pile of gold before each player quickly melted away, while his own increased.

"Confound you for a lucky dog," cried one, whose handsome, boyish face, sunny enough before, was now clouded with a petulant, vexed air, "there

goes the last *louis d'or* I shall have until my first pay day in this barbarous country whither we are going, where, it is said, one sees more beaver skins in a week used as money than he does good yellow gold in a year."

"Say, rather, more red-skins," laughed one of the other officers. "In the winter they feed on the King's grain, and in the summer kill the King's soldiers."

The winner smiled, apparently entering into the spirit of his companions' conversation, but an observer would have noticed that his participation in their merriment did not prevent his keeping a sharp eye upon his own cards and, perhaps, a too keen glance at those of the other players.

"No lucky star was in the ascendant at my birth," was his reply. "'Luck follows the hopeful,' as we say in New France. But even the best of luck turns; you may all have your revenge yet."

A moment later one of the players threw down his cards with an oath and arose from the table. "Curse it!" he cried. "My pocket is empty, so I must desist;" then turning to one of the company he said: "Come, de Chatignac, take my place, perhaps it will change the good fortune of our friend here, who has won every night since we left France."

The person addressed was a young man of some

five and twenty, pale as though from recent illness, who wore no uniform yet was possessed of a military bearing. He had been a ready hand during the early part of the evening to join in either song or story; his eyes sparkling with merriment while his hearty laugh had seemed a safety valve to a superabundance of good spirits. After the play began, however, his mirth gradually subsided, his brows contracted now and then with a frown, while his long, white fingers beat with increasing vigor a nervous tattoo upon the table. As the game progressed his interest quickened, while the signs of evident irritation increased. Several times his lips opened and his hand was raised as if to interfere, but whatever his purpose was he postponed action.

“Not to-night,” was his reply to the invitation. “Gaspard Roguin is too lucky altogether to suit my taste.” The last words were accompanied by a contemptuous curl of the lips as he glanced across the table.

Gaspard Roguin saw the look, and flushed angrily. “Your tone, Monsieur, has a savor of offense to my ears; pray alter it.”

“Not I,” was the quick rejoinder, while the slender finger-tips drummed ominously on the wood. “I repeat again, your luck has an ugly look.”

“Perhaps,” interposed a third with an uneasy

laugh as he saw the flashing eyes and detected an approaching quarrel, "perhaps Roguin's luck has its source in his having dabbled in the Black Art while in Paris."

The winner, who had laid his cards face down upon the table, looked about at the men clustered around him.

"I call you gentlemen to witness this insult received at the hands of de Chatignac. I shall take the matter up when once we land, and demand satisfaction."

"You shall have none from me," came the contemptuous reply; "I refuse to cross swords with a cheat, a card swindler."

With a cry of rage and a whitened face Gaspard Roguin sprang up and, seizing his sword, vaulted impetuously over the end of the table toward his accuser.

Just at that moment there was the sound of a terrible crash and the noise of splintering timbers. The ship's progress was so suddenly stopped that the shock sent the entire company in the little cabin sprawling in a heap on the floor, while the chairs and benches were overturned and the lantern extinguished. One by one the men disengaged themselves from the confused mass of bodies, arms, and legs, and groped their way to the door and up onto the deck.

Here everything was in confusion. The ship's

officers were running to and fro bawling orders, cursing the men or belaboring them with knotted ropes ends for showing cowardice or delay. The mainmast had snapped off close to the deck and lay athwart it amid a network of tangled rigging. Here a group of seamen was busily engaged trying to cut this heavy mass loose so as to right the vessel, which was careened over badly to one side; there a group labored hard preparing the small boats for launching, while still others ran hither and thither in their terror, doing nothing but add to the confusion.

Passengers poured up from below decks and stood huddled together in the darkness, women crossing themselves and appealing to the saints for succor, men wringing their hands in terror or busily secreting about their persons the most valuable part of their little property. To all this din was added the sound of the wind as it shrieked and shrilled about them like an army of evil spirits rejoicing in the mischief they had wrought, while the booming of each succeeding wave as it angrily crashed against the further side of the vessel overwhelmed them with its woeful sound.

De Chatignac pressed his way through the confusion to a point where the master of the ship stood. There he heard an officer report that the vessel had struck a submerged rock, which had torn a jagged hole in her side some ten feet from

her bow; that the ship had slipped off after the first shock; that the water was pouring in at a fearful rate; and that the vessel was slowly settling at the bow, and all was lost.

“To the boats!” was the cry, and a pitch torch was lighted and placed on the lee side at the only spot available for the launching of the frail craft that were now the only hope of the doomed throng.

The first boat was lowered and the oars thrown in, but a spiteful wave immediately swept it away and it disappeared in the darkness. The next one was made fast, and the order was given to the passengers to embark. Before anyone could enter a man was seen to jump upon the rail, his face showing an ashen gray in the fitful glare of the torch, but an officer stepping forward with the cry: “Women first, you coward,” dealt him a blow on the jaw that sent him crashing to the deck, where he lay stunned and bleeding.

The boat was soon filled and it started safely on its journey over the perilous waters. Another was hauled across the deck and launched successfully. At length the last one was ready and de Chatignac was left apparently the only person on the wreck beside the master of the ship. As he was about to descend a woman’s voice wailed upward from the boat.

“For the love of *le bon Dieu* do not leave my mistress behind! I saw her last in one of the

cabins praying beside the body of the nun who died yesterday."

De Chatignac bade them wait, and bounded down into the interior of the vessel again. Picking up a lighted lantern he hastened from one cabin to another in a frantic search for the missing woman. Finally, when almost despairing, he pushed open a door and beheld in the dim light the figure of a young girl kneeling beside the dead body of a sweet-faced nun. Her eyes were uplifted and her hands clasped upon an ivory crucifix, seemingly oblivious to the sounds above her, and her own danger.

At a glance de Chatignac saw that she was young, that her face (which he did not remember having seen before among the passengers) was, even in the obscure light, pale and exceedingly beautiful. Every evidence of grace and refinement was present in her person although she was clad in a simple, dark garb. With a cry of satisfaction he sprang to her side and, laying his hand upon her shoulder, said in a respectful tone:

"Come! Mademoiselle, you have no time to lose; we had almost gone without you."

The eyes of the girl turned slowly toward his face, her lips moved, and in a voice scarcely audible above the distant roar she replied: "Leave me, Monsieur; it is God's will that I perish."

The sweet vibrating tones of her voice thrilled

the young man. "Nay," he cried with enthusiasm, "it is God's will that you escape, and He has sent me to save you. I beseech you, Mademoiselle, that you hasten with me."

She shook her head sadly and turned again to her devotions. De Chatignac, accustomed to quick decisions, did not delay to argue, but, bending down, seized her in his arms and bore her rapidly away. He stumbled with his fair burden up the narrow steps and across the deck to the spot where he had left the boat awaiting him. Stopping with a cry he placed the girl on her feet and looked over the verge. The light of the torch showed only a rushing, whirling mass of water that beat against the ship's side with an angry snarl as if already balked too long of its prey. The boat had disappeared. He shouted hoarsely, but the only answer, save that of the infuriated elements, was a groan from the gallant vessel as it struggled stoutly in its death throes. "Gone!" he muttered; "deserted!"

The girl, who had watched his face, divined the situation. "Oh! why," she cried, wringing her hands, "did you not leave me to die, and save yourself. Forgive me, Monsieur, for I have been the unhappy cause of your destruction."

De Chatignac turned from the raging sea toward his weeping companion, and a hearty smile lighted his features as he replied: "*Ma foi!*

Mademoiselle, would you rob a soldier of the delight of rescuing a comrade from the hands of the enemy, even though it be by heading a forlorn hope; or deprive a gentleman of the pleasure of aiding Beauty in distress? Great dangers give also great honors. You do not know me, Mademoiselle, if you can believe I regret new peril;" then adding proudly, with a bow, "I fought at Fontenoy, and am a gentleman of New France."

A groan, clearly human, caused him to stoop and examine the nearby shadows of the deck. He soon discovered a prostrate form, and dragging it within the circle of light beheld the features of Gaspard Roguin. It was he who had been struck down by the officer for his cowardice. De Chatignac put a flask of brandy to his lips. The man opened his eyes, and staggering to his feet, looked wildly about him, then shuddered. When he recognized de Chatignac a venomous light flashed from his eyes. "You here?" he muttered.

"Yes, Monsieur Roguin," said de Chatignac. "We three are alone. The rest have departed without us. I should have preferred that you had gone with them. But this is no time or place to choose one's company. Good counsel is better often than a great army. What would you suggest for our deliverance?"

Roguin made no reply, for the full horror of

the situation had returned to him as he stood, biting his nails, looking wildly over the dark waters and shaking his head.

“I shall be the General then,” continued de Chatignac, “and you, Monsieur, together with Mademoiselle here,”—he smiled almost gayly at the girl who had been a silent spectator of all that had just passed—“will be my faithful and obedient soldiers. First of all, we must have courage. Hope is as cheap as despair, and makes a man hold up his head.” With these cheery words he gave his attention to the relief of their precarious condition.

He made a tour of investigation, hoping that the condition of the sinking ship would warrant them in remaining until morning. He found, however, that the water had risen so rapidly that it was a question of minutes rather than hours before the vessel would sink. He thereupon hastened back to his companions and, directing the young girl how to hold the torch, he seized an ax and bade Roguin join him in the labor of cutting the broken mast into lengths which, when lashed together with broken spars, would make a serviceable raft. Roguin obeyed sulkily, but fear of death overcame his personal feeling against de Chatignac and he, too, soon made the chips fly about him.

A movement of the ship as it settled still fur-

ther in the water warned them that they must hasten if they would avoid the danger of being sucked down when it sank. Soon the improvised raft was ready and launched. The three took their places, the girl securely held by a couple of turns of rope around her body; the line was thrown off and they were swept swiftly away from the wreck. Looking back they soon lost sight of the dim outlines of the ship, the waning torch being the only object visible in the all-encircling blackness. They had left none too soon, for within three minutes after their departure the good vessel gave up the fruitless struggle, uttered one last inarticulate, gurgling moan and sank beneath the victorious waves against which it had battled so bravely. The torch, a tiny point of light, was extinguished, and the three castaways were left alone with the night and the cruel water.

De Chatignac heartened his companions by calling out cheerfully at intervals, telling them that morning could not be very far off; that they would probably find they had drifted near shore, and prophesied they would all dine the next evening in some hospitable cabin before a blazing fire.

The night seemed interminable, but at length the first faint streak of dawn appeared and with it clearing skies. As they tossed helplessly about upon the long swell that followed the storm all three strained their eager eyes to see if land were

near. Soon the sun appeared, a great red ball of fire rising from the watery east, and all was light once more. With a cry of joy Roguin pointed out the low coast line far away in the distance. But there was no sign anywhere of their ship companions of the night before.

“If the kindly current will only set us in toward the shore instead of being contrary minded and carrying us out to sea, we are safe, as it will then be only a question of time before we reach land,” said de Chatignac cheerily. “But for my part I should prefer a good safe boat with a couple of pairs of oars to any current however friendly—*Pardieu!* what is that?” he cried as he turned and looked seaward. “Is that not a boat or does the sun blind my eyes and fill them with black specks?”

It was indeed a boat, floating lightly on the swell, empty, but traveling landward so much faster than the raft that it would undoubtedly overtake them in a short time. Nearer and nearer it came until they recognized it as the first boat launched from the sinking ship and torn away by the waves. When it reached what seemed the nearest point de Chatignac prepared to swim for it, but after taking a dozen strokes he returned in evident pain. “*Ma foi!*” he exclaimed as he clambered onto the raft again, “my wound treats me ill and will not let me swim even a beggarly

score of yards. Monsieur Roguin, it must be your duty to reach yonder means of escape and bring it to us."

Roguin obeyed with unwonted alacrity, and swam rapidly toward the desired object. He soon reached it, climbed in, seized the oars and with a mocking "*Adieu! mes amis; bon voyage!*" rowed steadily away alone.

For a moment de Chatignac stood motionless with astonishment, scarcely believing the evidence of his own eyes. Then came the full realization of his late companion's perfidy.

"Curse him!" he cried, wild with rage as he shook his fist impotently after the rapidly disappearing Roguin. "I should have known better than to trust him in anything." Realizing the necessity of concealing his despair from his partner in misfortune he quickly regained control over himself, and turning toward her with a smile he said encouragingly: "Our escape is but delayed, Mademoiselle." Then searching his pockets he continued: "Here we have a bottle of fresh water and a flask of brandy. To be sure solid food is wanting, but we can get along for a short time on liquid rations."

"Ah! Monsieur!" exclaimed the girl sorrowfully, "I have wrought worse than I dreamed. To go down with the ship would have been horrible enough, but to condemn you to a slow death

by thirst and starvation is terrible to contemplate," and she sobbed pitifully.

"Good liquor is both food and drink," said de Chatignac light-heartedly. "This supply will surely last us until we touch the rugged shore of New France. As for Gaspard Roguin, we are well rid of such a rascal, his hateful presence would but retard our progress, while he would probably drink up our stock of provisions at a single draught, leaving nothing for us." Manfully he strove to cheer the drooping spirits of his companion, but his own heart misgave him as he saw the slow progress they were making and realized that when the tide turned it would carry them seaward. Without rescue they might drift back and forth within sight of land indefinitely.

All through that day he pretended to partake of the brandy and water in equal measure with the young girl, but in reality he only wet his lips. Night came. De Chatignac's companion slept, securely fastened as she was, but he remained awake conquering as best he might the terrible thirst that assailed him, vainly endeavoring to think out some plan that would aid in their escape.

Morning dawned and the coast appeared nearer than before, but even at the rate they were moving it would take them at least two more days to reach it. The cold, hunger, and the agony of unsatisfied thirst, combined with the weakness from his

partly healed wound, brought on a dangerous faintness. He took the precaution of giving the girl a liberal portion from his scanty store of spirits to combat the effects of the cold and exposure that had begun to manifest themselves. There followed another night of watching and struggling against physical hardships. After dawn broke he called to his companion, but received no answer. Alarmed at her silence, he strove to drag himself to her side. A dizziness overcame him; the light of day was blotted from his sight; he fell back, rolled over the edge into the water and was gone.

A few hours later a fishing boat came upon an improvised raft on which was bound the unconscious form of a young girl whose long hair, loosened from its hood, streamed to and fro unnoticed amid the gently lapping waves, her fair face turned serenely heavenward; the apparently lifeless body of a man floated alongside, whose sword was entangled in one of the ropes binding the parts of the raft together.

Chapter Two

WHEREIN THE DEAD RETURN TO LIFE AND CAUSE
MUCH JOY AND CONSTERNATION

ALL Quebec put aside its pleasure and its gayety, and mourned. Gaspard Roguin upon his arrival had told the news of the disaster, and proclaimed himself the sole survivor from the ill-fated ship. He became at once an object of universal interest, and was compelled to rehearse again and again the details of the awful event and his miraculous escape.

Flattered by the attention bestowed upon him, his self-love urged him to magnify his own deeds. Like all liars when there is no chance of their falsehood being refuted, he lied largely and well. His story grew in telling until he appeared to his hearers a veritable hero, who had coolly allayed the general panic, skillfully superintended the launching of the boats, and then when all were filled had generously refused to add his weight to the tiny craft already overloaded, but had entrusted his own safety to a frail spar. He was finally providentially rewarded for his unselfish heroism

by finding an empty boat adrift, in which he reached land unharmed.

The flagstaffs upon the Château, the Intendant's Palace and other public buildings were dressed in mourning, and a day was appointed on which all the good inhabitants of the city were bidden to repair to the Cathedral, where a solemn mass was sung for the repose of the souls of those lost at sea; then Quebec resumed once more its struggles with living problems, leaving the dead to slumber in their watery sepulcher.

Madame Fleurat, the Governor's housekeeper, good, pious soul, had shed a tear at the Cathedral and then hurried back to the Château to superintend the preparation of a meal that should tempt the Governor's appetite, which, since the first news of the wreck, had disappeared entirely. Her fifty years of service in his family, both in France and the New World, had made her devotion to him a second nature, and all events or sorrows were of small moment to her except as they affected him. But all her painstaking was of no avail, for when she entered the room to summon him to the meal prepared with such loving care, she found him seated alone before the fire, absorbed in gloomy meditation.

"Come, your Excellency," she exclaimed in her cheerful bustling manner, "your dinner is waiting for you all hot and smoking. You will open your

eyes when you see how many of your favorite dishes I have prepared for you. You will injure your health if you do not eat instead of moping here in the dark and blinking at the fire for all the world like one of those Gascon owls that used to frighten you when a boy," and the good dame patted him gently on the hand in much the same motherly way as, when a young girl many years ago, she had first taken charge of the little motherless child in the Château on the banks of the far-off Garonne.

The Governor, however, shook his head sadly as he seized her rough, withered hand and drew her down until she sat beside him on a hassock.

"My heart is heavy to-night, *ma chère amie*, and I need your comfort and sympathy as in the old days, rather than your food. My thoughts are sad indeed since *le bon Dieu* has taken from me the one fair flower left blooming in the deserted garden of my life. For Aimée is gone, the loving, happy-hearted Aimée, whose existence has been the only bright ray of sunshine amid the clouds of difficulties, dangers and perplexities that have surrounded me since coming to New France. My old heart had looked forward so eagerly to welcoming her back from her two years' schooling in Paris, no longer a child, but overflowing with all the beauty, charm and grace of her full womanhood; and now—now to think that she lies beneath

the cruel waters, her loving glances quenched, her laughter stilled forever. But no, *Dieu me pardonne* for these unhappy thoughts! I will not think of her thus, but rather that her blessed spirit is now in Paradise, looking down upon my grieving heart in loving pity for its loneliness."

A sympathetic pressure of the hand from the good dame filled in a moment of silence.

"How well I remember," he continued in a reminiscent tone, "the day of the big fight when, hard pressed by the English officer, I would have fallen had not my gallant friend Félix de Marsay, Aimée's father, stepped between us and received the fatal blow intended for me. How his dying words ring in my ears even now: 'My little flower, *ma mignonne!* you will guard her as your very own, and be her father?' And I promised as he expired in my arms. I have tried to fulfill my word. You remember how, thinking the gloomy walls of the Château were unfitted for her bright young life, I placed her in charge of her old nurse in the little cottage beyond the Ursulines? and how, after I found her father's affairs were helplessly entangled with those of that rascal Roguin, I forbore to enter upon a hopeless legal fight but abandoned everything to him, preferring to care for her myself, making her my heir instead? And how I have kept up the harmless fiction that her

property was in keeping and thus satisfied her proud spirit? Two years ago you know I sent her to the convent in Paris that she might acquire the finer touches and feminine accomplishments she could not receive here, to fit her for the highest station to which she might be called. It was her own eagerness to return that led her to take passage in the ill-fated *L'Écume* in company with a maid and one of the nuns, rather than wait until the spring storms were over. Ah me! the ways of God are past finding out. He knows I would gladly have given what remains of my old, loveless life, loveless except for her, if by so doing she could have been spared."

The gray head sank upon his breast and the old soldier, valiant before a score of foes but now weary and stricken with grief, surrendered to his overpowering emotions. Thus the two aged figures sat in the flickering firelight, the one with his heart-strings torn and bleeding, the other mute in deepest sympathy. There are moments like these of profound affliction when the spirit, leaving the outer world, withdraws into some hidden recess of the soul and sits alone communing with its sorrow and obtains relief for its pent-up feelings, surcease of its grief, and gathers fresh spiritual vitality and strength from the vast storehouse of eternal pity and compassion.

The dropping of a burnt log in the fireplace,

the distant baying of a dog in the Lower Town, the cry of the sentinel on guard—these sounds smote upon dulled ears. Suddenly the Governor sat upright, his eyes raised, his figure tense and vibrating with suppressed excitement. The sound of a familiar voice seemingly near at hand thrilled him.

“Père Philippe! Père Philippe!” it called.

“Aimée! Her voice! Did you not hear it? 'Tis her spirit calling to me with the name she used as a little child.”

There was the sound of hurrying footsteps upon the hard polished floor of the adjoining room and the clicking of a tiny pair of heels upon the threshold; then the heavy door swung open and an apparition stood in the half-light of the doorway.

“Père Philippe! Père Philippe! Where are you?” resounded through the room, and the Governor started up, overturning the chair in his amazement, and faced about in the direction of the door. Before the astonished man could move the apparition darted across the room and flung itself into his arms.

“Aimée! My loved one! *Ma mignonne, mon bijou*, my little pigeon——” and the man’s voice became an inarticulate murmur of sobs and endearing names. At length he calmed himself and holding the girl at arm’s length exclaimed:

“It is then really you in the flesh and not your spirit?” Then turning to Madame Fleurat, who sat crouched on the hassock trembling with joy and fright, “Come, come, arise and bring lights; pile up the logs and broach a bottle of my best wine, for this my night of mourning is turned into a day of joy.”

Seated about the table, with the delayed dinner before them, they beamed upon each other with loving glances while Madame Fleurat, rejoicing in her master's happiness, bustled in and out, scolded the servants and seemed to become suddenly twenty years younger. But little did the Governor partake of the food set before him. His meat was to devour with admiring gaze and misty eye the features of his fair young companion, and drink in as if with insatiable thirst every word falling from her lips and every glance that darted from her sparkling lips.

Aimée told the story of her escape; how, when she opened her eyes she found herself warmly lodged in bed in the humble cabin of one of the numerous settlers who cultivated the narrow strip of land close to the river's edge, ekeing out their slender means by occasional fishing expeditions; how she had quickly recovered from the effects of the cold and exposure and within a few days was sitting up. Not so with her companion. For days he tossed delirious, now chattering unintel-

ligibly, now living over again the terrible scenes of the shipwreck.

“Again he talked of battle,” she said, “of siege and camp; and then he would seem to go back to his childish days in Quebec and familiar names came from his tongue, among them yours and mine. And oh! Père Philippe, can I ever be forgiven for my blindness! I recognized him then as my old friend and playmate, Raoul de Chatignac.”

“Raoul de Chatignac! Impossible! He is not expected home for some months yet.”

“Impossible, perhaps, but nevertheless it was he. Little wonder that I did not recognize him during those hours of excitement, darkness and misery, for he has changed wonderfully since leaving us all seven years ago. Then he was but a slight, stoop-shouldered lad, and now he is a tall, broad, soldierly gallant with a most bewitching mustache and only the same generous, hearty smile to remind me of my former friend.”

“And did he recognize you, *ma chérie?*”

“No, and no wonder, for I kept my head well muffled in my capote because of the cold, so that I do not believe he once caught a full view of my face. I stayed and did what I could to allay his discomfort until one morning, when they told me he was himself again, I directed them to start me on my journey to Quebec, not wishing him to

recognize me under such circumstances. This they gladly did, as one of the women folk was anxious to come to the city to buy some finery, especially as I promised them a goodly sum. After several delays spent at the houses of some of their friends upon the way to visit and repair the canoe, we arrived to-night. I bade them leave me at the gate of the Château and call on you in the morning for their pay."

"*Pardieu!* and they shall have it though it were a king's ransom," cried the Governor as he struck the table a ringing blow for sheer joy.

Thus did the old man and his foster-daughter while away the dinner hour in earnest questionings and glad replies.

Once more they sat before the fire as they had so often done before, she with her head laid lovingly upon his knee, his hand passing and repassing through the mass of her golden hair; and they were both content.

"You have grown more beautiful, little pigeon, than I had even hoped for. Alas! for the manly hearts that will beat quicker at the sight of your sweet face. You will have all the fine ladies of Quebec mad with envy. Ah me! if I were but twenty years younger I might try for the prize myself."

"You would come nearer winning, Père Philippe, than any that I know."

“What! have I a better chance than your gallant rescuer, Raoul de Chatignac? He must be a fine fellow. His father was my warm friend and a noble man. The boy gave every promise of equaling him when he left and from all I can learn he has indeed fulfilled his early promise. He did splendid service in several campaigns until finally Maréchal Saxe took notice of him and had him with him at Fontenoy, where he fought gallantly, falling at last with several wounds. It was shortly after that his father died and he is now come back to take possession of the seigniory and the wealth his father has left him. You could certainly do much worse, *ma mignonne*, than wed your old-time friend.”

Aimée sat dreamily watching the tongues of flame darting in and out among the logs before replying.

“No gallants now for me, Père Philippe; I want to make your life bright and happy once more after deserting you for two long years.”

“Nor do I wish to think of young gallants or anything that means my ever losing you again. I would think of naught to-night save that you are back once more. Just before you entered I had vowed my willingness to give up my own life for you if it were necessary. Your father sacrificed himself for me and I shall always stand ready to pay the father’s debt to his daughter. A life for

a life, *ma chérie*; if ever you need it, it is yours. I told you this the first evening on which I brought you here, a little child. I renew my promise here to-night, the night when you return to me a woman."

A far different scene was being enacted in the long, upper room of "The Silver Fox," kept by the jolly, sharp-witted Etienne Lebas, who was ever ready to serve a quip or jest with each bottle of wine or mug of cider to his merry customers. This inn, situated not over two hundred yards from the gate of the Château, was the favorite rendezvous for all the young officers and gallants of Quebec. It served the purpose of a modern club, being the center of the male social life of the city. It was the meeting place for the discussion of all matters of public, and, too often, those of private interest; the breeding ground of the thousand and one petty intrigues that sapped the vitality of the colony; and the scene of many of the innumerable personal quarrels arising over cards or in minds overheated with wine.

The room was crowded. Several groups of young men sat about small tables drinking and laughing, while a number were engaged in friendly games to while away the long evening. A knot of spectators had collected about one table where the interest in play was greatest. One of the

players, his back against the wall, seemed the center of attraction. It was none other than Gaspard Roguin, his eyes flashing with the lust of gain, his cheeks flushed with excitement and pleasure. His winnings were already piled high and were steadily increasing. He kept up a constant fire of half-bantering, cynical remarks directed to the other players, who, convulsed with laughter, were often unable to direct their full attention to their cards. Gradually the group increased, attracted by the sounds of merriment until at least a score of onlookers stood about the table.

The subject of conversation finally turned to the event of the day, the service at the Cathedral.

"'Tis well you escaped, Roguin," spoke up Gaudais, one of his former boon companions, "for if you had not we should have been obliged to shed one more tear, and I for one could not have done so; as it was I squeezed both my eyes dry weeping for the others who were lost."

A burst of laughter met this sally, as it was known to all that the speaker had not been near the Cathedral that day.

"I am not ashamed to confess I wept heartily," said one of the group stoutly, "for I felt deeply the loss of my old playmate and companion, Raoul de Chatignac, as gallant and true a friend as ever breathed the air of New France, as many of you can testify."

Several of the group assented to this earnest testimony to the worth of a lost comrade.

A spiteful look gleamed in the eye of Roguin as he replied:

"I, too, wept at the thought of Raoul de Chatignac, not because he was a friend of mine, but because of my disappointment at finding him to be unworthy of the high regard many of you have held for him; a regard I once shared in. But that is a story I have not yet told anyone. One must speak only well of the dead; you know the Latin proverb."

"Tell us about it, nevertheless," chimed in Berthier, one of his satellites, who saw that his leader only wished a little urging.

Roguin shook his head and sighed but did not speak.

"As a friend of de Chatignac," replied Armand Boucard angrily, he who had just spoken so warmly in his favor, "I insist that your cursed innuendo demands a full explanation."

"As you will," replied Gaspard Roguin with a shrug as he deftly dealt the cards around. "To begin with," he continued, "I have never told the true story of my escape."

A silence fell upon the group. Others drew near and listened.

"The first boat launched was torn away by the waves and floated off empty. Lucky it was for

me, for it was that same boat that I afterwards found and escaped in. (Dumay, you have not made your bet.) The second was ready to be filled when our gallant hero, as you have considered him, started to jump in first before any of the women. This lack of gallantry so enraged me that I felled him with a blow. Not a pretty thing to do, I admit, but justifiable under the circumstances. After all the boats were filled someone called out that there was a young woman left behind in one of the cabins. I hastened below to find her and upon bringing her to the deck I found the last boat had gone."

The speaker paused to gather in his winnings, and while the cards were dealt afresh, continued:

"I found our heroic friend still unconscious from my blow, so after resuscitating him I begged his assistance in making a raft. This with his lordly air he refused to do. The work thereupon all devolved upon me. (I double your bet, La Briot.) With much difficulty I managed to get the raft launched. After leaving the wreck, I discovered that I had forgotten to bring any food or water with us, hence you can imagine my surprise at seeing de Chatignac take a bottle of water stealthily from his pocket and help himself when he thought neither the girl or myself were looking. I suggested that he share it with us, but he

stoutly denied having it in his possession. From that moment I felt he meditated treachery. (You have lost again Dumay; you should play more carefully.) Finally, desperate with thirst, I again demanded a portion of the water for myself and our companion, whereupon he flew into a rage, knocked me into the water, and loosening a small spar, shoved it after me, telling me to shift for myself. I managed with difficulty to cling to this slight support. In the morning the raft, a frail thing at best, had disappeared, sunk no doubt with the weight of its two occupants, but I discovered near at hand the drifting boat. I never saw him again. He is now down below, a just punishment for his faithlessness. We all did well to pray for his soul to-day."

A breathless silence now filled the room. All were astonished at the recital. Before anyone could speak a voice, vibrating with intense emotion, resounded in their ears.

"Gaspard Roguin, you lie!"

Roguin looked up angrily. The flush on his face died away, and it became livid with terror. Raoul de Chatignac, pale and weak, stood beside the table with arms folded and blazing eyes. He had entered the room unnoticed and during Roguin's narrative had stood in the background. At its close he had quietly pushed his way through the crowd to the front.

A shout of wonder and glad recognition arose on all sides. This he silenced with a gesture.

“Monsieur did not count upon any delay through illness in my reaching Quebec, or he would have waited a little longer to make sure of my death before venturing upon this tale which is a tissue of lies.”

Gaspard Roguin, who had in a measure recovered himself, smiled scornfully. “Of course you will deny what I have said: that is but natural. However, you cannot prove the falseness of my story. One man’s word is as good as another’s. As for the girl, if she be alive, her testimony would be of little value, since you have had an excellent opportunity of intimidating her. Come, gentlemen, on with the game!” and he turned to his cards again.

“Messieurs,” said Raoul de Chatignac, “allow me to give you the true version of the affair,” and he modestly related the complete history of their escape. Gaspard Roguin played on in silence with a careless smile, betting heavily.

“I need no more additional testimony, I hope,” continued de Chatignac, “to prove the truth of what I have related as against this liar, than to tell you that at the time of the accident I had just accused him before a roomful of witnesses of being a swindler and card cheat. Judging by his winnings to-night he is at his old tricks again. I would

therefore ask one of you to turn down one or both of his cuffs! ”

A murmur of indignation arose and angry looks were cast at Gaspard Roguin, who, pale again, arose to his feet excitedly.

“ I will not submit further to your insults, Raoul de Chatignac,” he cried fiercely. “ Be good enough to appoint a time and place for the settlement of this affair. My sword is ready to cross your own.”

De Chatignac’s accusing finger pointed at one of his enemy’s sleeves was the only reply. Armand Boucard stepped forward but Roguin turned menacingly upon him. “ At your peril, Monsieur, or I shall be under the necessity of killing you likewise.”

Boucard was not to be deterred. He motioned to a man standing on the other side of Roguin, and simultaneously they each seized a hand. Before the enraged victim could make a struggle both cuffs had been turned down, disclosing several cards behind each. With a cry like an infuriated animal Roguin broke loose, and darting through the crowd reached a window, threw it open and leaped out into the darkness.

Chapter Three

A CHAPTER OF GLOOM, IN WHICH AN ESCAPE IS
MADE

ABOUT halfway to Beauport, set well back from the road, with one side overlooking from an eminence the waters of the St. Lawrence, stood the manor-like house of Pierre Roguin named by him La Maison Sombre. Dark indeed was the house and darker still its history and that of its builder.

Shortly after the close of the Great Louis's reign two brothers had settled in Quebec, engaged in trade with the Indians and prospered. At length a quarrel arose and they separated, the younger entering the great wilderness and taking up the hardy but fascinating life of a *coureur-de-bois*. The elder remained at Quebec and received a small grant of land four arpents broad at the river-edge and running back a full mile and a half. This tract was too small to be let out profitably to *censitaires* for cultivation. But the wily owner wanted, as he declared, only a home whither he could retire and enjoy his old age in comfort when it came on. He built a huge stone house close to the edge of the river and his old haunts knew him no more. Some years passed. He emerged from

his retreat long enough to marry the daughter of a Montreal merchant with whom he had had dealings in previous years, then returned and shut himself up with her in his lonely dwelling.

Strange stories were told by occasional passers-by of mysterious lights and weird sounds emanating from the darksome pile at night. Others talked of subterranean chambers beneath the gloomy dwelling, of boats unloading and loading on dark nights on the shore below, claiming that the commercial instinct still survived in the owner and that he continued thus to add to his fortune by illicit trade which he dared not engage in openly.

At about this time he assumed charge of the vast estate of Félix de Marsay, who was absent from Quebec most of the year on patriotic errands to France on the business of the Colony, or traveling about among the distant outposts, giving their commanders freely of his vast engineering knowledge, or drawing his sword or taking up his rifle in defense of some fort against English assault or Indian foray. Pierre Roguin superintended the leasing of his farmlands, the collecting of rents, the cutting of timber, in fact all the duties incident to his position. Unfortunately Félix de Marsay was a better soldier than he was a man of business, so little by little his agent came to exercise supreme control over his affairs with full

power to sell or buy as he saw fit, the owner being content to receive the revenue from his property without seemingly caring to know anything further concerning it.

Roguin's brother finally returned, peace was apparently established between them and they dwelt together. One day he was missing and there were secret whisperings of jealous anger on the part of the husband who, it was reported, was passionately fond of his girl-wife, of a moonlight duel between the two brothers and a secret burial. It was shortly after this event that a son was born and the mother died.

After these tragic events the owner became more and more a recluse, shunning all unnecessary association with his fellow men, devoting his spare time to the care and education of his child. His ambition for his future was boundless and he began adding little by little to his land by purchase, hoping to be able to leave his son a large property and money sufficient to maintain it and perhaps purchase one of the new colonial titles of nobility that the King offered at a good price. Occasionally, after consultation with the crafty notary, Potherie, he would through some legal quibble oust a small owner from his property and quietly annex it to his own estate, until finally his domains extended far in all directions.

Along with his trickery and roguish dealings

there developed a cynical philosophy that scoffed at everything. Openly defying the Church and its ministers, it is no wonder that he was accused of all sorts of dealings with the Evil One, the celebration of the Black Mass, and the housing of an imp-child, the Devil's own, as a familiar spirit, and it was said by many who had passed him on the road on his wild midnight rides that a witch bestrode his horse's tail.

Long solitary drinking bouts aged him rapidly after his employer's death and he had little with which to occupy his time. Finally, one stormy night, after driving the servants out into the rain, he ordered his horse saddled and when asked whither he was going, responded "To hell," and dashed cursing and screaming down the driveway. His horse returned with empty saddle and next day his body was found beneath the fallen limb of a giant tree near Beauport. He was brought home and buried, according to written directions left behind, ten feet below the floor of the great hall in front of the fireplace, his resting place being covered with a huge stone slab on which was cut:

I WAS NOT, AND I BECAME; I WAS, AND
AM NO MORE. THIS MUCH IS TRUE;
WHO SAYS OTHER, LIES; FOR I SHALL
NOT BE. AND THOU WHO LIVEST,
DRINK, PLAY, COME!

Such was the history in brief of the elder Roguin. Such was the dark inheritance of the son, growing up to manhood under the care of Marie Girol, his father's housekeeper and his own nurse since his birth. Amid these dismal surroundings it would have been small wonder had he become a gloomy, morose man.

This was not the case. His only heritage from his mother was a love for all the bright things of life, its levity and gayety; with this was coupled all the bad traits of the father. Hence he became a man crafty, unscrupulous, sensual; fearless of divine anger, and dreading man's only when there was a likelihood of consequences fatal to himself, for he loved life passionately, although in other respects not a coward. He longed to taste to the full its various experiences. Loving wealth he found it easy to add to it, as well as to gratify his passion for gambling, by dishonest methods at cards.

Although of average height his frame seemed slight, which, coupled with light hair, a smoothly shaven face and fair complexion, gave an effeminate touch to his general appearance. He lived alone in his gloomy dwelling save for the frequent companionship of a few kindred spirits whom he had gathered around him. He mixed in the social life of the city only when by so doing he could further some plan of his own. Although about

the same age, Raoul de Chatignac and himself had known but little of each other as children. He had always secretly envied the other's qualities, so different from his own, the esteem in which he was held, the success he had achieved at Paris. It was this feeling of envy that had induced him, poor sailor that he was, to cross the stormy seas and spend a year in France. It was with no desire for a soldier's life or military honors, but rather that he might see the *beau monde* and discover fresh channels of pleasure and also pick up any new ideas that might be of service to him in Quebec.

When confronted before the eyes of his associates with proof of his duplicity, his one thought was of flight. Landing safely in a flower bed in the inn yard, he quickly got his horse and set out for home. He rode recklessly along, cursing de Chatignac and his own mistake in not waiting to indulge his slanderous tongue until a sufficient length of time had elapsed to preclude all chance of de Chatignac's return.

Upon reaching the house he entered the great hall and threw himself sprawling into a chair before the fire. Again he cursed his luck, for little as he valued the regard of the world at large, it was vital to the success of his many schemes that he should stand well among the men of the community. He rang for wine and gulped down

several gobletsful. This only seemed to increase his ill temper, for he stamped his foot and struck savagely at the lettering on the stone slab before him:

I WAS, AND AM NO MORE.

The inscription seemed to mock him in his present state of mind. The carved faces about the stone fireplace seemed to grin with delight at his despair. Maddened, he poured out more wine, drank it, and then, throwing the emptied glass upon the floor, stamped savagely upon the pieces, grinding them into dust with the heel of his riding boot.

Just then his glance fell upon a rusty set of mailed armor standing against the wall like some old sentinel. In his madness he fancied he could detect a gleam as from a human eye peering at him from beneath the closed visor.

He dashed to it and struck the helmet vigorously with the butt of his whip. A wailing cry issued from the interior and the arms were raised as though to remove the heavy headpiece. Gaspard was startled for an instant, then fell to pulling at the helmet. A few vigorous tugs and it came off, revealing a human head which bore the wild, frightened face of a man about Roguin's own age, with a weazened look of untimely maturity. Its eyes burned with a strange, uncanny fire,

while the hair hung in long unkempt locks about the head, giving the general appearance of some rude creature of the wood, scarce human in its grotesque aspect.

"*Peste!* So it's you, Farouche, you fool! What mean you by this mummery? Off with this mail at once or it will be worse for you."

The figure obeyed, taking off the armor piece by piece, until it stood trembling in its ragged clothes before the angry man.

"So you were spying upon me," exclaimed Gaspard, cutting him savagely across the thinly clad legs with his whip. "Take that, and that, and that," and he rained a dozen blows first on one leg and then on the other.

"Oh! oh!" cried the unfortunate, writhing at every stroke and dancing up and down. "Oh! oh! Pardon, Monsieur, but I was not spying. I had fled—oh! oh! from Marie Girol who was angry with me—oh! oh!—for burying two of her fine chickens head downward in the ground—oh! oh!—to see if they would not change into fairies. So I ran and hid in here so that she could not find me—oh! oh!—I knew she would not be afraid of Farouche the Fool, but if she found a knight all clad in armor she would run and I would chase her."

The picture presented to his mind of Marie Girol fleeing, pursued by the ungainly mailed

figure before him, caused Roguin to be suddenly seized with a hearty fit of merriment and he laughed boisterously until too weak to stand. His companion's mood changing too from fear to mirth he joined with his "Hi-yi" in a voice of childish treble.

"Farouche," said Gaspard with a sudden start, "you have given me a thought with all your foolery that has solved my difficulties. A wise man may learn much even from a fool. *A toi!*" as he filled a goblet, raised and emptied it. "Your folly has taught me wisdom. You deserve a beating, but I will let you off this time. Now, listen. I am going away to-night and I want you to go down to the river and get a canoe ready to take me across. When you have done this return to me here." So saying he pushed the fool out of the room.

His spirits seemed to have returned, for he instantly busied himself in preparing for a long journey. He chuckled to himself frequently during these preparations and laughed, smiting his thigh a succession of resounding blows. By the time he had completed his arrangements his companion returned and announced that all was in readiness. Roguin then wrapped a cloak about him and stretched himself in the chair, first extinguishing the light. "I shall take some rest, Farouche. Do you stay awake and watch and

when the first sign of day appears, waken me and we will be off. If you doze, remember, I have a whip." So saying he fell asleep.

Like a faithful dog, Farouche crouched by the window peering out for the first glimpse of dawn which was yet several hours away. Farouche the Fool. Who he was or whence he came, no one seemed to know, not even himself. As long as Gaspard Roguin could remember anything he had always had Farouche at hand to fetch and carry for him, or to cuff and beat if the mood seized him. His hair was always long and tempting for mischievous hands to pull and he never resented it. Farouche the Fool! None of the servants about the place could tell anything about him, for he was a fixture there when the oldest had first come. Handy to draw water, make fires, and run errands he was indeed, but always in the way; one who must of necessity be beaten and kicked in order to teach him his proper place. Farouche the Fool! No one in Quebec knew of his origin, yet everyone seemed unable to recollect the time when he was not seen wandering about the streets or chattering wildly from some corner where he had been brought to bay by a crowd of small-boy tormentors, who knew he would not harm them and hence felt safe in perfecting their marksmanship by throwing stones at him. Farouche the Fool! Ask Marie Girol and perhaps the thin lips

would open to tell what she knew, and perhaps they would only compress the tighter when she caught sight of him and her hand reach for the birchen switch and bring it down sharply across the shoulder-blades showing plainly through the rags that made so sorry a pretense of covering them. Yet with all these delicate attentions from the world at large I doubt if a more contented heart could have been found in all New France than his as he danced alone under the trees in the moonlight, or sang away at some elfin melody when night had come and he had crawled into his little house, built in the yard from the ruins of a large dog kennel to eat the scraps of food the servants could not use, and curl himself up there for rest in the straw. Farouche the Fool!

At length his patient watching was rewarded by the appearance of a faint streak of gray upon the eastern horizon. He quietly crossed the room and awakened the sleeper. The two then passed noiselessly to the river's edge and soon were shooting rapidly across its surface. Reaching the farther shore at a point opposite Quebec, Gaspard Roguin got out, ordered the fool homeward, and after shaking his fist at the sleeping city, plunged into the forest just as the first sunbeam kissed the tree-tops above him.

Chapter Four

SHOWS HOW THE JOY OF RENEWED FRIENDSHIP
MAY BE MINGLED WITH A SAD HOME-COMING

RAOUL DE CHATIGNAC disappeared from "The Silver Fox" as mysteriously as he had come, before his companions had recovered from their amazement. He stopped in the city only long enough to hire a horse and then slowly and painfully rode along the western road toward Sillery on his way to his old home. He was weak, the animated scene at the tavern having exhausted what little strength he had. His wound, too, was painful and he winced frequently as his horse stumbled along the dark highway. Leaving the care of the kindly *habitant* under whose roof he had been cared for in rough but sympathetic fashion a couple of days after Aimée's departure, he had pushed forward so rapidly in his canoe that he reached Quebec at almost the same time as she. He had intended reporting to his old friend the Governor of his safe arrival, or at least stopping over night at the house of a friend; some chance, however, had led his steps to "The Silver Fox" only to overhear the calum-

nies uttered by Gaspard Roguin. Feeling ill and weak after this spirited scene, he determined to reach his home as rapidly as possible.

His father, Léon de Chatignac, a stanch royalist under Louis XIV, had resented the regency of Philip of Orleans, believing that the interests of the young king were suffering at his hands.

He had become entangled in one of the many plots to remove the Regent, which was discovered. Although he and his companions were pardoned by the easy-going Duke, he preferred a voluntary exile, and was permitted to emigrate to New France. Having sold his estate in Gascony he was enabled to purchase a large tract of land, which he carefully improved until his seigniory became one of the largest and finest to be found anywhere on the river between Quebec and Montreal. Fields yellow with grain bowed to the attack of the harvesters; a hundred *censitaires* tilled these many acres and brought him yearly tribute. While his wife lived he was content to superintend the development of his large estate and the early education of his young son.

Shortly after her death, an old-time friend coming to the Colony as Governor, Léon de Chatignac mingled more in the active life of the growing town, seeking consolation in his companionship and that of the valiant soldier and honorable gentleman, Félix de Marsay, Aimée's father. It

was his earnest wish that his child should have every advantage possible that should best fit him to add luster to his name. When the youth reached the age of eighteen and had absorbed all the teaching of the new country, he had dispatched him to Paris to the care of a distant relative, there to receive the best of military training and to acquire the grace and polish that only life at court could give. Desiring that he should gain the experience of an active campaign before returning, he had insisted on his remaining longer, until finally seven years had passed. On learning that he had distinguished himself nobly as aide to Maréchal Saxe at Fontenoy, his heart was filled with satisfaction, and feeling that now that the son was fitted to take his place he had nothing more to live for, he committed his soul to God and his estate to Raoul, and lay down and died.

Although thus aided by the influence of his father's friends and name, Raoul had really won his way by the force of his own personality. Brave and clever, with a cheerful, kindly disposition and a determination to achieve success, he had made many friends and few enemies. The praise of his superiors in rank did not fill his heart with selfish pride but rather spurred him on to greater achievements. Tall, lithe, handsome, courteous ever, he was assailed on all sides by the coquettish glances

and lovelorn sighs of the weaker sex without his head being in the leastwise turned. Still a stranger to the supreme affection of the heart he met them all with a twinkle of his dark brown eyes and a merry jest. Although placed in the midst of a corrupt court the manly ideals instilled into his mind by his father, together with a nice sense of honor, steadied him amid a multitude of youthful temptations and follies. His only vice was that of gaming, a gentlemanly failing and one that did him no harm as yet, since he had abundant means to lose. The news of his father's death had made the scenes in which he moved distasteful, and he became anxious to return. Desire outstripping caution, he had taken the first available ship home before his wounds had fairly healed.

A thousand sad fancies filled his mind as he jogged along. A sense of loneliness was uppermost which the unfamiliarity of his surroundings only served to increase. Plans for the future he had none save that of living his life in his father's stead, one that would redound to his own honor and be worthy of the family name. His chief desires now were to reach the old home with its tender associations and memories, to visit with filial affection his father's grave, and to rest—for the feeling of weariness and exhaustion was well-nigh overpowering.

His train of thought was rudely interrupted by the clatter of horse's hoofs approaching through the darkness behind him, while a distant halloo reached his ears. Thinking it was probably some jovial spirit returning homeward, giving vent to a tipsy shout, Raoul turned aside and waited to let him pass. Soon the plunging figure of a horse was dimly outlined in the gloom. As soon as the motionless form of the young man was spied, the oncoming animal was pulled in so suddenly that he reared high in the air while his skillful rider cried out:

“Raoul de Chatignac, is that you? It is I, your old companion Armand Boucard.”

Raoul put out his hand and grasped warmly that of Armand, who was none other than the brave heart who had defended his memory so stoutly before Roguin's sneering words.

“I thought I had lost you, *mon ami*,” he continued. “Seeing you so pale and ill I followed you as quickly as possible from the inn, but you had disappeared. I lost a good quarter of an hour making inquiries before I struck your trail. However, here I am, still dazed with the joy of finding you alive when we had already mourned you as dead, ready to take you back with me to my own roof or to accompany you home and there accord you a hearty welcome.”

“Many thanks, old comrade,” was Raoul's cor-

dial reply as they both started onward side by side. "I am sorely in need of your friendship. I fear the warmth of my meeting with that miserable cheat Roguin was more than my strength could bear, but your sympathetic presence will cheer and invigorate me I know."

"*Mon Dieu!*" was Armand's indignant reply, "but you have done us all a favor in exposing him if those are the tricks he has come back to practice on us. He will not dare show his face in Quebec again for a long time." Then, as he leaned toward his companion, he reached out in the darkness and grasped his arm, squeezing it affectionately, adding: "But your greatest service, *mon ami*, has been in your returning and giving us yourself again. We have missed you sadly but have been proud of you when we heard of your valor and renown across the sea. Your illustrious father did not allow anyone in Quebec to remain long in ignorance of your rapid progress."

"Dear, noble-hearted man, I fear his great affection for me prompted him to value my modest achievements more highly than he should. I pray *le bon Dieu* that I may yet do something worthy of his great love."

"You have already accomplished something, for, some of us, roused by your example, have tried to imitate your bravery. You remember

Ambroise Pelletier, whom we used to pity for his physical weakness and apparent cowardice? Well, he fell after inciting his handful of men to attack a hundred of the heretic English; his example turned defeat into victory and he lived long enough to see the enemy run. Then there was Blondet, whom we all thought would enter the church; he developed a sudden warlike spirit and did splendid service in a campaign against the Iroquois only to be scalped by the murderous redskins."

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed Raoul with a ring of satisfaction in his voice, "it is good news indeed if my poor showing in warlike deeds has borne such fruits. With so many gallant blades astir I shall find a goodly company for my own sword to join in the expected war, mutterings of which I heard before I left Paris."

"Not, however, until you are well once more, *mon ami*, and have had ample opportunity to gather new strength from your native air."

"But how about yourself? I hear no tale of deeds of daring from your own modest lips, although I warrant I shall hear plenty from your friends in Quebec."

Armand laughed. "There is little to say," he replied. "To be sure I have seen some service, and have acquitted myself as well as I knew how."

“Then I will vouch for it that it was such service as only a true and gallant soldier could render,” was the hearty rejoinder.

“Your praise, like your regard, is sweet to me, *mon cher* Raoul, but I fear it is greater than I deserve. But,” he added in a lowered voice, “there are others of your old-time friends beside your fellow soldiers who will be rejoiced to watch your career after your return.”

“Ah, yes! you mean the Governor. He has always been a true, good friend to me and to my house. I know he will be glad to see me. I should have stopped at the Château to visit him to-night had I not felt an overwhelming desire to get home.”

“Nay, nay, Raoul, not the Governor, although he will glory over you as though you were his own son. The one I mean will not mark your future course from earth, but heaven. Nor do I mean your father or mother either. For shame, old friend! Have the din of the camp and the glamour of the Court occupied your mind to the exclusion of all the tender recollections of childhood affection? Or has some fair dame’s languishing eyes so bewitched you that you forget all others of her sex? Do you not remember our little playmate, Aimée de Marsay? You must have met her on that ill-fated vessel.”

“Aimée de Marsay! Forget Aimée de Mar-

say with her gentle, loving ways? Never! But what mean you, Armand,"—here he halted his horse sharply and peered at his friend through the darkness,—“prating about Heaven and that ill-fated ship in connection with her?”

“*Peste!*” replied Armand in a voice of wonder tinged with impatience, “are you so ill that your mind wanders? She was on board *L'Écume* with you. You ought to be the one to tell me about her!”

“*Aimée de Marsay with me on L'Écume?*” repeated Raoul in a hesitating tone as though he did not fully grasp the meaning of the words.

“Yes, *mon ami*,” said Armand, with tenderness for his friend's grief, “but we will not talk of her now.”

“Yes, but we will,” exclaimed Raoul. “Oh! my poor head that will not let me understand.”

“Well, then, since you wish me I will tell you all I know. *Aimée de Marsay* was sent by the Governor to Paris two years ago to finish her education in a convent. She returned on the same ship as yourself. You and that rascal Roguin were the sole survivors. Hence our gentle, happy-hearted *Aimée* was lost.”

“*Aimée in Paris—convent—same ship—lost,*” murmured Raoul disconnectedly. “Ah, no! you are mistaken; it cannot be; I would have seen her if she had been there.”

“Would to Heaven I were,” replied Armand in a mournful voice. “The Governor himself told me, and we together mourned for her as well as yourself in the Cathedral this morning.”

They had turned mechanically during their conversation and were now wending their way under the arching trees toward the house that soon appeared, a dark mass of shadow before them. Armand’s companion did not reply but, lurching toward him, fell unconscious in his friendly arms.

The limit of strength had been reached and passed. With the shock of the news of his old-time friend’s death he had fainted. Armand held him tenderly upright in his saddle and guided both horses to the door of the house upon which he beat lustily with his riding whip, shouting:

“Hilloa! Within there! Open in God’s name!” In a moment or two a window was raised and a feeble voice exclaimed:

“Who are you, to wake honest folk from their sleep? Ride on, we have no heart to entertain drunken roisterers. Leave us to our grief.”

“Come down at once,” was Armand’s impatient reply. “Open and let your master in. We are no drunken roisterers.”

“Now I know you for a pair of robbers, indeed,” came in indignant tones from above, “when you speak thus. We have buried our

old lord this six-month, and to-day have mourned for the loss of our young master.”

“For shame, Fidette,” replied Armand angrily. “It is Armand Boucard; do you not know my voice? I tell you your young master is here and alive. He is sick and has fainted. Hasten, or I shall be forced to break my way in.”

A tremulous cry of mingled alarm and joy was heard and the window was closed. Soon the feeble flickering of a light was seen approaching the door. Armand dismounted and took Raoul’s limp form in his arms. The door opened and there appeared upon the threshold the figure of an old man in bare feet, nightcap, and gown. The instant the rays of the candle fell upon Raoul’s pallid features his look of perplexity and fear gave way to that of joy, and he sprang with all the agility of a young man to a bell which he sounded clamorously, shouting meanwhile at the top of his thin cracked voice:

“Help! Awake, you dullards; the master has returned!” Soon the forms of a half dozen startled servants appeared, who hastened to fetch lights and prepare to aid the unconscious Raoul. The old man, who was the major-domo of the establishment, bustled about in great confusion, scarcely knowing what he was doing, wringing his hands and crying:

“*Grâce à Dieu!* The young master is back—

yes, it is he—how pale he looks—so ill and weak—what a sad home-coming!”

And Raoul, just returning to consciousness, repeated his words in a weak murmur:

“What a sad home-coming!”

Chapter Five

WHEREIN THE HERO AND HEROINE PICK UP THE
THREADS OF LIFE ONCE MORE

RAOUL sank quickly into the deep sleep of exhaustion, after partaking of a little wine that Fidette brought him. In the morning Armand awakened early and after noiselessly dressing sat down beside the bed to watch his friend. As he waited, his mind ran back to the time when he, the son of one of the officers stationed at Quebec, used to join Raoul and Aimée in their play. He recollected how even at that early age they had both been enchanted by her winning ways and were indeed her willing subjects, while she, the little witch, had queened it over them with a truly feminine capriciousness, now showing some mark of her favor to one, and then to the other without apparent discrimination. Neither of the boys had ever wavered one whit in his allegiance to her, and both dreamed of the day when they would be her knights like the brave men in the stories they told, and ride forth together to slay her foes or be slain in her defense, if need be. Once, while playing together beside a tiny brook

that babbled its way through the ground near Raoul's home, Armand slipped, and rolling down the bank stopped just short of the brink that overhung a quiet pool. Aimée shrieked in alarm, but on seeing him unharmed ordered him imperiously to climb back and not be so careless again. Armand asked her what she would have done had he fallen into the water. "Sent Raoul after you," she answered. "But suppose Raoul had been the one in danger?" "Oh, then I should have jumped in myself to save him," was the reply.

Thus did Armand bitterly learn her preference at an early day. But there was no room in his childish heart for feelings of envy or resentment. He merely submitted to her will and served her faithfully as before. After Raoul's departure for Paris he had seen a great deal of their erstwhile queen, growing even more queenly and lovely, and the allegiance of many years was strengthened, and service rendered with greater fidelity. Yet through this long period he could still see that Raoul was first as in days of yore. She accepted his devotion as a matter of course with all the assurance of her right to the same that a sister would have shown. It was of Raoul, his doings, his success, his return, that they both talked most frequently when they met. Whenever Armand hastened to her with some news of their mutual

friend, then it was that his welcome, always cordial, was warmest.

Hence it was that he felt his heartstrings tighten painfully when he recollected that, although ignorant of her death, Raoul had found time to talk of many things, and yet had forgotten to think or inquire of their little friend. He pictured to himself what he would have done had he been in Raoul's place. How eagerly he would have inquired, what affectionate messages he would have sent her. He sighed wearily. After all, it was all over now, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had been the trusted slave of the one and the devoted friend of the other; had been able to bear the fact that he was second where he would have given worlds to have been first, without betraying his disappointment or grief to either. One was now beyond further service; he would endeavor to do double duty to the one remaining.

He started half-guiltily on looking at his friend's face, to see that he lay there with his eyes open, watching him.

"Your thoughts are serious, *mon ami*," Raoul cried out cheerily, "but so-are mine. I am hungry and want breakfast. Ring for Fidette and see what he can bring. I have a confused remembrance that we made a rather dramatic entrance last night. Perhaps he has not recovered yet from its effects."

The old servant appeared and soon the two friends were eating heartily, after which Raoul insisted upon rising and dressing. He then walked about the room, looking at the pictures and other familiar objects. Stopping at an old *escritoire* he pulled open one of the drawers.

“*Hein!* what trash!” he exclaimed, and was about to close it again when something caught his eye. He picked up a bit of gold attached to a narrow blue ribbon. “Who would have imagined,” he continued thoughtfully, “that this would have been one of the first objects to welcome me? See the curious thing! It is half of a *louis d’or* that Aimée de Marsay received from the Governor as a birthday present just before I left. She had me cut it in two and bore a hole in each piece. One she gave me and one she kept, promising to wear it about her neck until my return; while I—I promised to do the same. In the confusion of preparing for my departure I must have forgotten it and tossed it in yonder drawer. Poor little girl! I wonder if she wears hers now!”

Armand turned quickly away in order not to show the tears of mingled grief and shame for his friend’s thoughtlessness that dimmed his eyes, all the while thinking that if the trinket had only been given to him he would have worn it even though it had burnt a hole in his breast.

A week of care and rest passed rapidly by.

The morning of the eighth day found the two friends in their saddles making their way over the league of road separating them from Quebec. Parting when they reached the town, Armand rode off homewards, while Raoul made his way to the Château. He was told, on entering, that the Governor was busy over some important matter and he was asked to wait in one of the anterooms. He was alone and wandered about looking at the familiar objects on the wall and tables. Stopping before a window, he lazily watched the sentry passing to and fro upon the rampart, and he recalled the time when that post had been the height of his ambition; he smiled at the thought, for he had now put away all childish things.

As he stood there musing, he became conscious of the sound of rustling skirts which drew near and suddenly stopped. He turned and beheld the figure of a young girl standing in the doorway. A little above the average height she was, yet her whole appearance gave that effect of daintiness that one naturally associates only with small people. Like a miniature was her face—blue eyes that could shoot a glance of mischief for all their innocence; nostrils that could curl with pride or disdain at will; tiny ears all but hidden by the abundant locks of her light golden hair; mouth so demurely set that it was a temptation, suggesting only one possible use to a masculine observer

—all its parts bewitchingly framed and wreathed in a bewildering combination of ribbons, laces, and feathers that did service for a head covering. Her gown, of white silk, overshot with tiny blue *fleur-de-lis*, was partly hidden by a dark, velvet mantle that almost touched the tips of a very tiny pair of feet that peeped saucily out from beneath her petticoat. About her neck and half-obscuring her face was a collar of beautiful fur. Her cheeks were reddened with exercise, and her whole figure seemed aglow with life and vitality. She advanced several paces into the room and tossed her mantle over a chair before she showed any consciousness of Raoul's admiring gaze. Then blushing prettily, she curtsied and said apologetically:

“ Pardon, Monsieur; I did not mean to intrude. I thought the room was empty.”

Raoul bowed gallantly. “ It shall be so if you wish, Mademoiselle,” and picking up his hat he made as if to leave the room. He had nearly reached the door when he was halted by:

“ Oh! Monsieur, I beg of you, do not leave on my account. I do not object to your presence. Besides,” in an appealing tone, “ I am almost afraid to be left in this gloomy room alone.”

“ But, Mademoiselle, pardon me, you just admitted that you voluntarily entered the room, thinking it to be empty,” smiled Raoul.

"Oh! what a stupid man! Of course I did. I came in and finding it empty, as I supposed, I was becoming alarmed and was thinking of leaving when I saw——"

"When you saw me?"

"Yes."

"At which sight you were further alarmed——"

"No, reassured."

"But you blushed and looked confused."

"At finding myself in the presence of one who has become interesting to everyone because of the perils he has so recently escaped."

"Interesting to everyone? Do you mean that, Mademoiselle?"

"*Certainement.*"

"Without exception?"

"Excepting no one."

"Not even your own fair self?"

"You grow personal, Monsieur. Pray remember you are no longer at Court. Monsieur Raoul de Chatignac should not attempt flatteries of Paris upon the rustic maidens of New France," and she dropped her eyes demurely.

"You know my name? I have seen your face before; it is strangely familiar, but I cannot place it. Your name—may I not learn yours, Mademoiselle——"

"Mademoiselle Mademoiselle."

"You are jesting."

"That is my name, Mademoiselle Mademoiselle; at least to you."

"Never mind, I shall ask my friend the Governor."

"And I shall forbid his telling you. You see I have the advantage over you. Very few would care to know the name of an obscure——"

"Beauty."

"Do not interrupt, Monsieur. Of an 'obscure maiden of Quebec, while everyone knows yours and of your gallant rescue of a fair damsel——"

"You know that, too?"

"Who does not? Tell me, Monsieur, how looked she? Was she pretty?"

"I cannot say, Mademoiselle; one forgets all other women in your presence."

"Was she tall or short, dark or fair?"

"I do not know, Mademoiselle; I only remember that she wore dark clothes, and—and had sad eyes. But you——"

"Never mind me. Did she look anything like this?" and throwing off her furs, she stooped and picked up her dark-blue mantle and covering her hat and head and shoulders with it, turned her eyes sorrowfully upward.

"*Ma foi!* Do my eyes deceive me? No!—Yes! It is the same! Forgive me, Mademoiselle, for not recognizing you at once."

"I should never have forgiven you if you had.

A pretty blow to my vanity it would have been if, after seeing me with my head wrapped up in an ugly brown nun's *capote* on board a sinking ship, you had picked me out at once, here in the Governor's home, dressed in my best. However, Monsieur, I must say that it has taken a long time for us to become acquainted. Had I not desired to express to you my thanks for delivering me from a watery tomb, I certainly should not have persevered."

"Ah! Mademoiselle, I should rather thank you for having allowed me to serve you. I feel that I am the debtor."

"*Ma foi!* Mademoiselle," mimicked the girl in a gruff voice, "would you rob a soldier of the delight of rescuing a comrade, or deprive a gentleman of the pleasure of aiding Beauty in distress?"

"You are cruel, Mademoiselle, to jest at my feelings. I meant every word I said to you upon the wreck," replied Raoul, rather crestfallen.

"I believe you, Monsieur. Pardon my levity. It would ill become me above all others to mock at the generous sentiments expressed under such trying circumstances," replied the girl, leaving off her bantering tone and coquettish manner, a kindly light appearing in her eyes and a thrill of sympathy in her voice. "But I fear my presence here is disturbing to you. Your thoughts were sad

when you stood looking out of the window. You see I caught a glimpse of you before you saw me," and she seated herself near Raoul.

"They were sad, Mademoiselle, for they were thoughts of the past, a past filled with gracious memories. I was thinking how I could best meet the Governor when he appeared, for we have both suffered a loss in the wrecked ship, a loss I have but recently discovered."

"Some friend or relative? Why did you not save her instead of me, Monsieur?" asked his companion, in a tone of sympathy and distress.

"I did not even know that she was on the vessel. She was a foster-daughter of the Governor and an old, old friend of mine. She was but a little thing when I last saw her seven years ago. She should have looked something like yourself, Mademoiselle; your winning manners and tender, sympathetic heart remind me of her. We were playmates and sworn friends. Had Aimée de Marsay lived I know I should have loved her. But enough of my sad thoughts, Mademoiselle, I will not weary you," continued Raoul, endeavoring to throw aside his gloom. Then gayly: "I know I should have loved her if she resembled you."

"A truce to your compliments, Monsieur. Tell me more of your little friend. I am interested. Do you think I am so utterly frivolous I cannot

sympathize with a friend in a friend's misfortune? ”

The reproach in her voice made Raoul serious again. “ We were boon companions, Mademoiselle, and she was gentle, sweet, lovable and faithful, while I—I can only reproach myself.”

“ Reproach yourself? ”

“ Yes, it was in this wise. Before I left Quebec seven years ago we split a golden *louis* into halves; she to wear one piece and I the other. A childish fancy perhaps, but it was sincere. She wore hers I know, from her true, faithful nature——”

“ While you, Monsieur? ”

“ While I, Mademoiselle, in the confusion of departure, dropped it in a drawer where it lay forgotten until my return. I found it there shortly after learning of her death. Although in the presence of my good friend Armand when I made the discovery I was able to pass it off as a trifling fancy, yet it brought up before me all the past and what she had been to me in that past, and the future and what she might have become to me in the future had she lived. My life in France was filled to the brim with events and scenes that, I am ashamed to confess it, for the time being caused me to forget many things I should have remembered.”

“ They say one meets many fair women at

Court. Perhaps it was the pretty face of one of them——”

“No, Mademoiselle, *parole d'honneur*, no! Fair was many a face, but I knew the heart to be false or corrupt. My own heart was unmoved; no feminine charms stirred me. I would not have exchanged her, pure, lovely, and true as I knew she was, for all the powdered, patched, and rouged beauties to be found in all France,” and he turned his head aside, half ashamed of his emotion, and looked mistily out again through the window.

The girl gave a silent, tremulous sigh of relief; a look of joy and triumph flashed in her eye. There was silence for a moment, then she said hesitatingly:

“What was the childish token like? Was it anything similar to this?”

Raoul wheeled about with a start. His companion had risen and come forward toward the light pulling at a tiny ribbon about her neck until there appeared in her fingers the half of a *louis d'or*, rudely cut, with a hole through which the ribbon passed. Raoul gazed at it an instant,—then leaned forward and stared wildly into the girl's face. She smiled, and at the smile the young man gave a cry:

“Aimée!”

“Raoul!”

He passed his hands hastily across his eyes. " *Mon Dieu!* What devil's work is this to mock and taunt me? I leave her here—I return to find she too has been in France, nay, has even perished on the same ship from which I escaped. Armand, who cannot lie, told me she was dead; that he and the Governor had prayed for the repose of her soul in the Cathedral that very day. And now you seem to prove by yonder bit of gold that you, beautiful creature, that you are she; that she is not dead after all. *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" he cried, burying his face in his hands. "Awaken me from this mocking dream! The dread reality were better far than this torture!"

Aimée de Marsay laid her hand upon his head and spoke softly:

"Raoul, *mon cher* Raoul, it is indeed I, your old playmate and friend. It was I you saved, little thinking, when in your generous and unselfish spirit you risked your life for the poor abandoned girl, that you were saving a life you already valued—for childhood's sake. Forgive me, *mon cher ami*, for trying you and testing your remembrance of me. Your forgetting the childish trinket was a small matter. Your heart is the metal that rings true; it is that which you have kept untarnished."

Raoul arose and his eyes were filled with tears

of joy as he seized her hands and kissed them again and again, saying tenderly: "Aimée, you are indeed my little friend, little no longer, nor a child, but a woman grown; and just such a woman as I should have hoped and wished my playmate to become." He would have kissed her lips, but she drew gently back saying: "No, Raoul, we are children no longer."

"At least we can be friends, as good true friends as once we were, Aimée? *Grâce à Dieu!* You are spared so that I can still be your companion, subject, knight and——"

"Friend," interrupted the girl gently.

The room seemed far too small for the relief of his emotions. "Come," he cried, glancing out of the window, "let us go, little playmate, to the rampart where we have been together so many times before!"

And there the old Governor, coming up unnoticed an hour later, found them talking, laughing and delighting in their reunited companionship as simply as two children playing together upon the sands of the seashore.

Chapter Six

TREATS OF FOOLS, FAIRIES, AND CHILDISH FANCIES

FAROUCHE THE FOOL trudged wearily along the rough road. Fatigued in body he was, for he had been busy all the morning filling and emptying the washtubs, carrying the water all the way from the river up the steep bank to the house; gathering firewood for the kitchen, and fulfilling a half-dozen other arduous duties imposed upon him by his hard taskmistress. Since the departure of Gaspard Roguin she had had ampler opportunity than formerly to vent her spite upon his hapless head. When his master was home a goodly portion of his time was employed in carrying messages to the various *censitaires* upon the estate, or delivering notes to some of Roguin's cronies in the city, taking as much time as he chose for the return journey, loitering beneath the trees or throwing himself down beside a wayside brook to try to catch a glimpse of the water-sprites or other fairy creatures which his silly imagination fondly assured him people the natural world. But now his duties kept him nearer home, where he fell a vic-

tim to the vindictive spite of Marie Girol, who hurried him through one task only to impose another more laborious than the last. The sight of his ungainly figure always seemed to arouse her anger and give fresh occasion for a torrent of vituperation from her abusive tongue.

Sent dinnerless to Quebec to purchase some necessaries for the household, he was now returning with a small parcel tucked carefully under his arm, his bare head receiving the grateful warmth of the midday sun of early spring, singing softly to himself the wordless air of a song of his own devising. Perplexed in mind he was, too, with the omnipresent problem of the fairies, whose illusive forms continued to evade his watchful glances. His thoughts were finally interrupted by the steady beat of horse's feet coming rapidly along the road behind him. An instinctive desire not to meet strangers led him to ensconce himself behind a bush bordering the highway, through whose branches he furtively peered in the direction of the approaching sound.

The sight that came in view around a bend of the road brought a sparkle of admiration and delight to his dull-witted eyes. A coal-black horse appeared, exulting in all the strength of his noble frame; his coat glistened in the sunlight, his delicate nostrils splashed with foam. Loving all animals as he did, especially horses, the heart of

Farouche beat rapidly with pleasure at the sight. His gaze shifted to the rider as they drew nearer, and his look deepened into one of intense joy.

Seated easily in the saddle was the figure of a young girl who might have been, such was her skill, a female Centaur roaming fearlessly through some primeval region as yet unseen by human eye. Her hat had slipped off and hung unnoticed, held only by its lengthened band of gayly-colored ribbon, while her hair, partly disarranged by the wind, framed her face in a wreath of gold. She was indeed an object of beauty, a challenge alike to the admiration of angels and of men. At times she patted the horse's neck affectionately and spoke gently in praise or warning, to all of which the animal replied with a toss of the head or a prouder curve of the neck, as though in conscious understanding of the words.

While yet a dozen yards away, the horse stumbled, but quickly recovered himself, limping slightly as he went on. The eye of the rider, alert to his every movement, noticed the change and, reining him in, she halted directly opposite the opening in the bush where Farouche lay concealed.

"How now, my good Rex?" she queried anxiously in a gentle tone. "Have you forgotten how to lift your feet, while your mistress has been away, or did one of those pretty hoofs pick up a stone that you cannot rid yourself of?"

Farouche could no longer contain himself at the sight of the adorable picture before him, but yielded to the impulse that overwhelmed him. Springing into the road he knelt before the beautiful apparition and cried:

“At last I have found you, the Fairy Queen!”

The highly-strung animal shied at his unexpected appearance, while his rider herself involuntarily raised her riding whip.

“Strike me if you will, oh! Fairy Princess. Your blows will only give me pleasure now that I have found you,” continued the kneeling figure.

The girl quickly recovered from her slight confusion, steadied her horse, and with a smile of kindly encouragement and pity rippling over her features as she recognized who it was she had to deal with, exclaimed:

— “Ah! Farouche, is that you? How you startled Rex and me. Arise my poor fellow. What say you of fairies?”

Farouche obeyed and stood still wonderingly. “Are you not the Queen of the Fairies I have sought for so long?” he stammered with a shade of disappointment showing in his voice.

The girl laughed merrily. “Nay, no Queen of the Fairies, but only Aimée de Marsay, a simple mortal like yourself. Do you not remember me?” Then seeing by his blank look that her two years’ absence had effaced all recollection of

her from the mind of the unfortunate, she continued as she laid her hand sympathetically upon his head:

“My poor Farouche, have you then never seen the fairies?”

“No, Mademoiselle,” replied her companion sadly, “although I have searched for them everywhere. I have often found the rings on the grass at sunrise where they had danced in the moonlight all night long. I have watched for them in the woods at midnight and have tried to surprise them bathing in the brook or drying themselves afterwards with the moonbeams, but I have always come too late or made a noise and frightened them away. I fear,” he continued disconsolately, “that I shall never find them.”

“But did you not know,” said Aimée, wishing to humor his fancy, “that those who claim to have seen them say that they are tiny folk not half as high as my knee?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle,” was the quick reply, “but they say that they are very beautiful. You are the most beautiful being I have ever seen, so I thought you might be their queen. If so, I wished to tell you how I love the fairies and offer to serve you if I might.”

The girl was touched by his simple faith and earnestness.

“Do not be cast down, Farouche,” she said

kindly; "nor abandon your search for the fairies. Some day I know you will see them. In the meantime you can serve me, if you will, even though I am not the Fairy Queen. Rex, I fear, has a stone in one of his hoofs. Will you not take it out?"

Farouche, captivated by her smile, bent down, quickly found the offending stone and removed it.

"Now, Farouche, I must be returning," said Aimée when she had thanked him. "Will you not take this and keep it to remember me by? Some day you may need it," and opening a tiny chatelaine she took out a *louis* and placed it in his palm. "Come to me at the Château if you ever need assistance, Farouche. Although I am not the Fairy Queen, as you supposed, yet I can be your friend. Will you not take my hand?" and drawing off her glove she extended her right hand toward him.

Farouche gazed an instant at its soft whiteness, then at his own rough, grimy paw. He thrust his hands suddenly behind him and bending forward, reverently kissed hers. With a farewell wave of her whip and a parting friendly smile Aimée wheeled her horse about and was gone, while Farouche the Fool stood in the middle of the road gazing wistfully after her.

When horse and rider had disappeared from view he looked at the bright bit of gold in his hand. He had but a very general idea of its

value, knowing it to be worth much more than copper or silver. Although often taking money with him to the city when on various errands for his master, he had never in his life before owned so much as a sou. Dazed by the recent event he seated himself on a nearby stone and again felt and inspected his treasure. At last he drew from his neck a cord from which hung a tiny bag of cloth. Opening this he took out a small stone pierced by a smooth round hole, which he had worn to keep off bad fairies,—for some he knew were evil-minded towards mortals—as well as good, and threw it away, slipping into its place the golden gift of his benefactress.

Strange indeed had been the experience through which he had just passed. Never before had anyone spoken to him kindly; never before had human hand been laid upon him save in punishment or anger. His poor starved heart had received unlimited abuse, but never a sympathetic word; his gaunt, starved frame had felt many a blow, but never a caress. And so it happened that a strange sensation stole over him, one entirely unknown before: a feeling of fullness in the breast, a choking in the throat. For the first time his heartstrings, swept by a loving, sympathetic hand, yielded a strange thrill of human affection. The momentary overflow of Aimée de Marsay's gracious nature had opened a window in the dark-

ened soul of the fool, letting in a ray of pure, sweet light, and conquered him, binding him to her in bonds of loving service, a willing slave.

The young girl had galloped but a short distance on her homeward journey when she met Raoul de Chatignac riding toward her. He greeted her gayly:

“*Bonjour, ma chère amie.* What a glorious day this is. The air of New France, fresh from the wooded wilderness, is restoring my strength more rapidly than I had hoped. I learned at the Château the direction you had taken and set out trusting to meet or overtake you,” and the young man gazed admiringly at his friend’s fresh beauty. “How beautiful you are, Aimée!” he exclaimed impulsively. “One hardly knows whether to compare you to Venus, or Diana on horseback.”

“Your comparisons are trite, Monsieur, and savor of the insincere commonplaces of the Court,” replied Aimée de Marsay archly. “One with a hundredth part of your brains has just mistaken me for the Queen of the Fairies, a far more original, and for the surroundings a more appropriate simile,” and she related her meeting with Farouche.

“*Ma foi!* the fool was right. Queen Titania you are in very truth: that fairy queen concerning whom the great poet of the heretic English

has written a merry play; I read it while in Paris. Listen to what he says:

“I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

All of which, when translated out of their barbarous tongue into our musical speech, means that if we follow this path to the right a short distance we will find an open spot through which a pretty brook flows with a mossy seat upon its bank and fresh green grass for our horses to browse upon. I discovered it on my way hither. Come, Aimée, *mon amie*, let us be children again for one day as we were years ago.”

“Agreed!” cried Aimée with enthusiasm.

In a few moments the path down which they turned opened into just such a spot as Raoul had described. Dismounting, they left their horses to graze, and approached the brookside.

“Now, I shall sit here while you gather an armful of those flowers yonder, and bring them to me to weave into a chain for my neck and a chaplet for your brow,” was the imperious command of the young queen.

Raoul, an obedient subject as in the olden days, plucked generous handfuls of the sweet-scented spring blossoms and tossed them in her lap.

“And now,” she continued, “while I am busy with my fingers, you must use your tongue and weave marvelous tales of knights and fair ladies, dragons that haunt the gloomy forest, and robbers bold and evil knights who do dark deeds and in the end are punished for them.”

And Raoul, entering with zest into the spirit of the play as he reclined near by upon the soft, lush grass, recited once more the tales of childhood, tales drawn from the dreamy, poetic days of chivalry, embellishing them now and then with realistic touches gained from his own warlike experiences in the great world beyond seas. His playmate hummed softly a light accompaniment to his narrative as her nimble fingers busied themselves with the flowers.

“One more, Sir,” she commanded as he ceased. “My favorite about the beautiful maiden stolen by the robber baron and her deliverance by the hero, whom she knighted after hearing his solemn vows.”

This, too, he told, and when he had finished, as he had so often done before, with: “And so, fair lady, do I vow my strong right arm and trusty sword to thy service. Come danger, come death, come even the Foul Fiend himself, yet will you find me ready at your call. Crown me thy Knight, sweet mistress; behold me, here I kneel,” he knelt before her.

She then placed the completed chaplet on his brow and striking him lightly on the shoulder with her whip responded on her part:

“Arise, Sir Knight, and gird your armor on. Be ever valiant, be noble, true. A recreant knight is worthy no fair woman’s favor. And now, be-gone upon your quest, for, ere these blossoms fade, your battles will begin.”

Thus wore the long afternoon away, filled with childish game or story. Finally, after a wild, romping chase, they stopped, breathless with laughter, and, mounting their waiting steeds, rode in the full glow of the slanting sunshine back to the city.

That night the moon glanced shamefacedly into a room at the Château and saw Aimée de Marsay smiling contentedly in her sleep; then peered boldly in at the face of Raoul upon his pillow and surprised a glow of happiness upon it as he dreamed that he, an errant knight, delivered his fair playmate from the cruel custody of some fell ruffian; then, last of all, he peeped through the cracks in the roof of the old dog-kennel and beheld Farouche the Fool on his straw bed dreaming of a ride through space in the chariot of the Fairy Queen, whose features strongly resembled those of Aimée de Marsay, with a host of elves and fairies in their train.

Chapter Seven

IN WHICH A NEW ARRIVAL MAKES HIS BOW

THE next few weeks passed busily enough for Raoul de Chatignac. Although his father's affairs had been left in excellent condition, yet he found much to do, familiarizing himself with the workings of his large estate, becoming acquainted with his numerous *censitaires*, riding over the farms inspecting the land and timber,—in short, assuming complete control of his inheritance. Armand often joined him in his rides and the old friendship was strengthened anew by this intimacy. The years of separation appeared to melt away and they seemed never to have parted, but to have grown from child's estate to manhood bound by the same brotherly bond that now held them fast. A Damon and Pythias friendship of the New World it was, builded upon the solid foundation of mutual appreciation and manly love.

Raoul often sought the advice of his old friend the Governor, whose eyes dimmed with delight as he beheld the almost filial respect accorded him. In his frequent visits to the Château he was able

to meet Aimée de Marsay and enjoy the pleasure of her warm, sympathetic friendship. He never attempted to analyze his feelings toward her. His mind was tinged with the recollections of their relations of other days, and he accepted the present as merely an extension of the past with a few necessary modifications. Her attitude was the same as it had always been, save that she deftly turned aside some of his former childish familiarities with a gentle dignity that gave no offense.

No conscious thought of love for her entered his mind, for, as a result of his life in Paris, where the tender passion was spoken of in the high-flown, strained, artificial language of the time, its presence in the human heart had become associated in his thoughts with a fevered restlessness, broken sleep, love-sonnets to the fair one's eyebrows, and an overweening desire to fight a duel or perform some deed of daring to prove to the world the depth of a man's passion. On the contrary, none of these conditions existed. In fact, wearied at night with the duties of the day, he slept unusually well; no fervent poem dropped unbidden from his pen, although he possessed some proficiency in verse-making; while so far from being filled with murderous desires, he was at peace with all men, save perchance the absent Roguin.

He admired his former playmate's unusual beauty, thoroughly enjoyed the hours passed in her

society, and revered her for her gentle woman-nature. He made no effort to extol her virtues, for it never occurred to him that they were not evident to all. He looked forward to their meetings with pleasure, and came away refreshed and strengthened. Had he been called upon to perform any deed in her behalf, no matter how arduous or brave, he would have accepted the doing of the same as a welcome opportunity of demonstrating his friendship. No sacrifice would have been too great to have made for her sake, for was it not Aimée, his life-long friend? And that word friend carried him as far as he had yet gone in his life's experience. On the other hand there was no one to whom he would have turned for aid or counsel more willingly or naturally, knowing full well that his need, however great, would meet with a ready, affectionate response.

It was upon one of these visits to the Château that Raoul was interrupted in his chat by a summons from the Governor requesting his presence. Upon entering the room he found him seated at his desk with a strange gentleman.

"I have sent for you, *mon cher* Raoul, to make the acquaintance of Monsieur du Tillet."

The stranger, a young man of medium height, rose from his chair and bowed politely. Raoul returned the salutation with equal ceremony. He saw a frame well filled out, dark hair, small black

mustache and a short hairy growth below the lip, together with a very swarthy complexion, tanned by long exposure to the sun. A broad scar, as though caused by a saber cut, marred his left cheek.

“Monsieur du Tillet, it seems, is the nephew of an almost forgotten boyhood friend of mine, as this letter shows,” resumed the Governor, “and one who has been commended to me by several of my acquaintances in Paris. He has just arrived from New York by way of Albany and Lake Champlain, being somewhat of a traveler and having a touch of the explorer in his blood, as he is distantly related to the family of our famous La Salle.”

“I trust Monsieur du Tillet encountered no hardships on his journey northward?” remarked Raoul suavely.

“*Merci, Monsieur,*” was the reply given in a drawling tone. “I found traveling in this new land a delight rather than a danger, thanks to the guide furnished me by some of the Dutch traders at Albany, whom I found to be far from the pipe-smoking boors my fancy pictured, although,” he added with a wry face, “I found them rather fond of driving a hard bargain.”

“They certainly have that reputation among the Indians,” laughed the Governor.

“For many years,” said Monsieur du Tillet,

“my mind has been fired with a desire to see and enjoy the bold, free life of New France. I was also curious to study the colonial conditions existing among the English—hence my voyage in an English vessel to New York.”

“A beautiful land they occupy,” remarked the Governor, “and one that I still hope to see annexed to the French crown. By a strange coincidence,” he continued, turning to Raoul, “Monsieur du Tillet fell in with Gaspard Roguin, who, it seems, fled to New York after your exposure.”

“Yes,” explained the stranger, “I met him at the house of the English commandant. Learning of my intention of proceeding to Quebec and possibly remaining there if I could find a suitable property where I might settle down and end my days in delightful intercourse with Nature, he informed me that he had been obliged to leave these northern latitudes on account of his health, the winters being too severe.”

At the mention of the name of Gaspard Roguin a slight scowl darkened the face of Raoul. “It was indeed for the sake of his health that he left,” he muttered.

The stranger, not noticing his remark, continued:

“He described to me the beauty of his own estate in glowing terms and offered to part with it at what seemed to me a very reasonable price. He

confessed to me privately that he was in need of ready money, and offered to rent the place for a year with the understanding that I could buy it at the end of that period if I so desired. The English commandant, a fine fellow by the way, assured me that he was in every way worthy of confidence, so I deposited with him the first half-year's rent, instructing him to pay over the same to Monsieur Roguin if at the end of two months he did not hear from me to the contrary."

"Here are all the papers," said the Governor, pointing to his desk, "which I have carefully examined and find to be properly drawn, signed, and witnessed after the English fashion. I have also a letter from Monsieur Roguin requesting me to see that Monsieur du Tillett be given full possession without delay."

"You will find the property a handsome one," said Raoul cordially, for the manner of the stranger was pleasing to him. "Albeit the house, I believe, is a trifle gloomy."

"I understand that your estate lies but a short distance from the city," remarked Monsieur du Tillett with equal interest. "I trust we shall be close friends as well as neighbors."

"Unfortunately," replied Raoul, "they lie in opposite directions from Quebec, although both are about equidistant from it. But with a good horse one does not mind a little riding to and fro."

“Monsieur du Tillet has expressed a desire to go at once to his future abode, Raoul,” said the Governor, “hence I sent for you, knowing that you would be pleased to accompany him. He can ride my horse. I will send a man over with the packs he brought with him, a little later in the day. At least, if that will suit Monsieur du Tillet?”

“*Certainement!*” was the reply with a pleasing smile. “I am in your courteous hands, Messieurs. Besides, it will be plesanter to take my first ride in New France unencumbered.”

“I shall indeed be glad to go with you, Monsieur, and show you the way to your new home,” said Raoul heartily, “and shall stand ready later to show you our city of which we are not a little proud, and introduce you to some of its people.”

“*Merci! Merci!* you are kindness itself,” answered the newcomer. “If all the young blood of New France is as generous I can well understand how glorious a future awaits her.”

Thus did the three men chat pleasantly among themselves for a time until the horses were ready. As they walked across the room Raoul noticed that his companion limped slightly. “You, too, are suffering from a battle wound?” he queried in good-natured concern.

“No,” laughed Monsieur du Tillet, “it is but a lasting remembrance of a meeting years ago with

the husband of a fair dame whose merry eyes lured me into some indiscreet attentions."

After bidding the Governor farewell, they rode away toward the former home of Gaspard Roguin. Monsieur du Tillet could find nothing but praise for all that he saw, especially the distant view of Quebec.

"This noble sight," he exclaimed after halting his horse and turning about in his saddle, "alone ought to determine me to remain and cast in my lot with those who will some day make yonder proud city the mistress of a continent."

This sentiment pleased Raoul greatly. "Ah! Monsieur," he replied, "you little know how those of us who have been born here love and reverence New France. Our feeling for her is second only to our loyalty to the King. I trust that you yourself will ere long share in our love."

"Have no fear, Monsieur," was the spirited answer of his companion; "one cannot breathe this glorious air in company with such noble hearts as yours, before ere long he drinks in patriotism with every breath. You spoke of the King. Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes, many times, for I have just returned from a seven years' absence in Paris."

"You have seen some service then?"

"Yes, under Maréchal Saxe at Fontenoy."

Monsieur du Tillet stopped suddenly in blank

astonishment. "What!" he exclaimed, "you are not the de Chatignac who fought so nobly in that battle? the one Maréchal Saxe referred to when he said that with ten regiments of men like you he could conquer Europe. All France rang with your praises and even in my far distant corner I caught some of the echoes of your fame. Monsieur, I salute you," and removing his hat he bowed low.

"What you heard, Monsieur," was Raoul's rejoinder, "was doubtless exaggerated. I did no more than a score of others."

"I am indeed fortunate to meet with you, and doubly so in having the Governor place me in your hands. Under your guidance I shall feel myself secure in meeting only congenial people in Quebec. Will you not assist me in forming my circle of acquaintances?"

"*Certainement!* But the city is so small that you will probably meet everyone in a short time with but little aid from me; for instance, at the Governor's ball next week you will see the bravest and the fairest in the Colony."

"Ah! the fairest! I had forgotten to inquire about the women. But I am sure that along with such men, you have also beauty, wit, and intelligence amongst the fairer sex."

"True, Monsieur, and I shall take pleasure in presenting you to two of the most beautiful women

in New France, if not the world. The fairest of all, the ward of the Governor, is an old-time friend of mine. The other, Madame Duvivier, is a newcomer who arrived at Quebec only ten days ago. She is a widow of twenty-six who has been ordered by her Paris leech to try our bracing northern air. I have met her but twice and then only casually, but my eyes can bear witness to her beauty, while those who know her more intimately than I vouch for her wit and intelligence."

"What lucky star directed my steps hither!" exclaimed Monsieur du Tillet in delight. "With a beautiful home and such charming companionship, he would be a fool indeed who could not find contentment."

The time occupied on their journey was thus filled with genial discourse. After reaching La Maison Sombre and introducing his new friend to Marie Girol, the old housekeeper, Raoul turned to leave.

"*Pardieu!* Why this haste?" exclaimed Monsieur du Tillet regretfully. "Will you not enter, Monsieur, and take a glass of wine to help relieve you of the fatigue of our ride?"

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" replied Raoul, "but I believe I will not stop. I must return with the Governor's horse. *Adieu!*" and, mounting, he rode away, receiving a friendly wave from his late companion as he disappeared down the avenue of trees

that led to the house. His pride had been flattered by the open-hearted appreciation of his valor on the part of du Tillet, and he passed most of the time on the road back to the city thinking of his many pleasant ways, and congratulating himself on having made such a charming acquaintance.

Chapter Eight

A FRIVOLOUS CHAPTER, DEALING WITH BALLS,
LOVE-SIGHS, AND CONFIDENCES

THE night of the Governor's ball had arrived. Being the social event of the year it drew many people from homes situated far distant from Quebec. From Beauport, Beaupré, and the other settlements and seigniories down the river; from Sillery and the many intervening estates; even from Montreal itself—the people came, young and old, to pay their respects to the representative of the King and bask for a brief period in the sunshine of his mimic court. The men had an ear open for bits of news that might indicate the ultimate trend of events in the delicate political situation then existing between England and France; their wives, each laden with her little burden of gossip, eagerly sought out old acquaintances in order to barter what they knew about Madame A. for what others knew or thought they knew about Madame B.; the young people, always glad to exchange the monotonous life of the settlement for a short whirl of gayety in the capital city, brought their bright faces and merry

laughter to awaken the echoes in the narrow streets of Quebec and lighten up the walls of the somber old Château.

A democratic gathering it was, too, the Governor of Montreal having to elbow his way through a throng of mingled fur-traders, army-officers, and members of the *noblesse* of New France, in order to greet the Governor of Quebec and compliment him upon the success with which he managed to keep at bay the ravages of Time. The style of dress was varied. That of the ladies of fashion in Quebec was only a year behind the prevailing mode in Paris, while that of the women from other districts was two, three, or four years old, according to their distance from the center of fashion of the Colony.

The court of the Château, well illuminated by lanterns, was filled with the noise and confusion of the arriving guests. Within, the place was ablaze with candles; the rooms, destitute of most of their furniture, were decorated with spring flowers and leafy boughs, while the floors were well waxed for dancing. Five musicians, securely ensconced in the bay of a window with a huge pitcher of Norman cider and glasses on a convenient stand in their midst, discoursed a melodious greeting to the assembled company.

The people were not late in arriving, for state balls were such rare occurrences that each one felt

in duty bound to try to be the first guest to arrive and the last to leave. Raoul de Chatignac brought his new-found friend Monsieur du Tillet and early introduced him to a number of the young men. His reception was cordial, as the hearty laughter and polite bowing going on in the vicinity of his rather stout but passably graceful figure testified. He endeavored to be gracious to all, and his polished manner, gentlemanly bearing, ready wit, and ridiculous drawling speech made him an instant favorite. Raoul and he worked their way gradually to the center and were warmly welcomed by the Governor and by Aimée de Marsay, who stood near him. She was resplendent in her youthful bloom, enhanced as it was by the simple, daintily-fitting gown that she wore, and the single ornament, a pink blossom that nestled shyly in her hair. The two men were soon obliged to pass on to make room for those crowding up behind them.

“*Ma foi!* she is adorable,” exclaimed du Tillet in Raoul’s ear, “but I do not wish to poach upon your preserves, *mon ami*. Take me to beauty number two, the peerless widow you told me of.”

Raoul smiled, well pleased at hearing this tribute to Aimée’s loveliness from one who had seen much of the world and was a competent judge. He thereupon led the way into an adjoining room in search of the beautiful widow.

Madame Duvivier’s beauty was the complement

of that of Aimée de Marsay in every way. Tall and slender, with dark eyes and hair, black as the proverbial raven's wing, a sadly curved mouth, nose strongly aquiline, a glance languid, yet with an occasional gleam of boldness, a complexion of striking pallor,—these features made up an extraordinary picture of feminine comeliness, sensuous, unspiritual, attractive to most men, maddening to many. She possessed all the physical attributes foreign to the French type, rather that found beyond the Pyrenees; a beautiful woman indeed, alluring, lovable when in repose, but a possible demon when aroused.

She was surrounded by a cluster of young men each vying with each in his efforts at paying court to her beauty and her wit. She skillfully held the allegiance of all, bestowing an enchanting smile or jesting word on every one in turn in such a manner that every man thought himself favored above his fellows. Du Tillet gazed at her with undisguised interest. When an opportunity presented itself the two men entered the charmed circle. She instantly recognized Raoul and greeted him in a playfully chiding tone:

“Ah! here comes Monsieur de Chatignac, a tardy cavalier indeed. Did your life at Court impart such dilatory habits, Monsieur?”

“Nay, Madame,” was Raoul's quick reply, “I did but wait until I could bring another captive

to chain to your triumphal car as proof of my homage and allegiance to the Queen of Beauty."

"You will be merciful and forgive, Madame," said du Tillet with a low bow, "for the sake of one who hastens from the shrine of English and of Dutch beauty to do reverence at your own, as a moth gladly leaves the outer darkness for the candle flame."

"Your metaphors are mixed, Monsieur, while the last one is unfortunately chosen as well. The moth meets the flame but to be shriveled up and die."

"A glorious ending indeed to its useless life," was the gallant rejoinder. "But many, blinded by the light, are only singed and fall stunned, willing captives to the light."

Raoul, seeing that his new friend was well cared for, withdrew with a bow and mingled with the crowd again. One by one the circle of admirers left also, inwardly cursing du Tillet, until he and the fair widow were left alone.

"Your dexterity at verbal fence, in contrast with the awkward skill with which the rest use their rustic blades, betrays long practice at Court, Monsieur," said Madame Duvivier with a ravishing smile.

"The same words apply to your comely self. Never before have I met so formidable an antagonist at Court or in Colony, who could spur me on

to my best efforts. But tell me, Madame, why did I not behold you among the beauties that form so lovely a circle about his gracious majesty, the King, when I was in Paris last year?"

"Alas! Monsieur, I was in retirement then, mourning the death of my husband, who fell, brave soldier that he was, in Italy fighting under the Prince de Condé."

During their conversation du Tillet had been covertly studying every expression of his companion's face.

"Alas!" he echoed in sympathetic tones, "how sad for one so young and beautiful to meet with such deep affliction. But I doubt not I could recall to your mind a deeper sorrow."

The woman glanced at him anxiously. "A deeper sorrow?" she repeated.

"Yes, I can recall it by a word," and leaning toward her he spoke a name in a low, malicious tone.

His companion gave a start of astonishment, and replied in a voice of alarm: "What mean you by that word, Monsieur?" at the same time fixing on him a piercing look in which fear struggled with anger for the mastery.

"Hush!" exclaimed du Tillet, "someone is approaching to speak to you. Leave the ball within a half-hour on the plea of illness and go home; I shall also excuse myself. Instruct your

servant to admit me when I come and you shall know all. Do not fail me," he added sternly, then, with a smile and a ceremonious bow he said aloud: "Adieu! Madame, I leave you in better company," and he strolled off unconcernedly.

Raoul had wandered back to Aimée, who still stood near the Governor, looking very tired.

"Come, *mon amie*," he cried cheerily as he approached, "let us try to find some quiet spot where you can rest. The Governor can spare you now. You have done your duty to the crowd whose only interest is in staring at your beauty. Pray turn your attention to one——"

"Who, sated with all the complimentary speeches he has heard, wishes to add me to the company of his flatterers? I shall disappoint you, for I shall do nothing but scold," was the rejoinder as they moved away.

"Say, rather, one who like the bird after disporting himself all day amongst the butterflies and gaudy birds of paradise, flies joyfully homeward——"

"To his sober, homely little mate for supper and a resting place."

They had escaped the crowd and entered a room which was almost deserted, far from the music. Finding a small settle in one corner they seated themselves.

"Nay, nay, Mademoiselle Torment," laughed

Raoul. "Say, rather, to one whose presence seems like the cool, restful, strengthening atmosphere of a mountain-top after mingling with the noisy, jostling crowd in the plain below."

"Good! Monsieur Poet," replied Aimée, "try again."

"Still better, to enter your presence is like passing from the light of the ballroom with its smoking, flickering candles, into the bright, clear sunshine."

"That will do. You see I can make you say the same pretty speeches to me, your friend, that you whisper when making love to the beauties of the Court."

"With this difference, *petite*, that in your case I mean them."

"Well then, *mon ami*, if you really mean what you say you will heed words of warning from me."

"Warning?"

"Yes, against your new friend, Monsieur du Tillet."

"Why, the Governor himself commended him to me."

"That may well be, but no man, even though a Governor, can detect what a woman's intuition teaches her. For all his pleasant manner I have formed an instinctive dread of him. Take care, *mon ami*, that your intimacy with him lead you not into danger."

“*Merci* for your thoughtfulness for me, but do not fear. I shall keep my eyes open in that quarter.”

“One warning more and I am through. That woman with whom he was talking as we passed, Madame Duvivier: do not, I beg of you, place yourself within the circle of her influence. However we may be mistaken in our estimate of a man, trust a woman to detect what is dangerous in another woman. We are not blinded by the artifices of feminine skill and cunning as men are.”

“As regards the man, I believe you are mistaken. But the woman—she can have no power over me. That she is beautiful I must admit, but with you close at hand to warn me, my guardian angel, with your wholesome presence to counteract the noxious, tainted air of evil, with your——”

He stooped, and picking up the flower that had dropped from her hair he held it in his hand and examined it thoughtfully.

“So sweet, so innocent, so pure; with a mission to turn the minds of men Godward in thanksgiving for its beauty, its tender grace, its perfume! How like your own dear self, Aimée, it is. Looking at it I am moved to love this little blossom that has nestled in your hair to-night, for its message of goodness and truth, its delicacy, its soft beauty. May I not keep it? And beholding your gentle loveliness my heart is moved to——”

“ Ah! here you are, *mon bijou*,” interrupted the voice of the Governor, who had just entered. “ Will you not come with me? One of our guests, Madame Duvivier, is indisposed and is leaving,” and slipping the girl’s arm into his own he bore her away with him, leaving Raoul ruefully twirling the flower between his fingers.

Shortly after the departure of Madame Duvivier from the ball, Monsieur du Tillet made his adieus and was soon knocking at her door. He was at once admitted to the room where she, having removed her wraps, was standing awaiting his arrival with a look of mingled fear and scorn. He bowed politely. She pointed to a chair and seated herself on a couch.

“ Pray what is the reason for this mysterious interview, Monsieur? You, a stranger, whisper an unknown name in my ear and then command me to grant you an audience at my home at once. I saw fit to humor your whim. Proceed, or my mood may change. Why have you come? ”

“ To relate to you a story.”

“ What! at this time of night? ”

“ It will interest you, Madame, I assure you. To begin with I will say it is about a young French girl whose beauty captivated a poor army officer who married her and loved her devotedly. She soon became indifferent to him and found a younger and more pleasing lover. She possessed other

powers besides those of beauty; she was learned in the mysteries of the Black Art; the secrets of the alchemist were known to her and she was skilled in the uses of all deadly poisons. Finally, in an evil hour, she stole a sum of money with which to clothe herself more gorgeously to please her lover's eye. Fearing detection and wishing to marry him before her exposure, she poisoned her husband. He died without any suspicion being attached to her—but, pardon me, does the tale interest you?" and du Tillet stopped with a malevolent glance at his companion.

The woman had sat staring wildly at him during this recital. She signified "Go on," although no sound came from her lips. Du Tillet bowed and proceeded.

"She was finally obliged to face the consequences of her first crime, escaping the galleys, but was branded as a thief. Her lover naturally forsook her. Vague rumors connecting her with her husband's death, together with stories concerning her dealings with the Evil One, caused her to disappear. After her flight, proof of the murder of her husband was discovered. Were she to be found anywhere beneath the French flag she would be at once arrested, transported to France, tried and executed. I alone know her whereabouts. The name I whispered to you to-night was the name of the murdered officer, and you——"

"I?" came in harsh, raucous tones from Madame Duvivier's throat.

"You—are his wife."

For a moment the woman seemed stunned by his accusation, then, with a moan, fell back upon the couch unconscious. Du Tillet, smiling complacently, arose and going to her prostrate form took a small knife lying on the table and slit her right sleeve near the shoulder. There, clearly outlined upon the ivory white of her skin, a small, dull-red *fleur-de-lis* glowed. With a look of satisfaction he sat down and waited for her to regain consciousness. Finally she stirred, opened her eyes, and looked at him with a shudder.

"Your proof!" she cried faintly.

"The history of your crimes I heard when in Paris. A recent letter received from a friend there contained a description of you and told of a suspicion that you had escaped to New France. Your features and form tally exactly."

"A mistaken resemblance, that is all," cried Madame Duvivier wildly. "Your proof! Your proof! You have none."

Du Tillet pointed silently to the cut sleeve with the bare arm showing its tell-tale mark. The woman's eyes followed the direction of his finger and comprehended. Angry tears came to her eyes as she said scornfully:

"I hope, Monsieur, you are proud of your work

to-night, in hunting down a defenseless woman! I suppose I am at your mercy. What do you purpose doing?"

"One of two things; report you to the Governor, who will have you in a cell within an hour, or——"

"Name your alternative."

"Form a pact with you and allow you to live unknown and unmolested."

"What is the nature of the pact you propose?"

"Merely to place at my disposal your strange powers and to use your beauty to lead on and entrap whomsoever I shall point out to you. I have a game to play; one of revenge and gain. You can be of assistance to me. I give you in exchange your life, my friendship, and protection."

Madame Duvivier smiled contemptuously.

"Revenge!" she cried. "What do your puny men-natures know of the terrible thirst for revenge! Revenge is the air I breathe; it flows mingled with my blood; it is my one daily thought; my dream by night; for that, rather than to save my miserable life, I came to Quebec; for that I live; for it I would gladly die."

Du Tillet, struck by her vehemence, was silent.

"You cannot know the meaning of the word, you, with some petty spite against a man for fancied slight; against a woman, for spurning the selfish attention you call love. But I——! Come,

Monsieur, on one condition will I enter into alliance with you, otherwise you are welcome to take me before the Governor this very night and tell him all you know. The condition is that you, in turn, aid me to find and deliver into my hands the creature that I seek. He is somewhere on this continent. But be he in city or in trader's camp; on land or on stream, I shall hunt him down without mercy and when I find him I shall kill him—kill him! But before that I shall enjoy one hour of sweet revenge and torture his body as he has tortured my soul; shall sear him with red-hot irons and laugh at his screams; shall cut him up inch by inch if need be, until he undergoes every possible degree of pain and torment," and the woman, borne along on the flood-tide of her evil emotions, stretched forth her clenched fists and beat the air, while her face became contorted with malignant passions.

"It is well," said du Tillet when she ceased speaking. "We can then help each other. Who is this fellow over whose destruction you thus wish to gloat?"

"My false lover for whose sake I stole and murdered; because of whom I am what I am,—Gaspard Roguin——" and she bent forward and fairly hissed the name in his face.

Du Tillet started back as though struck.

"You may well be surprised," she continued,

“for he is the very man from whom you rent the house you occupy.”

Du Tillet recovered himself: “A strange fatality places him in my power,” he said, as he rubbed his hands together. “At the end of my first six months’ occupancy of his estate I can send for him on the pretext that I am willing to purchase the land. He will come, for he will be anxious to get the gold and go back to France. If you have aided me by that time as I wish you to do I will engage to deliver him up to you. We can thus both gain the ends we seek. However, I do not wish to force you, and will give you the remainder of the night to think the matter over. Remember, you are to enter with all your powers into my plans; you are to be accessible to me at all times, giving me a key to the back entrance of the house so I can slip in to consult with you unknown to anyone. On my side I will promise to keep my part of the bargain. I shall ride by in the morning. If I see a white handkerchief fluttering from your window I shall know that you have accepted my terms, and I shall stop. If not, then I shall go on to the Château and relate the same tale to the Governor I have told you to-night. I warrant he will be interested. Till then, adieu! Sweet dreams!” he added mockingly as he left the room.

Once outside he stopped in the nearest shadow

and with nervous hand mopped his forehead. The last half-hour had been an intense strain on him. He had tried for high stakes, and won. "*Par-dieu!*" he exclaimed. "One must play his cards well who has a she-devil for a partner."

Chapter Nine

DEALS WITH THE ACTIONS OF THE CLEVER STRANGER, AND THE FORMATION OF A CONSPIRACY

UPON reaching the city next morning du Tillet directed his steps past the home of Madame Duvivier. From the sill of a window on the second floor a tiny lace handkerchief floated in the breeze. Seeing this, he knocked, and in a few moments was standing before his victim.

“Well, Madame, your signal told me of your wise decision. I am relieved, for it would have been a distasteful task, that of turning you over to the tender mercies of the law. I much prefer that we should travel the same road, hand in hand, toward the common goal of our desires—revenge.”

Madame Duvivier, pale and beautiful as ever, and perfectly composed, showed no traces of the stormy scene of the previous evening. She smiled as the man ceased speaking, and replied:

“As you say, it is better that we unite our fortunes. There is my hand to seal the bargain.” After they had clasped hands she continued: “Here is the key to the rear entrance, as you requested, to use whenever you wish to escape ob-

servation. Follow up the stairs, and this smaller key will open the door of the adjoining room. I await your instructions."

"They will be forthcoming when my plans are matured. Till then hold yourself in readiness, my charming conspirator," and du Tillet playfully blew a kiss to his companion as he left the room.

Upon reaching home he wrote carefully a note as follows:

"Monsieur du Tillet begs Monsieur Gaudais to favor him greatly with his presence at dinner to-night at La Maison Sombre."

Two similar notes, addressed to Monsieur Berthier and Lieutenant Liotot, followed the first. Then he rang for Farouche, directing him to deliver them at once, next for Marie Girol, ordering her to serve the choicest wines to the expected company. The remainder of the afternoon he spent in walking up and down the large hall, in deep meditation.

Evening came, and the three guests overtook one another on the road to La Maison Sombre. On their arrival all were cordially greeted by their host.

"Ah! Welcome, Messieurs," he cried, extending to each a hearty grasp of the hand. "I am indebted to you for this pleasure. I felt lonely

to-day, and, on thinking over all the gentlemen I had met, it occurred to me that you were the best with whom to spend a few congenial hours."

The three men bowed in turn, secretly flattered at the words of du Tillet. Soon they were seated about the table where tempting dishes, prepared under the direction of Marie Girol, disappeared under the onslaught of their healthy appetites. The wine quickly loosened their tongues and they were ere long talking as freely with their host as though they had known him always. He regaled them with stories of life in Paris, tales tainted with the depraved atmosphere of the Court, which met with their boisterous appreciation, while the relation of his adventures among the English, told with his inimitable drawl, were vastly entertaining.

"Since we are talking about New York," he said in a meditative manner, "what sort of a man is Monsieur Gaspard Roguin, my landlord, whom I met there? You all knew him well, did you not?"

"None better, Monsieur; it happens that we three were his best friends," exclaimed Gaudais.

"As fine a fellow as ever walked the streets of Quebec!" cried Berthier with an oath. "A victim to the hatred of his enemies."

"One whom we would gladly welcome back as a brother-in-arms," said Lieutenant Liotot.

"You are his loyal friends, I see," said du Tillet





smilingly. "For my part I thoroughly liked him, and only regretted that our acquaintance could not have been continued. Inasmuch as we are sitting at his table and enjoying his wine, it is only fitting that he should be remembered by us all. Messieurs, I propose the health of Monsieur Gaspard Roguin!"

All sprang to their feet, and du Tillet emptied his glass with the rest.

"To his success and happiness!"

"To his quick return!"

"And confusion to his enemies!"

Thus the three guests in order murmured their sentiments before drinking.

Other toasts quickly followed: the King, du Tillet, New France, and all good comrades. Finally they withdrew to the large hall and, sitting about the table with the fragrant tobacco smoke wreathing itself above their heads and a filled glass at each elbow, stretched their legs out comfortably toward the open fire.

Berthier, at one end of the group, was a young man possessed of a considerable fortune left him by his father, who had accumulated it in the days when the fur trade was at its best. With it he had inherited his father's miserly habits, never spending a sou without trying to gain the best of the bargain. He rarely drank or played, because of the expense incurred. These characteristics were

well known to all his friends, yet among them he was popular for his easy disposition, his ability to sing a rollicking song, and his quickness of repartee.

Next to him sat Gaudais, a ne'er-do-well, dividing his time between the wineglass and card table, the latter apparently furnishing him his only means of support. He was well liked by a few for his open-handedness when he had money, and tolerated by the remainder for his wit and his power of entertainment in mimicking the speech and manner of anyone with comical skill.

The last of the three guests, Lieutenant Liotot, was an officer in the Colonial army stationed at Quebec, whose habits of life rendered his small pay inadequate. He was continually in need of money, and it was rumored by some that he had an interest in the business of one of the smaller traders, a thing expressly forbidden by the King. He was considerably older than the others, was reputed to have seen much service in the army in France, and was withal a great blusterer, continually giving vent to explosive oaths of his own coining accompanied by a fierce look and a tugging at his iron-gray mustache when excited.

The conversation flagged a little as that comfortable sense of ease and quiet that follows close upon an enjoyable dinner, washed down with generous draughts of good wine, pervaded their

frames. At length du Tillet, turning to Berthier, inquired:

"You said something at dinner about Monsieur Gaspard Roguin that puzzles me. You remarked that he was the victim of his enemies. What meant you? Is it possible that in New France one meets with the same intriguing and plotting that one does in Paris?"

"Worse," was the rejoinder, "for here we are at close quarters, and cannot escape each other. It was through a personal quarrel with Raoul de Chatignac that his departure came about."

"De Chatignac?" exclaimed du Tillet in surprise. "I did not suppose one with his frank and open nature would be guilty of hounding a comrade from the Colony."

"You do not know Raoul de Chatignac well," sneered Gaudais, "or you would not wonder. With his intimate relations with the Governor he is in a position to do harm to whomsoever he likes."

"Bombs and bullets! The unbearable ass!" growled Lieutenant Liotot. "Since his return he seems to think that we Colonial soldiers know nothing of fighting. *Mon Dieu!* Fontenoy! As though that were the only battle ever fought!"

Du Tillet again expressed his surprise, and remained silent for a few moments, gazing thoughtfully at each of his companions.

"I have a proposition to make to you, Mes-

sieurs," he said at length, bluntly, discontinuing their former topic of conversation. "I take it that you would all like to grow rich if it could be done safely; that you would not mind taking part in a small intrigue, if it paid you well; and that if we could incidentally pull Monsieur de Chatignac from his haughty seat it would give you all considerable satisfaction."

His companions looked at him wonderingly, and nodded.

"I am naturally averse to sitting still and doing nothing, believing as I do that I am well fitted for action along certain lines, especially when those lines bring indisputable gain and excitement. While tarrying at Albany I arranged with one of the Dutch traders to supply him with some commodities he needs, in exchange for other things that will yield me great profit. His trusted agents are to bring the goods to a certain point on the river above Quebec, where we can meet them regularly and make the exchange. The reason I rented this place from Monsieur Roguin was because I learned from him of its close proximity to the river, and the easy landing place for canoes. All our movements can be made at night, without anyone being the wiser. In addition, I concluded terms with the English commander at New York whereby I and my companions are to furnish him by messenger with all news relating

to the state of affairs in Quebec, the arrival of fresh soldiers and munitions of war, or changes in the fortifications. He is to pay for this handsomely, in French gold. What think you, gentlemen, of my plans? Will you join me?"

The three men responded to his early words with looks of intense satisfaction, but the latter portion of his scheme brought a shadow of doubt to their faces.

"Raw head and bloody bones! That is treason!" exclaimed the officer fiercely.

"No, trade!" was the quick rejoinder; "a fair exchange: our information for their gold, gold, *gold*, Messieurs," and he pronounced these last words with marked emphasis, and a tantalizing smile. "You hesitate?" he continued, with a frown, as his companions remained silent. "It is too late for that! You have learned my secret, and you must join me, or——" Here he opened a drawer in the table and taking out three slips of paper handed one to each of his friends. "I will demonstrate one of my useful accomplishments. Do you recognize your various signatures?"

The young men's dazed looks showed plainly their astonishment and alarm.

"I have written them rather well, eh! *mes amis*? I have already prepared a paper purporting to be an agreement between you three to conspire against the life of the Governor. Your names, writ as

neatly as those before you, are subscribed to the written plot. A very clever forgery it is. If placed accidentally in the hands of one of the Governor's friends, Monsieur Raoul de Chatignac, for example, should you refuse to join me, it might cause considerable trouble for you all."

"Trapped! by the great wart of Saint Louis," cried Lieutenant Liotot, as he twisted the ends of his mustache nervously. The other two were silent.

"But come, Messieurs, no harm shall happen to you. I only wanted to safeguard myself."

Du Tillet smiled complacently as he watched their consternation.

"Do you require further proof, Messieurs, that I can be a useful friend, but a dangerous enemy?"

"No, no!" cried his companions together. "We will join you."

"Well spoken, comrades," said du Tillet; "your hands upon it," and he grasped the right hand of each in turn. "We shall have some excitement out of this alliance, our pockets will be lined with gold, and, perchance, you may have an opportunity of humbling this upstart, de Chatignac. Our interests are one. He is the enemy of Gaspard Roguin, my friend. Henceforward he is my own enemy. I hate him already for his cursed, condescending ways. After one glass more to the success of 'The Royal Four,' as we can call ourselves, you must

return quietly to the city, and guard our secret well."

Long after the departure of his friends du Tillet sat meditating beside the fire. He smiled with satisfaction, and rubbed his hands together softly, murmuring:

"All goes well; the net is spreading for the catch." Then, with a frown: "The assistance of Madame Duvivier is essential, although an element of danger. I must make no false moves, and walk carefully. But, *Peste!* that only adds excitement to the game."

Chapter Ten

REPEATS THE FAMILIAR HISTORY OF THE MOTH
AND THE CANDLE FLAME

THE second day after the Governor's ball was a busy time for Raoul de Chatignac. A long, hard trip over his estate lay before him when he set out in the morning, entirely unconscious of the machinations of enemies, or the gathering clouds of intrigue that were massing in the distance. Unoppressed by any anxiety for the future, he was free to enjoy his thoughts as he rode along, and drink in with appreciative eye the beauties of Nature everywhere about him. The verdure-clad forest, the blue sky above him, the joyous call of bird, the sparkle of the waters, the nodding heads of many-tinted blossoms, the elastic tread of the proud animal he rode—all served to lead his mind away from the sordid, ignoble, and artificial things of life, directing it toward that which was pure and beautiful. Strangely, too, whenever his thoughts were guided along such channels the image of Aimée de Marsay, with her genuine, friendly glance, always appeared before him.

And, as he mused, the scene at the ball, when he had almost declared a passion the existence of which he had never suspected, came before his eyes. The inevitable comparison between her fresh, clear beauty, unearthly in the sense that it disclosed the existence of a nature refined and spiritual in its essence, and that of the mere fleshly, sensual types visible on all sides, and especially exemplified by Madame Duvivier; the striking resemblance between her nature and the simple blossom she wore; both of these causes led him along unconscious mental stages to the conclusion he was about to express when so inopportunistically interrupted by the Governor. But why inopportunistically? If the word lay ready to be uttered, why should it be suppressed? Might it not be true that these feelings of reverence, good fellowship, devotion to her interest and welfare, this oneness of thought, feeling, and desire which had existed between them since childhood, but which, since his return, had vastly increased—might not this be love in disguise? Was not the calm delight in her presence as sure a sign of its existence as the restless fever he had imagined necessary? His life could never be self-sufficient. Would not her constant, loving association make it complete? What would be his condition were she to pass out of his life? This last question had never arisen before, and as he considered it his heart was

filled with consternation. The thought frightened him.

He glanced upward and beheld a bird hopping in restless activity from branch to branch about its nest, venting its anxiety and loneliness in short, quick cries. How like his own condition it was, purposeless, disquieted, unhappy, if their long, sweet companionship were to end. And as he watched, the bird's note changed in tone to one of joy, as with a whirring of its little wings her mate darted through the branches to her side, while she, the former lonely disturbed creature, now flew to her tiny abiding-place among the leaves and settled down with a musical chirp of happiness and contentment. Raoul smiled at the sight as he realized that with Aimée's dear companionship and love his life would be completely filled, his mind forever at rest, replete with joy and peace.

Then, as if by magic, all the sights and sounds of Nature took upon themselves a new and merry guise. The singing of mating birds swelled upward in a blissful chorus of delight. The tender leaves trembled with joy at the embrace of the eager morning breeze. The blue sky smiled kindly down between the floating clouds at the river that purred and rippled with satisfaction. The blossoms, half-blown, raised their heads heavenward and dried their dew-tears in the warm kiss of their aged lover, the sun.

Raoul's heart leaped and sang within him in a transport of gladness, for he had found the key to storehouses of sweet delight, of noble, self-denying purpose, and glorious achievement: the old, time-rusted key of earnest love. Possessing it, a man though poor is rich, clad in priceless garb, proof against the buffetings of Fate and piercing blasts of misfortune; but lacking it, the richest becomes needy, feebly wrapping about his shivering form the vain rags of his loveless wealth. Filled with this strange, glad experience, the young man abandoned the further business of the day, and turned his horse's head toward the city, bent upon seeking out his loved one and pouring into her ears as best he might the chaotic words and thoughts that surged through his mind.

Before reaching Quebec his light-heartedness had disappeared before a sudden thought: what if his feelings met with no response? The idea staggered him. This difficulty had never before entered his mind. They had seemed so united in thought and feeling, but now—although he could remember many instances when they had seemed to be at one in a generous, happy friendship, yet from Aimée de Marsay had he received no sign that could possibly be construed as evidence on her part of any deeper emotion. In fact, he could recollect a score of times when she had, with quiet emphasis, shown him by a look, a word, that they

were children no longer; that, whereas before an innocent, childish friendship had been uppermost, now other things, maidenly modesty and reserve, had intervened and made a perceptible difference in their relationship.

What lover in the first dim consciousness of his passion has not seized upon the nearest plausible argument wherewith to torment himself? Hence as he passed along the city streets Raoul's pace slackened and his purpose faltered.

He involuntarily glanced up at the window of a house he was passing, and saw a face he recognized as that of Madame Duvivier, who smiled, and beckoned to him. He hesitated an instant. He did not care to stop, yet in his uncertain state of mind the summons came as a diversion, something that would give him further time for his decision.

The door was opened by the old deaf servant who took care of the house. He was ushered into the sitting room, and was warmly greeted by Madame Duvivier, who had early that morning received her instructions from du Tillet.

"How fortunate, Monsieur!" she exclaimed. "You are undoubtedly going to the Château, and I am just finishing a note I wish taken to the Governor. Will you not deliver it for me?"

Raoul bowed his acceptance of the commission.

"Sit here, in this easy chair, while you wait," continued his vivacious companion, and pushing

it forward she arranged a soft cushion behind his head, and sat down herself at an open desk.

“I am merely explaining to the Governor,” she remarked as she sealed the note, “the cause of my early departure from the ball. I am frequently subject to fainting fits. The crowd and the heat of the rooms that night undoubtedly accounted for the attack I felt coming on, hence my desire to get out into the fresh, cool air. These attacks used to be so terrifying to my husband.” Then, with the least bit of a regretful sigh: “Monsieur du Tillet told me that he had met my husband in Paris; perhaps you did, also, without remembering his name. I will show you a miniature I have of him,” and opening a drawer she took out a small frame and handed it to Raoul.

It was the likeness of a middle-aged man in full uniform, with a pleasant face and drooping mustache, but (so Raoul thought as he examined it closely) with a chin perhaps a trifle heavy, and eyes a little too staring—— A sudden drowsiness, sweet, but overpowering, assailed him. He struggled to raise his eyelids, but could not. He was unable to see the woman standing before him, gazing upon his face, with all the intensity of her mind concentrated within her glance, nor did he see the imperious movement of her white hand through the air above his brow, nor hear the command, uttered in a low, earnest tone: “Sleep!”

Despite his struggles, he was forced to yield, and lay back in the chair, apparently slumbering peacefully.

"Do you know who I am?" was the woman's first question.

"Yes," came in low but distinct tones from the unconscious Raoul.

"And are you ready to be obedient to my will?"

"Yes," after a pause.

"Hear, then, what I have to say. You are to come to me here whenever I command you in my mind to do so, no matter where you may be, or what you may be doing. Will you obey?"

"Yes."

"You will become fascinated with my beauty, seek my companionship frequently, and show your devotion by willing obedience to my slightest wish. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"If any other woman has gained your love you will grow cold toward her, and transfer your allegiance to me. Will you?"

No answer. The man's brow knit as though he struggled hard against this last command. Madame Duvivier stamped her foot impatiently as she renewed the effort of her will to overcome his resistance. The contest ended.

"I will," came at length the answer, with a groan as though wrung from him by sheer force.

“You will increase your intimacy with Monsieur du Tillet. He is a fine comrade, and your true friend. Will you obey in this?”

“Yes.”

“You will awaken in two minutes, and imagine you have fainted. You will then leave me, and hold yourself ready to do my bidding, or respond to my call. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly.”

Madame Duvivier then poured out a glass of wine, and stood beside the chair. Raoul opened his eyes. His companion smiled sweetly as she offered it, saying: “Try a little of this, Monsieur, it will revive you. I little imagined when I talked of fainting that it would affect you in this way.”

Raoul drank mechanically, and looked at her in a daze.

“I fear that something may be the matter with your heart,” she continued gayly. “In fact, from what I hear, I am persuaded that you have no heart at all, but have left it in the Château for safe keeping.”

Raoul did not reply to her raillery save by a smile. Was it the light falling on her face, or was it the pose she chanced to be in? Certainly he had never been so attracted by her beauty before. How perfect the curve of her neck! What an exquisitely chiseled chin! He had never noticed the sad, dreamy, tender look of her eyes, nor the

graceful, wavy outline of her hair as it wreathed itself about her face. He sat silently drinking in the intoxicating draught of her loveliness. His eyes sparkled with admiration as he said earnestly:

“You are very beautiful, Madame. In fact the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” and with an impulsive movement he lightly kissed the hand that proffered him the note, and was gone.

Meanwhile the three friends of du Tillet were pondering over the strange state of affairs that had arisen. They were secretly afraid of his power, fearful lest he turn it upon themselves in a moment of anger or treachery. The desire for gain, however, overpowered their secret misgiving, and they comforted themselves with the thought that if they heartily assisted him he could not be otherwise than friendly. They therefore proceeded to carry out his directions, given them the next day, to purchase small quantities of goods, paying for them with the money he provided, and sending them in canoes by night, in care of a trusty boatman, to the landing-place below the frowning walls of La Maison Sombre. These goods were carefully stowed away in one of the subterranean rooms, ostensibly to await the time when they should be sent to the appointed spot on the opposite shore above Quebec. In truth they remained where they were placed, du Tillet's arrangements with the Dutch trader being purely mythical.

Du Tillet appeared but seldom in the city, only often enough to retain his popularity. When he met his three confederates in public he gave them the same smile and nod of recognition that the merest acquaintance received.

Thus passed two weeks, and the three found themselves one evening wending their way to the home of the arch-conspirator, in obedience to his summons. He greeted them with warmth as they entered the hall. "Welcome! *mes braves conspirateurs*, to the first business meeting of 'The Royal Four.' The stock of goods you have so faithfully collected has been delivered, and we have now only to share the profits," and he pointed to three piles of gold upon the table. "Fifty *louis* apiece for your labor is not bad pay. Who says now that trade with the sleepy Dutch is not profitable?"

His three companions stared at the coins in amazement, hardly daring to realize the actuality of what had seemed but a golden dream. Soon each one was clinking his share in his pocket.

"You must be a magician, *mon cher* du Tillet," said Berthier with enthusiasm, "and can transmute the baser metals into gold."

"This is but a foretaste of what will follow," smiled du Tillet, "if you remain faithful."

"But where is your portion?" remarked Gaudais.

“My share,” was the smiling rejoinder, “will come in the shape of personal gratification in achieving the downfall of de Chatignac, and what I may be able to squeeze out of him. I am willing to have no part in the profits of our trading so long as I get the other. That is satisfactory, is it not?”

“*Parbleu!* You are generous indeed,” replied Berthier, while the other two nodded a gratified assent.

“And now regarding a scheme of action against de Chatignac I have worked out,” said du Tillet. “Who among you knows where a copy of the plans of the fortifications can be found?”

“There are no copies in existence,” replied Lieutenant Liotot. “The original is carefully hidden in the Governor’s desk at the Château. I saw him put it away one day when I called to make a report. Several times when I have been there he has been called out of the room. Dirks and daggers! The same thing will happen again. I shall watch my opportunity, and secure the plans.”

“*Ma foi!*” said du Tillet, with a slightly satirical smile, “how ready my fellow-partners are to perform the arduous tasks I impose upon them. However, you are all interested, I know, in the destruction of Raoul de Chatignac. There will soon be work for the rest of you. I shall not divulge the details of my plot. Suffice it to say

that suspicious actions will be observed, and incriminating documents found upon him, that will cause Monsieur Raoul to stand up and face a row of gun-muzzles on the Place d'Armes some fine morning at sunrise. Hold yourselves in readiness to play any part that may be assigned to you. Your work, Lieutenant Liotot, must be done at once. Secure the plans as soon as possible, as I wish to make a copy of them to use on our own private business with the English commandant. And now, *mes amis*, a farewell glass to our success, and the ruin of our common enemy."

After they had gone, their host sat watching the flaring candles on the table. "The plot should succeed. Then, good-by, Monsieur Raoul, to this wicked world," and du Tillet laughed silently, distorting his features in diabolical mirth.

A full half-hour he remained motionless, in deep thought; then, after yawning several times, he arose, and, blowing out all the candles except one, he seized that, and left the room to the flickering light of the burning logs and their wavering shadows. Yet not entirely to them, for when stillness reigned throughout the house, the old suit of armor standing immobile in its dim corner, stirred, and after many contortions a human figure emerged, and the form of Farouche the Fool stole noiselessly away.

Chapter Eleven

IN WHICH A COUNTERPLOT IS PLANNED

THE sudden revelation of Madame Duvivier's charms bewildered Raoul as he trudged on toward the Château in a sort of waking dream. On his arrival he found both Aimée and the Governor absent, so, leaving the note, he turned mechanically homeward. The next day while completing his interrupted rounds he suddenly felt an irresistible desire to see Madame Duvivier again, so he quickly abandoned his work and rode to Quebec. He soon found himself in the society of his charmer, who seemed to have expected him. More fascinating than ever, she gayly laughed and chatted with him of Paris and the Court, and her early impressions of New France, her loneliness since her husband's death, and her appreciation of the attention received from a few congenial persons she had met in Quebec. Something in her tone told Raoul that he was included in that number, and his heart warmed with intense satisfaction at the thought. When he took his leave he was more deeply entangled in the meshes of her net than ever.

It soon happened that he spent more time in the city, a victim to the enchantment of Madame Duvivier, than he did in the care of his estate, until finally he was unhappy unless he saw her for at least a few moments every day. As a proof of his devotion he strove to anticipate her every wish, purchasing all sorts of costly gifts that he thought might please her fancy; rode with her, accompanied her to the Cathedral, and in short became her willing slave. At first he feebly struggled to return to the ways and associations of his old life, but that strange, subtle power, stronger than his own will, ever mastered him again. Meanwhile his visits to the Château diminished in frequency, and dwindled down to an occasional perfunctory call. While he was with Aimée he appeared preoccupied, moody, and *distract*; at times he arose and left on the plea of urgent business in connection with his property.

Aimée, quick to detect this change in her friend, at first wondered if she were to blame, and searched her memory carefully for any recollection of word or deed of hers that could have given offense.

Soon, however, she became aware of the true state of affairs, for one day, when hurrying home from the Cathedral, she met Raoul and Madame Duvivier walking together on the street. The latter was clad in her most becoming costume, and

was talking lightly to her companion as they passed. He, intent upon her beauty, did not see his friend, although their elbows almost touched. Madame Duvivier returned Aimée's bow by a smile, and a glance of triumph that was not lost upon her.

The young girl hurried home and, seeking refuge in her own room, wept long and bitterly. She was sorely wounded at heart that her old friend, over whom she had formerly exercised a guiding and restraining influence, should so suddenly fall a victim to one against whom she had carefully warned him. Her gentle, innocent nature had instinctively recoiled at her first meeting with Madame Duvivier, being convinced from the beginning that she was a dangerous companion for Raoul. Several times she had questioned herself closely as to the cause for this feeling, but could find no valid reason. A subtle something within her said that the arts of fascination Madame Duvivier employed were those of the siren, rather than the innocent wiles of a worldly woman whose vanity fed upon the attention of the stronger sex.

She dared not analyze more deeply her own feeling, but chose to attribute her anxiety over Raoul's welfare to her long friendship for him; this was surely an adequate reason for her distress. She had come of fighting stock, and there arose within her the firm determination to accept the challenge

she had seen in her opponent's eyes. Her father had battled for his country's cause, and felt that he might save for his King's service one whose ability and sterling worth was sorely needed in those troublous times. She, too, would fight to win for future usefulness a man whose innate nobility of mind and character were well worth any sacrifice or exertion on her part. Her father had fought valiantly against the enemy to save a man's life; she and this strange woman would pit themselves each against the other in a battle royal for a man's soul.

This worthy determination once made, her momentary womanly weakness disappeared. Her tears were quickly dried, and she was all eagerness to begin the struggle. Careful planning was necessary, and she longed for the fresh air and sunshine to give her thoughts clearness. She thereupon ordered her horse, and was soon galloping along the road toward Beauport, in keen physical enjoyment of the invigorating exercise. As her mind became more quiet she realized the magnitude of the struggle before her and her own weakness. An ally was indispensable. At the thought she chanced to raise her eyes, and her heart leaped for joy as she recognized the figure of Armand riding toward her.

"Ah, *mon amie*," he cried, "my happiness is now complete. I felt that good companionship

was only necessary to make my ride one of perfect enjoyment."

"I cannot stop with you to-day for mere pleasure's sake," replied Aimée, with a mischievous smile. "I ride afield in search of some champion to join me in a worthy cause. Aside, Monsieur, and let me pass."

Armand gasped. "You, Mademoiselle, in need of a champion, and wish to pass me by? You surely are not serious. I may not be worthy in your eyes of any great deeds, but you must know from our lifelong friendship that my heart would be always willing and my hand ever ready to answer any call to your service."

"*Mon cher Armand,*" answered Aimée soberly, "I was but jesting. You are the very person I wished most to see, for I do really need your aid."

Armand's eyes lighted up with joy. Hopeless as he knew his worship to be, he grasped eagerly at every slight indication of favor at her hands, although he remained firm in his determination to take no step that would be at all disloyal to Raoul. He had noticed his marked public attentions to Madame Duvivier, and had heard the numerous rumors that such devotion had aroused. For the moment his heart beat faster as he beheld his companion's beauty, and the unbecoming hope flashed across his mind that Raoul's actions might clear the way for the realization of his own fond dreams. It

was only a moment, however, before he put the thought ruthlessly aside, and dropped his eyes in shame of his baseness in the presence of the sweet nobility looking at him in his companion's gaze.

"It is about our old friend Raoul," continued Aimée. "Have you not noticed a change in him of late?"

Armand's heart sank. Raoul, always Raoul! Then, with an effort to throw off the unworthy feeling, he replied:

"Truly, he has seemed to avoid me for some weeks past, for no reason that I am conscious of. I have ridden frequently out to see him, but always found that he was in the city. He spends much of his time with Monsieur Tillet and his friends, whom, I must confess, I do not like. I suspect, too, he indulges more freely in wine and play than is good for him. I also fear for the consequences of his friendship for Madame Duvivier. She is very beautiful but, *mon Dieu!* deliver me from the toils of these fascinating widows who come to New France from goodness knows where for the benefit of their health."

Aimée trembled as she realized that Raoul's attentions to this woman must be observed and known to all, but replied bravely:

"*Mon cher* Armand, we must not judge too harshly. There are so few pretty women in Quebec that perhaps he is not to be blamed for being

dazzled by this new arrival, while, as for his other friends, they may not be so bad as you think. However, I agree with you in the main, and feel that if we are truly his friends we ought to use all our efforts to woo him away from any undesirable acquaintances, and thus save him from himself. I can do something; you can do a great deal."

"I will gladly join you for his sake, as well as from my regard for you. Your charms ought surely to win him from the control of Venus herself, while I——"

"While you can share with him his new-made friends. Go with him into their gatherings, watch and see if they be indeed friends; stay at his elbow to warn him, and thus, perchance, reassert your former influence, and gradually lead him back to his old life of simpler joys and more healthful pleasures. *Le bon Dieu* will surely prosper us in our undertaking."

All jealous feeling had been swept away; the momentary sway of an unworthy thought had ceased; Armand had once more won the victory over himself.

"Agreed!" he cried earnestly. And, as their hands clasped, his eyes could meet hers with a glance that was open and unafraid.

On parting from her friend, Aimée urged him to repair to the city at once and begin his task, say-

ing that she herself would ride on alone in order to think out some plan for her own actions.

Her heart was reassured, and her purpose was strengthened by the interview, for she knew that she could depend on Armand's most unselfish efforts in the coming struggle. But a reaction set in shortly. A feeling of desolation and loneliness surged through her mind. Poor motherless girl! she had never realized her helpless state so fully before. Hitherto when she had needed counsel she had gone to the Governor, and had received a father's advice. But now she craved a feminine mind, a mother's heart, to understand her motives (no man could do that), and to help her avoid anything unmaidenly and yet effect her purpose. With no one to whom she could turn, her burdened heart sought the sympathy of her brute companion.

"Ah! Rex, dear Rex," she murmured, burying her face in his silky mane, "you would help me if you could." The intelligent animal tossed his head in sympathetic reply, and stamped his forefeet uneasily, as though rendered uncomfortable by his mistress's distress.

Presently a slight movement of surprise on his part caused her to look up, and she beheld Farouche the Fool standing near with ragged cap in hand and a troubled look upon his face. Aimée smiled encouragingly at him.

“ You did not take me for a fairy this time, did you, my good Farouche? ”

“ No, Mademoiselle, for you look unhappy. The fairy folk are always joyful. Tell me,” he continued earnestly, pointing up the road in the direction taken by Armand, “ did he make you sad? ”

Aimée smiled. “ Armand? No, indeed, he is one of my best friends.”

“ Was it—the Governor? ” Farouche was racking his poor distraught brain to remember anyone with whom he could possibly connect his beautiful divinity before him. Aimée laughed this time heartily. “ Poor dear Père Philippe, who has been a father to me, and would lie down and let me walk over him if he thought it would give me any pleasure? ”

“ So would I,” was the quick reply, as a jealous glance shot from the man’s eye.

“ I know you would, and perhaps you may be able to serve me some day,” returned Aimée gently.

But the mind of Farouche, unsatisfied, returned to his first train of thought. “ Was it the young man I see so often, Monsieur de——, he with the bright eyes, just returned from France? ”

“ You mean Raoul de Chatignac? ”

“ Yes, yes,”—eagerly.

“ No. Raoul de Chatignac is another good

friend. It was my anxiety over his future that perhaps made me appear unhappy."

"Your friend? Then you do not know?"

"Know what?"

Farouche's face lighted up with a sudden glow. He struggled to express the idea that was uppermost in his mind, but unsuccessfully.

"Monsieur Roguin, bad man—his enemy. He try to—Monsieur Roguin, I mean Monsieur du Tillet, no, Monsieur Roguin——" And Farouche stopped helplessly.

Again his thought labored to find utterance, and again he failed. Laying his hand upon his brow, he murmured piteously: "My poor head! Monsieur Roguin——" Before he could complete his sentence his quick ear caught the sound of an approaching horse, and he disappeared behind a bush. In another moment Monsieur du Tillet appeared, riding leisurely. As he passed Aimée he greeted her with a polite bow and an admiring glance. After he had gone she called Farouche, but he did not appear. Turning her horse's head homeward she rode on with a new apprehensive fear in her heart, aroused by the fool's words.

Chapter Twelve

WHEREIN THE GOVERNOR RECEIVES A BLOW

SUMMER days came with their wealth of sunshine and soft breezes, and with their coming Raoul's infatuation increased. The supervision of his estate was entirely neglected. His days were spent mainly in the society of Madame Duvivier, walking, or driving, or picnicking with a merry party on the lawn in front of his house. His evenings usually found him at La Maison Sombre, with Monsieur du Tillet and his friends, or in the upper room of "The Silver Fox," where the wine flowed freest, the songs were the loudest, the stakes the highest. True to his promise to Aimée, Armand overcame his personal dislike for many of Raoul's companions, and mingled freely with them, ever at his friend's side, warning him against reckless play, and urging him to return home early before the wine had robbed him of his reason. Toward him Raoul retained a friendly feeling, although the former close companionship was gone. Sometimes he seemed to chafe at his interference, waving him aside with an impatient word. Again,

he was overcome with shame and regret when he awakened in the morning after a wild night and found himself in Armand's room and realized that it had been necessary for his friend to escort him there. Promises of better conduct were made, only to be broken as soon as he felt the mysterious power calling him to the side of Madame Duvivier, or forcing him to spend another evening with his gay companions.

Aimée, on her part, redoubled her efforts to aid him. Frequently she prevailed upon him to spend an hour with her at the Château. At these times she met him with all her old frankness, and strove earnestly to recall him to his better self. Sometimes he appeared to regain his normal condition, and would then seem to be the bright, affectionate Raoul of yore, as they talked of their childhood happiness, with all its pleasant memories. Often she would be happy and contented after his departure, fondly hoping that she was making some lasting progress with him, only to see him soon relapse again under the malign influence that overshadowed his life. Several times, while in the midst of a merry hour together, he had suddenly ceased talking, a strange look had come over his face, and he had risen and hastily made his adieux, as though in obedience to some unseen call.

It was after one of these unsatisfactory interviews one evening that she stole, weary and sick

at heart, into the Governor's room, where he sat in his easy chair, and kneeling by his side laid her head upon his knee, as she had often done before. The fatherly caress and the sympathetic tone of his voice always soothed her and gave her courage.

“ Ah! my little pigeon! ” he exclaimed affectionately as she nestled close, “ it is you, is it? I was longing to have you with me again, but ”— here he pinched her ear mischievously—“ I thought Raoul de Chatignac was with you, and did not suppose you would leave your youthful admirer for such a surly old bear as I, no matter how fond I might be of you.”

Aimée gave his big hand a squeeze as she replied: “ For shame, Père Philippe, have you not yet learned that I care for my old friends best of all? The younger ones have not been tested and found true, as you have been. Raoul stayed but a short time, saying he had another call to make. I fear he finds that the bonds of our old friendship chafe him. I see him but seldom now,” she added a little wearily.

The Governor frowned. “ True, I have noticed him here but little of late. I hear, too, that he is fascinated by the beauty of Madame Duvivier. I hope to be able to disillusion him some day in that direction, if it should ever become necessary.”

Aimée looked up quickly. “ Why? Do you

know anything against her? Did she not come well recommended?"

"Yes, but I have not lived in the world thus long not to recognize the arts of an intriguing woman. Several suspicious matters have come to my notice. I intend to send by the next ship for further information concerning this dark-haired beauty. However, until I can offer some substantial evidence against her it would be folly to speak to Raoul. I am a little worried about him in another direction, also. I am told he is spending too much of his time with companions who, although they may do him no real harm, at the same time can do him little good. He should be awaking to the serious things of life, instead of throwing in his lot with a parcel of gay rakes such as I am bound to say many of our young men are. I shall send for him ere long and give him a little fatherly advice. He is too noble and fine a fellow for me to allow him to drift into unworthy channels. I have been much occupied recently with fresh anxieties concerning the Colony, and have, I fear, neglected my duty both to you and to Raoul. I am especially baffled in trying to account for the recent mysterious disappearance from its hiding place in my desk of the plans of the fortifications, old and new, of the city. I cannot but believe that they have been stolen. If so, then undoubtedly for a purpose. I hesitate and shudder at the thought of possible

traitors in our midst. A secret enemy is more dangerous than a hundred open foes. When this matter is satisfactorily settled I shall have my mind more at rest."

"Tell me, Père Philippe," said Aimée earnestly, "what sort of a man was Raoul's father? I have only my childish recollection of him—the last few years of his life he lived in such retirement I seldom saw him."

"Léon de Chatignac," replied the Governor in a meditative tone as his mind went back over the long years, "was the only man, except your own father, I have ever known who was of a metal that rang true to every blow. These two, my nearest and warmest friends, although of differing temperaments, were alike in many particulars. They were both God-fearing men, loyal with an unswerving loyalty to the King, holding honor and truth above all else. Hence, knowing the father as I did, I have no fear that the son will ever be unworthy of the sire. The thoughtless follies of youth might sway him for the moment, but I would stake my life upon it he could never do anything dishonorable or disloyal."

The door opened, and the figure of Lieutenant Liotot appeared upon the threshold. From his troubled face Aimée guessed he had matters of importance to discuss with the Governor, so she slipped silently from the room.

“Are we alone?” the man asked anxiously, closing the door carefully after Aimée’s departure, and looking furtively at the gloomy corners.

“*Certainement!*” replied the Governor rather testily, for his appearance proclaimed him the bearer of evil tidings. “But why this need of secrecy? Have the Indians advanced upon the city and surprised it, or have you unearthed a plot to assassinate all the King’s officers?”

“Nay, your Excellency,” was the answer, “it is on a question of conflicting duties that I desire your counsel.”

“Ah! you wish advice!” said the Governor in a relieved tone. “State your difficulty and I will try to help you.”

“I—that is—well—you see,” was the stammered reply, “one of my best friends and comrades lies under suspicion in my mind of doing an act which my duty as a soldier obliges me to condemn. It is this conflict between my friendship for the man and my loyalty to the King that is disturbing my mind. The former causes me to hesitate before doing anything that might harm him, while the latter tells me plainly that I ought to speak of the matter to those higher in authority. Hence I have taken it upon myself to seek your Excellency’s advice.”

“If it be a matter of tale-bearing concerning some slight infraction of the regulations by a fel-

low-officer, your own good sense should guide you. If it be an act of personal folly, you had best plead with your friend as only a friend can. On the contrary, if it be aught affecting the interests of the King, you would indeed do well to sink your personal feelings out of sight and follow your sworn duty as a loyal subject and a soldier."

"Thanks, your Excellency, for your true words, which have made my duty plain to me. I felt I was doing right in coming to you, for the importance of the affair, I believe, justifies me. But I confess that my personal interest in the man made me hesitate in deciding which was the better course to follow."

"Well, Lieutenant, to the point of your story," said the Governor impatiently.

"While walking to-day near the Place d'Armes I saw the figure of my friend ahead me, and hastened my pace to overtake him, but he turned the corner before I had approached near enough to speak. Just before doing so, he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow, for he was walking rapidly, and at the same instant a paper fell to the ground. I picked it up and followed him, but on turning the corner he was nowhere to be seen. The paper was half unfolded, and my eye caught sight of the signature. You can yourself see why my curiosity led me to read the letter, and why I brought it to you," and so

saying he handed the paper in question to the Governor.

As the latter glanced over the written page his heart sank within him and his lips formed the inaudible word "Treason!"

"You have indeed done well, Lieutenant," he continued in a steady voice, "and I shall not forget your services. Have you mentioned the matter to anyone else?"

"Not a soul, your Excellency."

"That is also well. Continue to be silent upon the subject. And now, what is the name of your friend whose act lays him open to very grave doubts of his loyalty and honor?"

"Raoul de Chatignac," was the quiet answer.

The Governor started violently, as though struck. His heart gave one convulsive leap, and then stood still an instant, while the room seemed to grow dark and the objects in it sway dimly before his eyes. The unengaged hand, striking against the table, clutched its edges for support. By a supreme effort he recovered himself.

"I will attend to the matter. Again my thanks for your service to the King." He spoke slowly, but with a dry, strained voice, as he dismissed the officer with a bow.

When he was alone he stumbled to his chair and fell wearily into it. His chin lay upon his breast, his eyes were sunken, the lines about his noble fore-

head and lips were deepened visibly; he had aged ten years in as many minutes. The first blow had partly stunned his sensibility, now he gradually awoke with a shudder to the horrid reality of the affair. Picking up the crumpled sheet from the floor he spread it out carefully on the table, and lighted another candle. He then opened a drawer, took out a document and, laying it beside the other, carefully compared the two signatures. "The name of the British commandant," he muttered, "they are the same." He then took up the fatal paper and read it carefully, now and then uttering his comment in a broken voice.

"I congratulate you on the success of your previous efforts in obtaining information for us. (So he has had dealings with him before!) All we lack is an accurate plan of the fortifications complete in every particular. (They are evidently making careful preparations for an attack; I now understand why the plan is missing from my desk. A copy is being made.) A messenger will await you at the usual point on the river just after sunset on the evening of the 7th. (That is to-morrow night.)"

He could go no further, but bowed his head in anguish, while the hot tears trickled down his cheeks. "Ah! Raoul, Raoul," he moaned piteously, "this would have broken thy father's heart. Would that I could see thee stretched at my feet,

pierced by an Indian arrow or the bullet of the enemy, thy handsome face pale in death; yes, pale in death, death with honor, rather than this," clutching the edge of the incriminating letter—"for this means—*Mon Dieu!*—this, too, means death, but one of infamy and dishonor. Thy sojourn, in the early flush of impressionable young manhood, amid the blighting influences of a corrupt and intriguing Court, has been the cause of thy fall. And now, hardest of all, I, your friend, your father's friend, loving you for his sake as well as your own, cannot speak to warn you of your danger ere you commit yourself by an overt act of treason. I am also the friend and trusted servant of the King, the sworn guardian and defender of New France against the plots and evil designs of her enemies, among whom you are about to array yourself. How glibly I talked to Lieutenant Liotot of yielding all personal feelings when they conflicted with duty! Little did I imagine that I, too, should be put to the test!"

Suddenly he struck the table a blow with his fist, and his eye sparkled again with hope.

"*Peste!* Here I am taking everything for granted, and looking upon the very darkest side of the affair. Perhaps Raoul will miss this paper, and fear to keep the appointment. Possibly the Lieutenant was mistaken in the identity of the person who dropped the letter. It contains no ad-

dress. Perhaps after all Raoul is innocent; I believe he is, and shall until incontrovertible proof of his guilt is forthcoming. Perhaps a dozen things may prove him guiltless. My duty only demands that he be watched, to see if he goes to meet the messenger of the enemy. If not, then I must seek for other clues. Until then I can but wait. Aimée, poor child, must be kept in ignorance."

Late he sat, pondering hopefully over the matter, seeking a solution that would exonerate the son of his old friend from all wrong-doing. At length he sought repose, only to toss restlessly through the night, crying out continually in his sleep as a father for a son, "Pray God he does not go!"

Immediately upon leaving the Château, Lieutenant Liotot walked rapidly toward the Cathedral. There he joined a dark figure concealed in the shadows, saying with a laugh, "Well, it is done."

"How did he take the news?"

"He swallowed my story whole, without a question. When I gave him the name he staggered like a bull that has been hit between the eyes with a hammer, but he shook himself together, and I left him to devise a plan to entrap the bird."

The two then parted; the dark figure stopped at Madame Duvivier's for a few hurried words of instruction, then, taking horse and guided by the rays of the moon, set out upon the Beauport road,

More than one mind in Quebec anxiously awaited the outcome of the morrow, while the unsuspecting victim of it all sat in the upper room of "The Silver Fox," winning heavily from his good friend Berthier.

Chapter Thirteen

WHICH NATURALLY PROVES UNLUCKY FOR THE
HERO

THE Governor arose next morning, weary and worn. Aimée, noticing his haggard face, ran to him and, putting her arms about his neck, pulled his head down and kissed him on the brow.

"There!" she exclaimed, "I will smooth out all the wrinkles. You must have had anxious news last night after I left you, for I would swear there are a dozen more now than there were yesterday."

The Governor, taking her face between his hands, looked earnestly into her eyes. "You speak truly, child," he said, with emotion. "I received grave news, indeed, and to-day will be a time of constant anxiety. You can perhaps aid me if you will spend the forenoon at the Cathedral praying that *le bon Dieu* will turn aside the calamity that overhangs us all."

Raoul received word early at his home that Madame Duvivier was indisposed, but would be glad to see him at her house late in the afternoon.

He therefore spent the morning wandering about under the trees, chafing at the delay in again beholding the siren who was luring him mercilessly upon the rocks. He feared lest her health was failing under the cool breezes of New France, and shuddered as he thought of the long, harsh winter that was but a few months distant. When the hour approached for his visit he started for the city, bearing an assortment of flowers he had ordered Fidette to pick. But as she entered the room to greet him his fears regarding her health vanished; never had she appeared to him to look so beautiful, as she thanked him graciously for the flowers and for his thoughtfulness.

“It is the part of a slave to do aught he can for Beauty’s comfort or delight,” he murmured gallantly, while his eyes fell upon a curiously flashing stone, set in a brooch at her delicately molded throat. She motioned him to a chair, and he obeyed, still watching the strange, lambent flame that played about the jewel. He was about to speak, but the fantastic thing seemed to fascinate him. A moment later the hand of the woman was raised, a light command was given and the young men sank back unconscious.

As soon as she was assured that he slept, she knelt quickly down and removed one of his shoes. Drawing a folded paper from her bosom, she laid it carefully in the bottom, and slipped it on again.

Then regaining her feet, she approached him and spoke in a low, melodious voice:

“You will not feel the presence of anything unusual in your shoe. You will carry out the suggestions I shall make to you, and you will never associate me in any way with whatever consequences may follow. In one minute you will awake.” Leaving him, she crossed the room and busied herself in taking the flowers he had brought out of the box and arranging them carefully in a large vase. He opened his eyes and watched her dreamily.

“As I was saying,” she began, without looking at him, as though continuing a conversation that had not been interrupted, “you are more than kind to take the trouble to bring me these lovely blossoms. I appreciate them more than I can tell. However, I am anxious to behold the pale pink flower you have told me about that is so rare in this neighborhood, and I shall hold you to your promise some day to get me a large cluster.”

“Yes, I remember,” he replied eagerly, “they grow only in one spot, a point of land a half-league up the river on the other side. Would you like them to-night? They wilt if picked before sunset, but if you gather them immediately after the sun goes down, they will last with care for several days. If I leave now I can return shortly after dark,”

“Oh! I do not wish to trouble you so much, Monsieur,” she replied in a deprecating tone. “There is no hurry. Besides it is far, and you may be weary.”

“I am never weary in your service, Madame,” Raoul answered, rising. “I am rejoiced to learn your lightest wish,” and he seized the beautiful hand that was extended toward him, accompanied by a tantalizing smile, and kissed it feverishly.

The great sun sank slowly to rest, loth to leave the world he loved, glowing with indignation as though apprehending in his fiery heart the deeds of treachery and wickedness that would be enacted after he had disappeared and left the earth to the care of the twilight shadows. Life suddenly became tense to those hearts who awaited expectantly the events of the next few hours. The supreme moment of activity was nearly come.

A horseman rode rapidly through the gathering dusk toward La Maison Sombre, and on entering the great hall greeted the look of inquiry from the expectant du Tillet with:

“All goes well. I have sent Gaudais on ahead to act the part of the hidden messenger. The Governor has an officer and two men ready to follow our honest friend in his voyage up the river.”

Alone in a room of the Château, the Governor strode up and down, watching impatiently the sinking light of day. A few hours, and his hopes or

his fears would be realized. His fatherly heart yearned toward the boy, whom he had always loved. The stern mind of the soldier and patriot steeled itself for the unimpeded performance of its duty. Alone in the dim Cathedral, Aimée still lingered, praying on in an agony of apprehensive fear.

Raoul, all unsuspecting of the imminent danger he was in, seated himself in his canoe and started off with light heart. A strange intoxication filled his mind. As yet no words of love, only admiration of his charmer's beauty, had escaped him. The torment of the morning, when he was prevented from seeing the object of his strange infatuation, had taught him that he must not delay further. He was determined to woo and win her if possible that very night on his return from his quest. The air was filled with a strange, unnatural, golden haze; his heart's blood pulsed hotly along, while he sang softly to himself a gay *chanson*, keeping time to the measure deftly with his paddle.

Oblivious as he was to the outside world, it is not strange that he did not notice another canoe creeping along after him in the gathering shadows of the opposite bank. When he, too, entered these shadows as he approached the end of his journey, this strange canoe, with three soldiers in it, drew nearer and nearer. Finally he ran into shore,

leaped out and turned toward the flowering shrubs, situated only a few yards from the water, to gather the blossoms he sought. He did not hear the ripple of the approaching canoe, nor did his ear detect the slight grating sound it made as it touched the land. Just then he did hear a somewhat familiar voice issuing from the thicket in front of him:

“Is that you, de Chatignac? Have you brought me the plans?”

He stopped, wonderingly, his arms filled with the first few flowers he had plucked, and started in amazement as a hand was laid upon his shoulder and the voice of the officer who had arrived in the other canoe sounded in his ear:

“I arrest you, Raoul de Chatignac, in the King’s name.”

At these words a crashing was heard in the bushes as the owner of the first voice took sudden flight.

“Arrest me?” Raoul exclaimed in anger as he peered into the faces of the three soldiers before him.

“Yes, in the King’s name. Will you return to Quebec with us peaceably?”

“There must be some mistake,” was his dazed reply. “I have done nothing.”

The officer shrugged his shoulders, and pointed to his canoe. He entered it with the prisoner,

while the other two soldiers paddled alongside in the one in which Raoul had set forth.

Stunned, confused, angry, Raoul sat silent, his hands unconsciously clasping the gathered blossoms. Still perplexed, he got out when they reached the city and walked quietly with his guard toward the Château. On entering, the officer left the others for a moment while he sought the Governor. "Did you find him?" asked the old man eagerly, and a world of fear and hope breathed through his words. "We did, your Excellency," was the crushing reply.

In a few moments they were all assembled in the Governor's room. Pale and agitated, he sat in his great chair beside the table, trying hard to be stern, repressing an almost over-mastering desire to cast himself upon the neck of Raoul in an agony of pity and grief.

Before him were the prisoner, the three soldiers, and Lieutenant Liotot, whom he had summoned to attend. The former stood frowning with a defiant air, endeavoring to appear calm amidst a storm of angry feelings.

"Monsieur Raoul de Chatignac," began the Governor in a voice he strove to render firm, but which trembled with emotion, "you are among your friends and well-wishers."

"Is it the part of friends and well-wishers, your Excellency," replied Raoul in a bitter tone, "to

track an innocent man to the woods, arrest him on an unknown charge, and then humiliate him by bringing him through the streets of Quebec under guard at early evening? There are some mistakes that are too grievous for even friends and well-wishers to make."

"But," continued the Governor without seeming to notice his reply, "you are also in the presence of those who are sworn to preserve the Colony, whose first duty is toward the King and their own honorable oath."

Raoul's lips curled. "Of what crime or crimes am I accused, and who are my accusers?" he said proudly.

The Governor picked up from the table the letter of the British commandant at New York, and passed it to him. "Did you ever see this before?" he asked anxiously.

Raoul glanced at the signature and returned it. "Certainly not. Why?"

"*Grâce à Dieu!*" cried the Governor, "I did not believe you had; but read it carefully."

Raoul took the document close to the light. As he read his hand trembled with agitation, and his eyes flashed. When he had finished he exclaimed warmly:

"*Mon Dieu!* your Excellency, this is treason! There are traitors in the city who are corresponding with the English." He looked at the silent faces

about him wonderingly, then at the Governor. "What has this to do with me?"

For reply, the Governor motioned to Lieutenant Liotot, who stepped forward and in a few words related the manner in which the paper had come into his possession. At the end of his recital he burst into hypocritical tears, and murmuring, "My poor, poor Raoul!" retreated to his former position.

Raoul gasped in astonishment as the meaning of this testimony flashed over him. "I, the owner of that vile thing?" he cried. "Impossible! You who are my friends and well-wishers, as the Governor has truly said, cannot believe that for an instant. A de Chatignac traitor to his King and country? Absurd!" and Raoul laughed scornfully at the thought.

"No, Raoul," said the Governor kindly, "no one here believes you have anything to do with it. We feel assured that you can explain away all unfortunate circumstances, and we will rejoice to hear you do so. That is why I had you brought here, feeling sure that at this private hearing your apparent connection with this letter would be satisfactorily accounted for. To begin with, there is probably a mistake in identity. Lieutenant Liotot saw only the back of the person who dropped it, and at some distance, too. Where were you at the hour mentioned by him? Probably at home

attending to your affairs?" and the old man's voice trembled in his anxiety to find some loophole for the escape of his beloved friend.

Raoul's eyes fell and he was silent a moment. Then he looked up, "No, your Excellency," he said frankly; "Lieutenant Liotot was correct. I did pass along the street mentioned, and turned the corner at the time he claims to have seen me."

The Governor's face paled. "Where were you going?"

"To—to make a call," after some hesitation.

The Governor was silent in turn. Then in an altered tone he went on:

"It is very unfortunate you cannot prove yourself to have been elsewhere at that hour. You will see by this letter that a time and place were appointed for the delivery of the plans referred to. How do you explain the fact that you reached a spot on the river on the day and hour appointed in this letter, where a messenger was in waiting who called you by name and asked about the plans also mentioned in the letter?"

"A coincidence merely, your Excellency; I went to that particular spot to gather flowers for a friend."

The Governor frowned. He guessed who the friend referred to might be. Raoul was silent. The evidence pointing to his guilt was forcing its

weight upon his mind. The Governor misinterpreted his silence.

“No other person was seen approaching the spot where the emissary of the English lay in wait, save yourself. However, all the evidence is purely circumstantial. Only one witness claims to have seen you drop the letter, and he admits he was walking some distance behind; therefore it is very possible he was mistaken as to the identity of the person. You can probably prove from your friend that you set out with the determination to gather flowers. The men who followed you have said that you were busily engaged in that occupation when they landed. They may be mistaken in the name uttered by the hidden messenger; the English make but a poor mouth at pronouncing French, at the best. I would, therefore, encourage you by saying that while your position is extremely unfortunate, yet nothing has been brought forth that cannot possibly be explained.”

At this juncture the officer who had captured Raoul advanced and whispered something in the Governor's ear, who flushed and nodded, then resumed in an apologetic tone:

“Nothing has been presented which justifies me in doing anything other than release you. I should not be doing my whole duty, however, if I omitted a very unpleasant task. I would spare you if I could. It will be necessary to search you.

It is a mere form, but it will put you in a better light to be searched, and nothing of an incriminating nature found. A man who sets out to deliver a set of plans would naturally carry them with him." The Governor breathed more easily. He would now be able to dismiss the affair, and nothing further need be known about the matter.

Raoul started as though stung, and reddened visibly at this humiliation, but said nothing. At a sign from the Governor the officer approached and began his work. Raoul assisted him as much as possible.

An oppressive silence ensued, broken only by the sounds made by the officer engaged at his disagreeable task. The flickering light of the candles showed the pale, drawn face of the Governor, his teeth set, his hands clasped tightly over the chair-arms, and the look of an awful suspense in his eyes. The two soldiers stood motionless. Lieutenant Liotot from his shadow looked silently on, a faint smile of expectancy on his face. Carefully the officer felt in all of the prisoner's pockets, removed his coat and examined its lining with a deft touch, then the waistcoat, but without result. He removed a shoe; nothing there. He took off the other: a paper fell to the floor. The eyes of all were upon the officer as he stooped, picked it up, and handed it to the Governor. Stupidly the old man gazed at it a moment; then, recovering him-

self, opened it before Raoul's wondering gaze, and cried in a heart-broken voice:

"*Mon Dieu!* Raoul, a copy of the missing plans!"

At these words, and before Raoul could frame a reply, a muffled scream was heard and the figure of Aimée de Marsay, who had been concealed behind one of the heavy curtains at the further side of the room, staggered forth and sank, half unconscious, to the floor. Through some womanly intuition, as well as from the looks and actions of the Governor at dinner, she had surmised that Raoul was in trouble, and had taken an early opportunity of slipping behind the protecting hangings. The proceedings had at first filled her with dismay, then anger. Finally, when she realized from the Governor's cry that the plans had been found concealed on Raoul's person, everything grew black before her eyes, and she emerged from her hiding-place.

She was up in an instant, all giddiness gone, and approaching the group she stepped in front of Raoul and earnestly looking into his eyes, cried:

"Raoul de Chatignac, you have never lied to me. Tell me on your honor, by the memory of your mother's soul in Paradise, and your father's spotless name, *are you guilty of this deed?*"

Raoul's surprise at her appearance vanished before a feeling of joy at her presence. Here was one who would not believe him guilty, despite all

the devilish evidence that could be produced. All his soul rose to meet her glance, and in its innate nobility and honor, freed for the moment from the blighting power of Madame Duvivier, it flashed back an answering look as he said firmly and impressively:

“ I am innocent; I swear it! ”

“ I believe you,” exclaimed Aimée in exultant tones, “ and know that whatever appearance of guilt there may be is but the result of some vile plot to ruin you,” and with a firm step and a farewell glance that said: “ Have courage! ” she quietly left the room.

The Governor had had time to recover his self-control. The whole situation was changed. The evidence seemed to his mind complete.

“ To prison! ” he said coldly to the officer, and rising he tottered unsteadily across the floor to his own chamber and disappeared.

Chapter Fourteen

SHOWS HOW TIGHTLY A NET CAN BE DRAWN

THE next morning saw Armand hurrying to the Château to seek an interview with Aimée. He was surprised, when she entered the room, to see how little the calamity seemed to have affected her. A little paler she was, perhaps, than usual, but she greeted him with her accustomed kindly frankness.

“I knew that you would come quickly,” said she calmly, “as soon as you heard the news of Raoul’s misfortune.”

“I heard nothing of it until a few moments ago,” was the reply. “I rushed off at once to learn from you the particulars of this unfortunate affair.”

Aimée thereupon related in detail all she knew. When she began, her friend’s face expressed genuine astonishment, but as she proceeded this gave way to a look of alarm, and when she reached the point in her narrative where the accusing plans were found within the prisoner’s shoe, he buried his face in his hands, with the cry: “*Mon Dieu!* this is terrible!”

“You surely do not believe him guilty of such dishonor?” she cried in a tone of bitter reproach.

He shook his head.

“It is all a dreadful mistake,” she continued, “one that can surely be explained.”

“That is true, but alas! we have only a short time in which to help him. The Council meets this afternoon to try him. Unless he can clear himself he will die.”

It was Aimée’s turn to become agitated. “But he will swear upon his honor that he knows nothing about it,” she cried.

“Alas! *ma chère amie*, his word will not stand against the damning evidence that has been revealed. The discovery of the plans has sealed his fate.”

“It is all some vile plot against his life,” the girl exclaimed, wringing her hands. She then related the confused words of warning of Farouche against Gaspard Roguin. Armand again shook his head sadly. “The testimony of that half-witted fellow will avail us nothing.”

Aimée stamped her foot angrily. “You refuse to consider my suggestions. Have you none of your own to make? Or are you, too, turned against him, and unwilling to lift a finger in his behalf.” Then passionately: “Oh, that I were a man! I should surely find some means of helping a friend, an innocent, injured, slandered friend,

charged with a foul crime, instead of sitting here doing nothing but shake my head. Have you no brain—cannot guards be bribed? have you no hands—cannot prison bars be sawn asunder?”

Magnificent she stood with head erect, flashing eyes, and heightened color, an embodiment of scorn, distress, and anger. Never had she appeared so beautiful to Armand, never had he felt so passionate a desire to do her service. Then the wind of the tempest veered, and she was a helpless, grief-stricken woman again. She seized his arm. “Forgive me, *mon cher* Armand, I know not what I am saying. I know only this, that he, my friend, your friend as well, is innocent, yet in great danger; is the victim of some intriguing enemy and we are powerless to aid him,” and she fell into a chair, convulsed with sobs.

Armand was deeply moved as he witnessed her grief. A sudden purpose thrilled him. He approached the young girl and leaning over her, said softly: “I shall do my best. Remember, I shall do my best for his sake—and for yours.” An overwhelming desire seized him to press his lips to the glorious mass of hair so near his face, but he restrained himself with an effort, and, touching her head lightly with his hand as though in benediction or farewell, he hastily quitted the room.

Directing his steps toward that portion of the

Fort where Raoul was confined, he was admitted to his cell. The prisoner sat in gloomy meditation, scarcely looking up when Armand entered.

“My poor Raoul!” was his greeting, “what a terrible misfortune has befallen you! But be of good cheer; your friends will do all in their power for you.”

“Friends!” said Raoul bitterly. “I have no friends. Such as I thought I had, I find have higher duties than those of friendship. Liotot was my friend, but he imagined he saw me drop that cursed letter, and straightway considered it necessary to inform the Governor. Tisseraud was my friend, but he felt obliged to sneak behind me up the river and place me under arrest. The Governor was my father’s friend as well as mine, but he conceived it to be his duty to cast me into a dungeon for committing a crime I never dreamed of. Bah! give me a few enemies; they could not treat me any worse.”

“Come, *mon ami*,” said Armand quietly, as he seated himself beside Raoul and placed his arm affectionately about him, “do not let your anger warp your judgment. Lieutenant Liotot and Tisseraud may be your friends, but they are also soldiers, sworn to a high ideal of duty. The Governor is your devoted friend. We can neither of us guess what an agony of soul he underwent last night. Had you been his own son the task

could not have been harder. But he is also the Governor, the trusted servant of the King, the guide and bulwark of all New France. There are others, too, who are your friends."

"Yes," was the reply, "I received a note from one of them this morning, Madame Duvivier, thanking me for the flowers I managed to have conveyed to her, and hoping that I would soon be at liberty."

"And still another," was Armand's calm rejoinder; "Aimée de Marsay, our old playmate, Raoul, whose affectionate heart is torn with anxiety and distress over your trouble." The speaker winced a little at his own words.

"True," murmured Raoul thoughtfully. "I know she is loyal, and believes me innocent. Her action last night showed that. But she is only a woman, and powerless to aid me."

"And I, too, have come to claim the right to help bear a friend's calamity," went on Armand steadily. "Cannot you think of anything that would assist in unraveling out this skein of tangled circumstances?"

Raoul shook his head ruefully: "Nothing!"

"Then," continued his companion firmly, "there is but one thing to be done. The Council is convened to meet at five. Unless something can be brought forward to explain this mystery you are lost. You will be shot at sunrise."

Raoul was unmoved.

"Listen carefully to my plan," continued Armand earnestly, in lowered tones. "I shall obtain permission to visit you at dusk, wearing a light cloak. Once here I shall exchange clothes with you, and you will walk out a free man. I can arrange to have a canoe, filled with ammunition and supplies, ready for you in charge of one of your servants, and you can escape to the forest and there live the life of a *coureur-de-bois* until the enigma is solved and your name cleared."

"But what will be done to you when my flight is discovered?"

"*Pardieu!* that is my affair. I am willing to run the risk."

Raoul turned upon his friend a look of affection and gratitude. "And do you think, my dear old comrade, that for one moment I would be willing that you should take my place and endanger your own life? Forgive me if in my bitterness I seemed blinded to the worth of a devoted friend whom in my better moments I thoroughly appreciate. Nay, my good Armand, I am guiltless, and await my trial, strong in the knowledge of my innocence. If I am freed, it is well. If I am to die, that is the affair of *le bon Dieu*, and I shall strive to meet the end like a brave man," and he grasped his friend's hand warmly, while his face glowed with feeling.

“But think of all who would rejoice to have you spared—the Governor, Aimée and all,” persisted Armand.

“And could I ever meet the contempt of that brave old soldier, or behold the scorn in her womanly eyes, caused by my acceptance of your proffered sacrifice? No, Armand, my friend, my brother in all but birth, tempt me no more. My cause is just. I leave it all with God.”

Scarce a half-hour had passed and the prisoner was once more plunged in melancholy thought, when the lock was turned, the door grated on its rusty hinges, and the Governor entered. Raoul sprang to his feet and advanced to meet him. The old man, laying a hand on each shoulder, looked earnestly into his face, and murmured sadly, “My dear boy!” Then, leading him to the bed, he seated himself beside him and began gravely:

“Raoul, you are doubly dear to me; a son could not be more so. You have inherited the noble qualities of your father, my friend; in you he lives again for me. You are young. Youth has its moments of impulse when acts are committed thoughtlessly whose importance and far-reaching effects are not realized. Through some mistaken sense of honor, through some generous thought, youth is often lead by designing minds into depths where only shallows were expected.

I stand in your father's place to you, Raoul. In his name, I beg you to tell me all!"

The young man drew slightly back.

"You heard what I said last night, your Excellency, that I was entirely ignorant and innocent in this affair? Do you not believe my word? Do you suppose me guilty?"

"Not by so much as a thought or a single intent," was the quick rejoinder. "I can only see how you may have been led into playing a dangerous game for others; how you have been used as their tool. Come, Raoul, I say it again, tell me all. If you can assist me in bringing the really guilty ones to justice, I can then honorably plead for your release, besides, you will be doing a patriotic act. Do not let any false ideas of honor stand in your way. Those who have used you are not your friends, but your enemies. They doubly deserve punishment. I am one of your judges, as well as a friend. Unfortunately under present circumstances I can only be your judge. Confess to me the names of the culprits, and I can then be a friend at the same time. I will plead for you, oh! so earnestly, my boy, if you will but let me," and the old man's voice vibrated with intense emotion.

Raoul arose and, walking up and down a few paces, turned and faced the Governor.

"Your Excellency, I cannot doubt your inten-

tions; they are kind, but I fear if my word is not sufficient to satisfy you of my complete innocence, I cannot see how any testimony of mine, implicating others, if there were any such, would have any greater weight. I readily foresee how the evidence to be presented will persuade the other members of the Council of my guilt, when it has already convinced you, my warmest friend. Nor do I blame anyone. The evidence, although circumstantial, is absolutely convincing to a judicial mind. The chain is perfect; not one link is missing. I recognize that you are led solely by your high sense of honor and your faithfulness to duty, and I respect you for it. You would gladly do what you could to save me. You can do nothing. In my father's name I thank you, and bid you farewell, forever," and he extended his hand. The Governor seized it, pressed it to his bosom, and turned feebly toward the door, which, a moment later, was locked behind him.

At five o'clock the members of the Council, convened in extraordinary session, assembled in the council chamber of the Château. They all wore a solemn look, for the matter before them was most serious. There were difficulties and dangers in plenty from outside foes. If a hidden enemy were in their midst it behooved them to exercise the greatest diligence in apprehending and punishing him. At last the Governor entered,

looking very pale and worn. When he had taken his seat the trial began. Calm and dignified, the prisoner was led in. His lofty bearing created a favorable impression. The witnesses of the preceding evening gave their testimony afresh. The letter from the English commandant at New York was read and passed from hand to hand for examination. Under oath Raoul denied all knowledge of the affair, but could offer nothing in explanation or refutation of the evidence presented. The members of the Council, several of whom had known Raoul's father long and well, looked into one another's faces in blank dismay. Here was one of the richest and most promising young men of the Colony, charged with blackest treason. Knowing him as they did, they could not believe him guilty, and yet—the evidence! the possession of the incriminating plans! The Governor read two communications he had received. The first ran as follows:

“As a citizen of France, and a newcomer to the Colony, and its well-wisher, I beg leave to pray the honorable Council to weigh carefully the evidence presented to them before pronouncing judgment upon the prisoner. Should there be the slightest doubt in their mind of his guilt, I pray that his life be spared. To prove my practical interest in this affair, I hereby offer to the honor-

able Council, in case the prisoner is found innocent and released, the sum of five thousand *louis d'or* to be used by them in discovering the real traitor, or for any other lawful use."

The Governor hesitated an instant before reading the name signed to the communication, "Antoine du Tillet."

The second consisted of only a few lines:

"Believing thoroughly in the innocence of the accused, and that he is in reality the victim of unscrupulous enemies and traitors, I hereby volunteer my services toward their discovery, and, if he is at once released, I offer my own person as security for his appearance should he ultimately be found guilty.

"ARMAND BOUCARD."

The reading of the two notes was received in silence. The first was indignantly regarded as a veiled attempt to purchase a favorable verdict. The second was considered as the unselfish sacrifice of a devoted friend. The prisoner was removed, and discussion of the case was begun. Much scratching of heads ensued in the efforts of the Council to find a way for leniency toward the young man. But the evidence was inexorable in its sway over their minds. An hour later the

prisoner was brought in. The Governor arose and faced him. His features were hard set as he struggled bravely to carry out to the end the terrible task imposed upon him.

“Raoul de Chatignac,” he said, and his voice sounded smothered and far away, “the Council has adjudged you guilty of the crime of treason against the King and New France; I therefore sentence you to be led to the Place d’Armes at sunrise to-morrow, and shot. Thus perish all traitors!”

Chapter Fifteen

DESCRIBES HOW AIMÉE TOOK THE MIDNIGHT
AIR IN A GOOD CAUSE

AIMÉE awaited the decision of the Council, on her knees. The moments dragged wearily along. She strove to believe that the delay augured well for Raoul's deliverance, but in spite of her efforts a chill fear to the contrary crept over her, benumbing her faculties. Her tears were dried. She ceased praying, and knelt, a picture of dumb misery, with her eyes turned toward the door. At length it opened and Armand stood before her with pale and saddened countenance. She sprang to her feet in alarm. "*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "you need say nothing. Your face tells me all!"

Armand approached and laying his hand gently upon her shoulder, said earnestly, "It is all over, *mon amie*. I have done the best I could, for his sake, and your own. Man could do nothing more."

Aimée returned his earnest gaze. "I believe you, Armand, and in his name I thank you." Then, with a look of high resolve, she continued:

“As you say, man has done his utmost. It only remains for woman, frail and weak though she be, to exert her power. I shall appeal to the Governor to pardon our friend.”

Armand shook his head mournfully. “The Governor will do nothing. He would not were Raoul his own son.”

Aimée smiled sadly, but with a resolute air. “You do not know. *Le bon Dieu* will not allow the innocent to suffer. He will aid me. I shall succeed.” Then, after a moment’s silence: “And now leave me, *mon cher* Armand, for I must see the Governor alone. I shall await him here.”

After his departure, Aimée sat in the gathering twilight patiently looking for her foster father’s return. Dinner time came. He did not appear. She could not eat, but busied herself in making little preparations for his comfort when he did come. The moments passed; eight o’clock struck. She called a servant and dispatched him to make inquiries about the Governor. He returned shortly with no news. A sudden thought smote her: perhaps, foreseeing her appeal, he was absenting himself until it would be too late, purposely avoiding an interview with her that was bound to be painful to them both! Nine o’clock sounded from the great clock of the Château.

Hurriedly wrapping herself in a cloak, she slipped out. She had no destination in mind; her

one desire was to do something; anything was better than quiet and inaction. The full moon had risen and made the city bright with its silvery light. She vaguely hoped she might meet with Armand, or someone she knew who could assist her. But the faces she saw were all strange, and, she shrank from their admiring gaze. At length, after much purposeless wandering, weary with her rapid progress, and sick at heart, she stopped in the shadow of a tall building and leaned her aching head against the cold stone of its wall. Groups of people passed her, gayly talking and laughing, all bent upon their own affairs; not one had a thought for the innocent man doomed to meet an ignominious death within a few short hours. The heartlessness of mankind depressed her. The notes of a rollicking chorus from a tavern a few doors away struck discordantly upon her ears. She was alone in her helpless anxiety and grief. A wave of despair overwhelmed her.

A figure that had dogged her footsteps unnoticed ever since she had quitted the Château, approached closer and said in a respectful tone: "Mademoiselle is in trouble? Perhaps she needs help?"

Aimée looked quickly up as she recognized the voice. "Ah! my poor Farouche!" she exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"I heard that the young man we talked about

on the road to Beauport was in trouble. I knew you would be sorry."

"Alas! I do need assistance sorely. The plot you tried to tell me about has indeed succeeded. Raoul de Chatignac will die at sunrise."

The face of the fool showed that he realized the depth of her grief. The details of Raoul's misfortune he could not comprehend. He only realized that the beautiful young woman, his fairy queen, his goddess, his good angel, whose very garments he touched as sacred things, was in distress, and that he wished to serve her.

"Can I help you?" was all that he could say.

"No, my poor fellow," was the despairing answer, "I fear not. I am looking for the Governor. If I could find him he could aid me."

The man's face brightened. "You want the Governor? I will fetch him."

Aimée caught at this hope. "Do you think you can? Oh! my dear Farouche, if you only could I would be so grateful." Some new thought was evidently working in the half-crazed brain, for the man smiled and laughed excitedly as he replied: "Go home. I will come when I have found him," and quickly disappeared around the nearest corner.

Despite her natural despondency, Aimée yielded herself to the hope revived by his confident words and hastily returned to the Château to await his arrival.

Whatever the train of thought was that had started in the mind of Farouche, it had grown dim and finally was lost before he had gone a hundred yards, and his face wore a confused, puzzled look as he strove vainly to recollect the plan that had first appealed to him. For half an hour he wandered aimlessly through the streets, finally ending his journey near the Château. Just then he caught a glimpse of a soldier, standing full in the light of a shop window. Soldiers were always associated in his mind with the Governor, so running up to him he asked:

“The Governor, where is he?”

The man, recognizing his questioner, laughed. “Will your business not wait until morning, Monsieur Fool? He does not like to be disturbed at night.”

But Farouche persisted. “I want the Governor. Important message.”

The soldier shook his head. “I would get small thanks if I told you, and he were annoyed by some crazy errand of yours.”

Farouche, confident in his belief that the man possessed the desired information, hesitated, then, pulling at a cord around his neck, he drew forth a little bag and slipped out the gold piece Aimée had given him. “This is yours if you tell me,” he urged, holding it out in his hand.

The soldier’s eyes sparkled as they saw the coin.

Perhaps, after all, the fool had been entrusted with a message of some consequence. This seemed probable, as he had evidently been furnished with money to be used in reaching the Governor. He took the gold, slipped it into his pocket, and leaning toward Farouche said in a low tone: "I cannot tell you surely where he is. I was on guard at the meeting of the Council this afternoon, and overheard the Governor say to one of the members that he would spend the night at the house of Monsieur Guion, just this side of Sillery. That is all I heard. Mind you, I do not know where he is, so you must not tell anyone that I said he was at Monsieur Guion's. You had better wait until he returns to-morrow."

Farouche nodded gayly, and darted off. A few moments later he was admitted to the room where Aimée anxiously awaited him. He related to her what the man had told him. She clapped her hands with delight:

"I have found the trail of the fox at last. I shall now run him down," and she ordered Rex to be saddled for her at once. She then turned to Farouche, "And now, my friend, how can I thank or reward you for your service?"

For reply the fool seized her hand and laid it on his head a moment with a look of intense joy, then bowing, he left the room. Aimée's heart throbbed with renewed pity for the poor man, for

she understood that he found ample compensation in the simple realization that he had been able to serve her.

The moment she learned the Governor's whereabouts from Farouche, her resolve was made. She would go herself to him and plead Raoul's cause. There was no time to be lost in seeking Armand to accompany her; besides, she was unwilling that anyone else should know the purpose of her adventure. Word was presently brought that her horse was ready, and in a short time she set off just as the hour of ten was striking.

Out into the night she went upon her lonesome journey. The clear light of the moon made the road plain before her, save where it cast the dark shadow of a clump of trees or bordering hedge athwart her path. The pure, cool night air exhilarated her as she dashed along, and increased her hope of a successful termination to her errand. She imparted some of her enthusiasm to the gallant Rex as she patted his neck and talked affectionately to him. "Poor Père Philippe," she murmured gayly, "how secure he feels now, and how surprised he will be to see me." Then, as the quiet beauty of the night forced itself upon her, "How beautiful the country is by moonlight! How the river shines and sparkles!" No thought of personal fear entered her mind. The purpose of her

errand kept her from dwelling upon such a theme. There was ample time for her to cover the five leagues before her, and return ere the fatal hour. She was confident of her influence over the Governor, and the ultimate success of her enterprise. A tiny hamlet was passed. That meant her journey was half done. No sound or sign of human life was apparent save the distant twinkling of a light in the humble dwelling of some *censitaire*, or the discordant barking of a dog bidding defiance to his ancient enemy, the moon. As the night wore on the air grew chill, and she drew her mantle closer about her throat. Once only did her heart pulsate timidly as she plunged into the gloomy shade of a stretch of woodland. That was soon passed, and she was in the welcome light once more. The near approach of a range of hills upon her right told her of the rapid progress she was making, while the steady descent of the moon warned her of the flight of time. At length the glimmer of lights among the trees was seen and she came to a side road which she recognized as the one leading to the home of Monsieur Guion. Turning into this, she found herself in a few moments before the door.

The Governor, upon his arrival at his friend's house, had told him frankly of the reason of his visit, and had requested that he be allowed to hold his vigil through the long night alone. He sat,

sunk in profound meditation, in an old armchair beside the table where a solitary candle strove vainly with its dismal rays to illuminate the surrounding obscurity. He reviewed carefully the events of the past few days to reassure himself that he had indeed acted justly. His heart bled as he thought of his young friend, and of that older friend, his father. "Raoul! Raoul!" he groaned, "if there had only been a reasonable doubt, one bit of evidence wanting, I believe that the result might have been different." But with Spartan firmness he told himself that no loophole of escape had offered itself; that he had done his duty, hard though it had been. The clock in the room tolled twelve. He shuddered at the sound. "Four hours more before the end!" he murmured. "Would that you were here, Raoul, and I were in your place. My life is nearly ended, while yours, so filled with promise, has but begun." His thoughts then turned toward Aimée. "Perhaps it was cowardly for me to run away from her appeals, but it was necessary. I question if my own strength would have been sufficient to resist her. Would that I were with her now to help bear her sorrow." He was dimly conscious of the sound of a closing door. He raised his eyes mechanically. The person of his thoughts stood before him. "Aimée!" he cried in astonishment, as he started up from his seat, "you here?" and his out-

stretched arms enfolded the loved form in a fatherly embrace.

“*Certainement!*” was the reply when she had disengaged herself. “Oh, you naughty, naughty Père Philippe, to run away from me and force me to take this long ride to reach you,” and she playfully shook her riding-whip at him.

“You have come alone?” the old man gasped in consternation.

“Yes, at least dear old Rex was my escort.”

“And why——” faltered the Governor.

“Why have I come? To remind you of an important matter that you left unattended to.”

“Important——?”

“Yes, you left so hurriedly you forgot to write out and sign a pardon for Raoul,” was the demure reply.

“But, *ma chérie*, the Council found him guilty.”

“The Council!” and Aimée stamped her foot in disdain. “What do I care for the Council, a lot of stupid, silly old dunces who cannot tell an innocent man when they see him. You are higher than the Council. You know in your heart that, no matter what the appearances may be, Raoul never could be guilty of such an offense. You hold the power of pardon. It is your superior knowledge and judgment that should overrule the mistakes of the wretched Council.”

The Governor shook his head sadly. “On the

overwhelming evidence offered, I could not do otherwise than concur in their verdict. You know, my daughter," went on the old man in a piteous appeal to justify himself to Aimée, "you know that I would have cut off my right arm, even have given what is left of my miserable old life if by so doing I could have saved him."

"You need do nothing so heroic, Père Philippe; a few words from your pen will suffice."

"Oh, child, do you not realize what that would mean?—Dishonor! It would give my enemies good reason for accusing me of favoritism, and neglect of duty. For forty years I have served my King, and yet without stain of unworthy deed. Would you have me now at the close of my life be false to the standards that have hitherto guided me? What would the thoughts be that would fill my declining years?"

"Nay, rather," responded Aimée with spirit, "what will your thoughts be if after Raoul's execution you find that he is innocent, as you surely will. Can all your feelings of duty well done smother the remorseful agony that will be yours, or wash your hands clean of the blood of one who is almost your own son? Men prate of evidence, forsooth! What would evidence be worth to me if a thousand lying tongues swore that you were guilty of some base crime, so long as you looked me in the eyes and said: 'I am innocent!' Has



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not evidence condemned guiltless men before to-day? If you need evidence in Raoul's favor, I have discovered some." Here she related the conversation she had had with Farouche weeks before. The Governor at first listened eagerly, but when she had finished, the hope died out of his eyes as he shook his head, saying: "'Tis but the confused vaporings of a vacant mind."

Aimée abandoned all argument and, falling to her knees, stretched out her arms in entreaty. "Ah, my father, I implore you to remember that you are a man as well as Governor. Do not let the mind of the Governor lead you into doing that which your human heart tells you is a mistake, a possible wrong. Were it indeed not better that he should live, with a doubt in your mind against his innocence, than that he should die with a doubt in your heart of his guilt? Think what the awful mistake that you may now be making signifies to us all! It means death and disgrace for Raoul; it means years of regret for yourself; and as for me"—here her voice became a wail of agony—"for me—it will break my heart, Père Philippe, for—for I love him!" and with a convulsive sob she buried her face in the old man's coat.

"*Mon Dieu!* Why must we suffer thus!" he cried in great distress, yet without any signs of relenting.

Aimée sprang to her feet. "You refuse?" she

cried passionately. "Then I entreat you no longer. I demand his life at your hands. Are your ideas of honor such that your own oath counts for naught? When a little child, you told me the story of my father's sacrifice for you. You swore eternal gratitude, and took your oath to do for me what he had done for you. Again, a few months ago, you ratified it when I was delivered from the sea. 'A life for a life' were your own words. The time has come when you must make good your promise or you are dishonored forever. A life for a life! It is Raoul's life I now demand from you, for your own oath's sake."

Superb she stood before him, her head proudly raised, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving with restrained emotion, as she pleaded with him both for her loved one's life and for the preservation of his pledged word.

Like one dazed, the Governor stared at her during her eloquent appeal. When she finished he dropped into his chair and, confusedly picking up some writing materials on the table, wrote a short note to the officer in charge of the execution.

"A reprieve," he muttered hoarsely as he handed it to her.

"No, a pardon!" came in ringing tones from the young girl, as she tore it in two and flung the pieces back upon the table.

Once more he wrote, this time a full pardon,

signed, sealed, and addressed it carefully. Aimée, who had glanced at the clock, seized the paper hurriedly, gave him a kiss, and after an affectionate "From the bottom of my heart, I thank you, Père Philippe," was gone. The Governor sat as one in a trance. He did not hear her as she left the room, nor did he catch the sound of hoofs as she sped away. All through the night he sat, nor stirred until the rising sun flooded the chamber with its morning greeting.

During Aimée's interview with the Governor, Rex had had an opportunity to rest, so that as they hastened homeward both horse and mistress seemed imbued with the same desire. There was still ample time, but, in Aimée's excited frame of mind, the distance seemed interminable.

"Hasten, dear, good Rex," she cried, "I have done my part; see that you now do yours."

Rex snorted proudly in assurance to her that he would do his share faithfully, and made a shower of sparks flash from his flying feet as he gallantly breasted the ascent of an approaching hill. On and on they sped as fast as beating heart and quivering limb could carry them. More than half of the return journey was covered. The moon sank rapidly behind them. The early mists that rise above the river before dawn began to form themselves. A night-bird whirred close to them as he turned his flight homeward. An owl stared

in open-eyed surprise from the dark shadows of a leafy tree as they rushed past. A league only remained to be traversed. They slackened not their speed for hill or steep descent, for smooth or rough roadway. An intoxication of impulsive desire to hasten seemed to possess them both. Up the last hill they dashed. Once beyond this and the road was level. The summit is gained, and they gallop furiously down the other side. The bottom is almost reached when the noble Rex steps into a hidden hole—the snap of a broken bone is heard, and he falls helplessly. His rider, thrown by the sudden shock, lights apparently unhurt upon the grass. She is up in an instant and endeavors to help the stricken animal. Her efforts are of no avail. He lies with bleeding nostrils looking at her with piteous eyes as though craving her forgiveness for thus failing her in her extremity. The precious moments are passing rapidly. At length, with a farewell embrace, Aimée starts, with the pardon in her hand, to finish the journey on foot. There is yet time if she can only hasten. She has not taken a dozen steps before she is conscious that in her fall she has injured her ankle. She struggles bravely against the pain, limping along, anguish of body mingling with agony of mind lest she be too late. The pain increases with every step. A feeling of faintness assails her. A glance at the signs of approaching day spurs her to super-

human efforts. A mis-step wounds her more cruelly. She sinks to the ground, but with desperate purpose still animating her she rises, struggling, to proceed. A few yards further, and her strength fails utterly. The mists from the river seem to come up and surround her and becloud her mind, until at last all is mist, and she lies an unconscious heap beside the road, her lover's pardon still clutched between her fingers, and all the while the pitiless day approaches.

Chapter Sixteen

ILLUSTRATES THE PROVERB: "THERE'S MANY A SLIP," ETC.

UPON hearing Aimée order her horse, Farouche knew that she had determined to make the journey to Monsieur Guion's. A strong desire to protect her in some way from the dangers of such a ride stirred within his awakened soul. Consequently, so soon as he left the Château he quitted the city, taking the road toward Sillery at a jog-trot, turning back every now and then to listen for the sound of overtaking hoof-beats. At length he distinguished them approaching, and withdrew into the shadow until horse and rider had passed, making sure that it was she whom he adored. As he went along he laughed gleefully, recalling the fact that a little beyond him a foot-path led off to the right, passed over an intervening hill, and finally joined the highway again almost at the entrance of the estate of Monsieur Guion, cutting in two the distance to be traversed. The road itself curved around near the river and followed a winding course the remainder of the way. Into this by-path Farouche plunged, bent

upon reaching his destination at the same time as the young girl on horseback. Well it was that his master had inured him to long journeys by frequent trips between La Maison Sombre and Quebec. Well it was that Marie Girol had often threatened him with an additional beating if he did not return within a certain time, thus forcing him to run the entire distance, building up a strength of limb and depth of wind that stood him in excellent stead as he bounded along on his moonlit errand. At length the woods were passed and the road regained just in time for him to see Aimée dash into the grounds about Monsieur Guion’s house. Carefully following, he approached a lighted window, and glancing in he recognized the Governor seated in his chair. He then took up a convenient position where he could see all that passed, and waited. He had, of course, no idea of the purport of Aimée’s visit, but as he watched her enter and witnessed the interview of evident entreaty on her part, the Governor’s refusal, followed by the writing and sealing of a letter, his simple brain comprehended dimly what was passing, and as the girl quickly seized the letter and fled he realized the necessity of its safe and quick delivery.

By this time he too was ready for the return journey. Either he was unable to maintain the same speed, or the horse and rider covered the homeward way with greater fleetness, for, when he had

reached the main road again, he listened in vain for any sound of their approach. Going on slowly for a short distance he found the injured animal groaning with pain, but with no traces of his mistress, so he hastened to overtake her. A moment or two later he spied the form of the young girl, prone beside the road, her white, unconscious face bathed in the mournful rays of the departing moon. At first his alarm was extreme, but finding her hand still warm, he realized that she was not dead. Dead people he knew had icy cold fingers, and did not sigh and moan as she did. Perplexed as to what to do, he first lifted her up in order to carry her home, but a warning groan of evident pain frightened him. He therefore laid her gently at one side of the road and taking off his coat, rolled it carefully up and placed it under her head. Then he caught sight of the letter still tightly held in her clenched hand. An intuitive thought of its importance flashed over him. In the inspiration of the moment he seized it and started off.

At the first distant streak of gray, signs of activity appeared about the Château and its vicinity. Sounds of preparation for the impending event were heard; soldiers were drawn up in readiness, and a straggling group of spectators had already collected about the Place d'Armes. Armand had passed a most miserable night, counting the swiftly passing hours. He had received permission to

take farewell of Raoul in his cell after the priest had visited him, just prior to his being led forth to his doom. With faltering step and sorrowful heart this faithful friend approached the Château. He shuddered as he saw the signs of preparation for the coming tragedy. He had crossed the Place halfway when he was overtaken and nearly run down by a strange, excited figure. Turning angrily upon this careless intruder of his sad thoughts he recognized the face of Farouche. The poor man, panting and well-nigh spent, stopped as he recognized in Armand a friend of Aimée’s. Smiling, and gasping for breath, he thrust the precious letter into his hands, gesticulating wildly. Armand examined it closely by the dim light; his heart gave a quick start as he recognized the handwriting of the Governor. The fact that the missive was addressed to the officer in command gave him additional hope, so he hurried away to find him. When this was accomplished and he was informed of the contents he rushed to the cell of the condemned man. The confessor had just left, and de Chatignac, remembering the promise of the day before, was expecting the arrival of his friend. With a sad smile he greeted his visitor, but Armand, unable to control his joy, cried: “Good news, *mon cher* Raoul, you are a free man, you are a free man! The Governor’s pardon has arrived!”

The prisoner's face flushed.

"I did not believe that an innocent man would be allowed to suffer," he said calmly.

A long time did the slight figure beside the lonely road lie motionless. In vain did the last rays of the moon touch her lips in soft adieu. In vain did the gentle twitterings of drowsy birds, leaving their warm nests for another day of song and sunshine, fall upon her heedless ears. In vain did the mists, rising in long, curled columns, trail gracefully upward into the higher regions and melt away. In vain did the varying phases of the daily miracle of dawn spread themselves about the heavens to delight her closed eyes. She lay as one inhabiting another world. At last the warmth of the sun shining full upon her face recalled her absent spirit. She opened her eyes and gazed wonderingly about. A flash of recollection thrilled her with an agonizing fear. She started up, but sank down again with a cry of pain as she attempted to stand upon her injured foot. A realization of the fruitlessness of her brave endeavor filled her mind and overwhelmed her. Just then her glance caught sight of the Governor riding hurriedly toward her.

The old man, recalled to his surroundings by the bright sunshine, left the house of his friend precipitately. When the scenes of the night recurred to him he was filled with anxiety for the

safety of the young girl, and he bitterly upbraided himself for not accompanying her back to the city. Hence, without waiting to partake of any food, he hurried his horse toward Quebec, in great distress of mind. This was immeasurably increased when he came upon the wounded Rex, and he realized that some mishap had occurred to Aimée in her wild night ride. Pressing hastily on he searched carefully both sides of the road for any evidences of the missing rider. When he perceived her sitting upright upon the grass, he uttered a cry of joy, and quickly dismounting, approached her.

“What has happened, *ma chérie*, are you injured?” he exclaimed anxiously.

Aimée threw her arms about his neck as he knelt, and laid her head wearily upon his breast in mute despair.

“Rex is sorely hurt,” she murmured, “my ankle is sprained, and I have lost the letter you gave me. I have failed in my effort to save the life of one who was dearer to me than all else. Too late, too late!” she wailed. “Ah, Raoul, you know all now,” and finding relief in tears at last, she sobbed out her grief within the sympathetic embrace of her protector and friend.

The Governor was dumb, not knowing what consolation to offer. At length he spied Farouche’s coat.

“What is this?” he cried. “Someone has evidently been here. Perhaps the person who placed this beneath your head also took the letter and delivered it in time.”

Aimée looked up at these words, and through her tears recognized the garment.

“Farouche’s coat!” she exclaimed. Then, as a sudden ray of hope illumined her face: “Quick! Quick! Père Philippe, let us hasten! Let us ride together to the city. I can manage somehow to hold on behind you. Perhaps—perhaps——” and with these wistful words she allowed herself to be placed upon the horse, although in great pain, while the Governor mounted in front of her, and they rode homeward as fast as possible. Their speed was all too slow for Aimée’s eager desire, and she constantly begged that the spur be applied. When they reached Quebec it was still early, and few people were astir to see the unusual sight of the old Governor and his ward riding the same horse.

As they passed the Place d’Armes Aimée closed her eyes with a shiver, not daring to look, lest she see some evidence that would tell her the execution had taken place, and that she was indeed too late. At the Château she was helped down, and stood a moment at the door, filled with instinctive dread of what she was soon to learn. Suddenly it was thrown open and Raoul appeared upon the threshold, followed by the faithful Armand. With

a cry of joy she advanced a step forward, forgetful of her injury. A sudden stab of intense pain pierced her frame, and she fell swooning into the outstretched arms of Raoul. When she regained her senses, in the room to which she had been carried, she imperiously ordered both Raoul and Armand away. Summoning the Governor to her side, she pulled his head down near her happy face and whispered tremulously: “Père Philippe, will you do me one more favor?”

The old man nodded. “What is it now, my little pigeon?” he said fondly.

“You must forget that—that—what I said last night about Raoul,” and Aimée attempted to hide her hot cheeks in a vigorous and lengthy embrace.

A gay party had assembled the night before at La Maison Sombre. Du Tillet had invited his three fellow-conspirators, members of that gallant company, “The Royal Four,” to dine with him and spend the night in hilarious anticipation of the downfall at dawn of their common enemy. Lieutenant Liotot was obliged to be absent, as his duties compelled him to remain in the city until after the last act of the bloody drama on the Place d’Armes had been completed. He promised that as soon as it was all over he would ride post-haste to bring them the welcome news and join them at their breakfast.

The dinner was of the savoriest; the wine was good and plentiful. Hence it was not strange that a feeling of good humor and contentment prevailed. Gaudais and Berthier were especially satisfied, as du Tillet had declared another dividend from their supposed trading venture, which chinked merrily in their pockets at every movement they made. Du Tillet, on his part, experienced that feeling of joy that comes to one upon the happy realization of his cherished plans. Toasts were drunk in profusion. "To the success of the Royal Four," cried Berthier, his face aflame and his eyes sparkling with delight.

"Confusion to all plotting knaves, and honor and reward to honest men like ourselves, who seek to purge our beloved Colony of traitors," proclaimed Gaudais with drunken gravity.

"May de Chatignac eat a merry breakfast with the Devil in Hell!" was du Tillet's vindictive wish.

"Hush!" cried Gaudais in alarm, as he glanced over his shoulder apprehensively. "Talk not of the Devil or you will hear his bones rattle!"

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Berthier with an uneasy laugh, "du Tillet can speak as familiarly of him as he chooses, since they are partners."

Du Tillet smiled. "You would indeed say so, if you knew my latest play."

"Tell us!" cried his companions eagerly.

Du Tillet twisted his glass in his hand, watching

it intently as a crafty look played over his features.

“What would you say, if after having successfully imitated the English commandant’s signature, if after having placed the stolen plans in de Chatignac’s shoe, if after arranging matters so that he should go to the spot where he was captured—I should tell you that I wrote to the Council begging them to release the prisoner, posing as his friend, and offering them five thousand *louis d’or* if they would do it?”

His two companions burst into a roar of laughter. “What did I tell you, Gaudais?” cried Berthier. “It would need the assistance of Monsieur Diable surely to devise such a clever finishing touch to a plot.”

Du Tillet looked pleased, and, slapping Gaudais upon the back, called for a song. This done, another tipsy chorus followed, and yet another. Thus the night wore on. When their eyes became heavy, play was suggested, and soon they were wide awake again, thrilled with the gambler’s thirst for gain. When this finally failed to amuse, fresh wine was ordered, and the drunken orgy was renewed. At length du Tillet, who had forgotten to watch the clock, started in surprise as he glanced at its hands, and staggering to the window he threw back the heavy curtains, admitting a flood of sunlight.

“*Pardieu!*” he cried, “the sun is up an hour.” Then going to the table he filled his comrades’ goblets and his own. Handing them around he said solemnly, as he blinked his drunken eyes:

“Come, my gallant mates, stand here on either side and help support me while I sing a song, a requiem to the soul of our departed friend, whose body by this time lies pierced by a dozen bullets.”

Gaudais and Berthier did as requested, putting their arms about du Tillet, all three standing unsteadily, swaying in the middle of the floor, glasses in hand.

Du Tillet began to sing in a maudlin voice to a gay air the time of which he dragged in mock solemnity, pausing at the end of each line:

“La Vie est vaine;
Un peu d’amour,”

“*Peu d’amour*” responded the other two.

“Un peu de haine. . . .
Et puis—bonjour!”

“*Et puis—bonjour!* Raoul! *Bonjour, Raoul! Bonjour,*” cried Gaudais and Berthier, convulsed with mocking mirth.

“La Vie est brève:
Un peu d’espoir,”

“*Un peu d’espoir,*” echoed the chorus.

“Un peu de rêve,
Et puis—bonsoir!”

“*Et puis, bonsoir! Bonsoir! Hola! Raoul, bonsoir, bonsoir!*” came the jeering shout from the other revellers.

Du Tillet ceased, and raised his glass. The others followed his example. Before another word was spoken, the door opened and Lieutenant Liôtot burst into the room, his face pale with excitement and alarm. The roisterers gazed at him in drunken wonder.

“Fire and fiends! The game is lost,” he cried, “he is pardoned.” Three faces looked at one another in stupid amazement; three uplifted hands relaxed their hold; three goblets lay in broken pieces on the floor.

Chapter Seventeen

A CONVIVIAL CHAPTER DEVOTED TO SONG AND STORY

AIMÉE had so far recovered next day that she was able to sit up in her chair, with the injured ankle carefully resting on a stool. Armand called to inquire how she was, and found her a very bright and cheerful sort of invalid.

“Raoul would have come with me, but he received word of a number of things requiring attention at home, so he left at daybreak. I fear his property has suffered somewhat from neglect during the summer, and I can well believe he was needed there.”

“I hope that his recent experience will open his eyes to the dangers and enemies that surround him,” was the earnest reply.

“His enemies? You mean——”

“Madame Duvivier and Monsieur du Tillet.”

“You think, then——”

“I am convinced that our friend went to gather flowers at a certain spot up the river for Madame Duvivier, as he says. I further believe it was at her request, and that being so, I am sure she did it for a purpose.”

“But Monsieur du Tillet?”

“I can present no proof of hostile action. I have always had, however, the greatest dread and distrust of him.”

“He certainly was much exercised at Raoul’s plight, and made a very liberal offer to the Council for his release. Would an enemy do that? Could an unworthy man show such disinterested sympathy?”

Aimée shook her head, still unconvinced. Then looking at Armand with a smile, she said:

“I heard of another letter read before the Council. It was like your warm, generous nature to make such an offer.”

Armand’s ears tingled with pleasure at her praise. “I only did what I could, as I promised you,” he murmured. “But tell me,” he continued, seeking to rid himself of embarrassment by leading the conversation into another channel, “how was it that you were able to reach the Governor and win him over to your side? When I left you here you were awaiting his arrival. The next time I saw you was in the morning, and you and he were riding as though you had been on a journey together.

“Promise me that you will not breathe a word to anyone, especially Raoul, and I will tell you, for I think you are entitled to know the details of my plan after your own brave endeavor. You see I

also know of your unselfish offer to permit the prisoner to escape, and remain in his stead. Raoul told the Governor all about it."

Armand turned redder than ever. "I will promise," he said, "to tell no one; as for Raoul, I shall not tell him, either, unless perhaps by doing so I might aid him to tear himself away from the wiles of Madame Duvivier."

Aimée paused a moment thoughtfully. "Agreed," she finally said. "I have bound dear old Père Philippe to secrecy. I intend that you two shall be the only ones to know anything about it."

She then related simply the history of her night's adventure, and of Farouche's part in it. Armand stared open-eyed in amazement and admiration.

"Alone, and all that distance—and at night? It was heroic!"

"It was nothing of the kind," was the deprecating reply. "I had a beautiful moonlight ride. No credit belongs to me, for I, too, failed in my efforts. Had it not been for Farouche, whose foolish head was clear enough to hasten on with the message instead of staying with me, poor Raoul would not have been saved. It is to him the praise belongs; and to poor Rex, who did his best, and who lost his life in doing it; for Père Philippe found he was so badly injured that it was necessary to shoot him," and a thought of sad regret

for the affectionate animal she loved dimmed the speaker's eyes.

"Do not grieve," was Armand's sympathetic rejoinder; "the Governor will give you another horse as fine as he."

"Ah! but another will never be quite the same. But, come, *mon ami*, the past is gone. We have the present and the future in which to act. I do not believe Raoul's enemies will cease their attacks. It is our part to find out, if we can, just who they are. If we can gain any proof on this point, then we can hope to enlighten our friend; unless we can do that I fear he will never learn for himself until it is too late."

"True! but what is the best path to take to reach that goal?"

"Madame Duvivier," replied Aimée musingly, "will not, I believe, make another move for some time, after her recent failure. Hence, it will probably be Monsieur du Tillet who will act, if he is the man I take him to be. It will be necessary for you to go with Raoul, if you can do so without appearing to force yourself, whenever he is thrown with du Tillet and his friends."

"I have been invited to attend a gathering to-night at du Tillet's to assist in celebrating Raoul's escape. At first I thought of declining, as it is sure to be an uncongenial company. However, I believe you are right, and I shall go."

“Do, by all means. Stay near Raoul and watch closely those who treat him with especial favor. He who swears eternal friendship with him, note well; be suspicious of those who flatter and cajole him.”

After the four conspirators were sober enough to realize the failure of their plot, du Tillet announced that he would provide entertainment the next night for a score of good fellows, in honor of Raoul's release. Before he could decide upon a new plan of attack, it would be necessary for them all to show the warmest friendship for their intended victim, in order that he might not suspect their complicity in the recent events.

Hence it was that at the appointed time some twenty odd of the *gay jeunes gens* of Quebec were assembled at La Maison Sombre to do justice to the goodly cheer provided by their host, and to express in varying degree their joy at beholding the guest of the evening once more a free man. Raoul was in high spirits, for he had found time to stop at Madame Duvivier's and hear with delight her sweet *regrets* that she should in any way, however slight or remote, have been the means of placing him in the unfortunate position he so recently occupied. He thanked her again and again for the kind note she had sent him while in prison, and swore that he was ready to run into any dan-

ger, however great, if by so doing he could fulfill her slightest wish. Armand came with him, quiet and watchful, mingling freely with the other guests, with a smile and hearty word for all, but with one eye always upon his friend, and an ear ever open to catch whatever words might be addressed to him. Du Tillet was at his best; affable and gracious to everyone, he infused a glow of good feeling throughout the gathering, while the ready flow of wine soon rendered each man the best friend of all the rest.

It was when the spirits of the company had reached this height after dinner and they had settled themselves comfortably in a huge semicircle in the great hall that du Tillet arose and, filling his glass, said:

“To one of our number, who has recently come off victorious despite the vile machinations of some hidden foe; the king of good comrades, who has won my stranger-heart completely, proving to me that even in these wilds of the New World there gleams untarnished the same true metal of which the many noble heroes and brave men of our beloved France through all her glorious history were made.” Raoul cast a grateful glance toward the speaker, and raised his hand deprecatingly as he finished. The toast was drunk with a ringing shout.

A dozen complimentary speeches followed.

Among them were those of the three conspirators, who vied with one another in their efforts to impart a genuine, hearty tone to their words. Lieutenant Liotot, as being the one whose testimony had been the first to direct suspicion upon Raoul, publicly apologized to him, with tears in his eyes and a volley of explosive oaths, acknowledging that he should have conferred first with him upon the matter and swearing on his soldierly honor that were he called upon to do the thing over again he would resign his commission rather than cast a shadow of mistrust upon so upright and true a friend as Raoul. The latter accepted his proffered hand, begged him to cease all regret, and toasted him in turn as a gallant officer who followed boldly where duty led, despite his personal feelings.

A song was proposed and sung. Another followed. Then came stories of love or adventure, each person in turn contributing his share to the entertainment of the group. At length Armand was reached. A song was clamored for, as all knew the excellence of his voice. He assented good-humoredly, and began:

“ In olden days for lady’s praise,
A knight went forth to war,
With arms complete, his charger fleet,
And pennon fluttering far;
While on the field of blazoned shield
Hung fair and clear to view,
A simple band from woman’s hand—

A tiny knot of blue:
 A true knot,
 A blue knot,
 A lover's knot of blue."

The air was captivating. The fingers of many drummed the time of the measure upon their chairs, and all joined lustily in echoing the refrain:

"A true knot,
 A blue knot,
 A lover's knot of blue."

During this chorus du Tillet, who sat next to Raoul, leaned over and spoke softly in his ear with a knowing look. "I understand, *mon ami*, that it was a woman's wit and woman's reasoning with the Governor that persuaded him to sign your pardon. Ah, me! you have much to thank the beautiful widow for!"

Raoul reddened, and gazed at his host in astonishment, but the beginning of the next verse prevented him from questioning further.

"Did foeman bold, or robber's gold
 Or Paynim blade appear,
 'For God, St. Clair, and lady fair'—
 Rang forth the rousing cheer.
 'Mid weapons' flash and deafening clash,
 As man and beast he slew,
 An omen clear danced ever near—

A tiny knot of blue:
 A true knot,
 A blue knot,
 A lover's knot of blue."

The lilt of the music was in the very atmosphere. Eyes sparkled and hands waved in unison as the resounding chorus was repeated:

“A true knot,
A blue knot,
A lover’s knot of blue.”

Raoul tried again to gain more information from du Tillet, but he only smiled slyly, and shook his head. “Ask her,” was all that he would say.

Now came the closing lines:

“To-day your knight goes forth to fight,
Oh! love, my love, so true;
God give him grace his foes to face
With your sweet knot of blue:—
A true knot,
A blue knot,
A lover’s knot of blue.”

They all rose to their feet to repeat it, which they did twice over with a vim, and when they had finished they sat down again, flushed and excited.

“*Pardieu!* Monsieur Armand,” exclaimed du Tillet heartily, “a gallant song and one whose tune, methinks, has quite bewitched us all.” Then turning to Raoul he continued, “*Mon cher de Chatignac*, while our friend has been singing of knights and war I have noticed the sword you wear to-night. I do not recollect having seen you

with it before. It has a look of ancient workmanship as though it could tell of murderous onslaught against the Paynim hosts. Can you not fashion for us out of the past some tale of knightly valor for our diversion?"

Raoul drew his sword and holding it lightly in his hand spoke musingly: "It has indeed a history, strange and curious, not unlike in its interest to that Excalibur, King Arthur's blade, famous in the songs of our French troubadors. You see its fashion is that of an early day, with its fantastic hilt, its long, thin blade, with needle-point for thrusting, fit to be compared with our modern rapiers, yet with double edge so sharp that no sword of battle could cut more keenly."

So saying he arose and tossed his perfumed handkerchief, a filmy bit of lace, into the air; a bright flash was seen as the steel gleamed in the candle-light, and two fragments of the fabric floated to the floor instead of one. The company, vastly interested, left their chairs and gathered around the speaker.

"'Tis a family heir-loom that has descended from father to son since the days of the first de Chatignac, who received it from the hands of Saint Louis himself, who dubbed him knight in recognition of his deeds of prowess performed in the sixth Crusade. He also gave him this jewel in the hilt, which was said to have adorned the eye of some

heathen idol. The blade is of the famed Damascus make." Here he placed the point upon the floor and bent it until the handle almost touched the tip.

"Tradition has it that he who parts with it save to his rightful heir, shall die an ignoble death. Used lawfully the owner is sure to be victorious. These mysterious Arabic characters traced upon the blade carry a warning that in times past has proven strangely true. The first line, translated, declares:

" ' Fight not for maid unless your heart be pure. '

"One of its former owners, in the days of Charles the Wise, suffered extreme penalty for disregarding it, for, being enamored of the daughter of a neighboring knight with whom he lived in constant enmity, he seized her secretly and made off with her by night. Overtaken next day by her angry father, he stood up to meet him, trusting in this blade, that had never failed him, and thinking that his enemy's advanced age and indifferent skill at fence would give him an easy victory. He fell after the fourth thrust. The second line affirms:

" ' Fight not for country, save for love, not gold. '

"A brave de Chatignac with a roving disposition sold the strength of his right arm to Robert of

Scotland, and perished in the first battle occurring in their inroad against the English. The last line runs:

“ ‘ Fight not ’gainst man unless your cause be just.’ ”

“ The most famous of our blood, a favorite of Charles the Ninth, covetous of an adjoining estate belonging to a Huguenot general, took forcible possession of the same during his absence, and upon his return attacked him fearlessly, knowing full well that in the troublous condition of the times he would not be punished for the murder. The Huguenot, though taken by surprise, put up so gallant a defense that in a few moments my grasping ancestor lay outstretched, his life blood soaking into the ground he had tried so basely to seize. Hence you can well understand, *mes amis*, how it is that I value this relic of past usefulness, known throughout preceding generations as ‘ Heart’s Desire,’ above all my possessions. In the light of my late experiences at the hands of unknown enemies, you can also appreciate why I have girded myself with this infallible weapon.” Here the speaker’s eyes flashed as he concluded: “ My cause is just. Woe to him against whom this point is directed.”

The earnestness of his voice smote ominously upon the ears of Gaudais, who shot an uneasy glance at du Tillet. The host, seeing it, smiled

carelessly and turning to Raoul, said heartily: "*Ventre bleu!* an interesting tale, my good friend. We all join in your wish for a speedy meeting with your foe."

The assembly then broke up and they were all soon galloping along toward the city, their merry voices making the road-side ring with echoing strains of

" A blue knot,
A true knot,
A lover's knot of blue! "

Chapter Eighteen

DISPLAYS THE FURY OF A WOMAN SCORNED, AND
THE SETTING OF A NEW TRAP

THE next evening the stealthy figure of du Tillet glided up the dim back passage and stairs of Madame Duvivier's house. He came partly in response to a request from the dark beauty, and partly because he needed to outline her future actions in the furthering of his latest plan. When he entered she received him coldly and motioning him to a chair, gazed at him with a contemptuous smile. "I hope you are satisfied with your own bungling that has caused the failure of our enterprise," she began scornfully.

Du Tillet looked at her in surprise. "My bungling!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yours," was the spirited reply. "I certainly did my work well. I landed your precious victim in a cell, and you, because the fish was in the net thought all was done and walked off without taking any precautions to prevent him from slipping through the meshes, or the net from being disentangled by some outside hand."

"You mean——"

“Yes, I mean that the Governor should have been watched up to the last moment so that no one could approach him; that those persons most likely to interfere should have been guarded well and hindered in any move they might try to make. You are a pretty plotter; indeed; a child could check a conspiracy of yours.”

Du Tillet, nettled at this retort, flushed and inquired sharply:

“You know, then, who was the means of influencing the Governor?”

“*Certainement!* Why not? Why do I have a dozen ears and eyes at work gathering and reporting information daily if not to know what passes? Despite our careful plans, my efforts and assured success, all was thwarted by that innocent-faced, golden-haired, purring pussy at the Château.”

“Aimée de Marsay?” cried du Tillet.

“Yes, she was seen to leave the city on horseback. She evidently learned where the Governor was, reached him, and persuaded him, for he sent the pardon by another messenger to Quebec just in time, and the two came back together, for they were seen on the street riding the same horse. I have had my eye on the girl for some time, suspecting that she loved our intended victim. This act of hers confirms me in my belief.”

Du Tillet sat gnawing at his fingers. “Curse

her!" he muttered, "to have thus spoiled all. I will settle with her later on," he concluded vindictively.

"But all this has nothing to do with our little affair, Monsieur. You seem to have forgotten our bargain; I was to aid you, and you were to help me. I have done my part, but have not seen you doing anything to further my ends in return. You can now continue without my assistance until you accomplish something for me besides promises."

Du Tillet masked his real feeling with a kindly smile. "My dear Madame Duvivier, how unjust you are in your speech. Unknown to you I have been exerting my best endeavor to bring about the fulfillment of your desires. Matters have now reached such a point that I have but to dispatch a message to Gaspard Roguin and he will appear at Quebec as fast as he can travel. In fact, I have done everything except place him in your hands; and that I shall not do until by your aid I have succeeded in my own affair."

"Shall not?" cried Madame Duvivier angrily, as she tapped her slippered foot violently upon the floor. "You use those words to me, when all I have to do is to refuse you further aid, and, by enlightening de Chatignac, put him on his guard against you!"

"And I," replied du Tillet, with a bland smile,

“have only to step to the Château and speak a word in the Governor’s ear entailing such consequences to your charming person as will absolutely preclude any further action on your part toward the gratification of your hatred.”

Madame Duvivier’s eyes flashed, but she realized the weight of his words, so, biting her lip a moment, she replied in a voice she strove to render calm:

“Well, what if I choose to believe that what you have told me regarding the efforts already exerted for me, is true? What further assistance can I render you? I am getting tired of having this love-sick youth about. His attentions weary me. I am obliged to exert my full influence over his will to prevent him from making love to me and offering his hand in marriage. As it is, the sighs and admiring words and glances of the silly fool are trying.”

Du Tillet then told her of his new project. “You must in some way awaken the lust of play in his veins, and, having done so, keep it continually fed. You surely have some powerful drug that, without injuring the body, will inflame the mind and cause it to cast reason and caution to the winds. I have heard of such.”

His companion smiled. “If that is all that is required, it can be easily accomplished.” Going to her *escritoire*, she searched carefully for a few

moments, then returned. "Here is a gray powder. Drop into his wine as much as you can hold upon the extreme point of a small dagger and he will become filled with the determination to follow out whatever end he may at the moment have in view, at any cost. Double the dose, and he will become frenzied, and forgetful of all restraint; for your purposes, a madman, who can be urged or influenced into doing the wildest deeds."

At this moment the bell rang. Madame Duvivier arose hastily. "Depart quickly, as you came. It is de Chatignac. He insisted upon coming again to-night. I shall do my best. See that you are successful this time, for if this plan fails I shall not help you again until you have placed in my own power the man I hate."

Du Tillet shivered uneasily at the malignant tone of his companion, and silently withdrew.

Raoul entered eagerly and approaching Madame Duvivier kissed her hand with all the deference due a queen. She smiled upon him in her most fascinating manner, and devoted all her energies once again to entangling her victim still deeper in the snare of her enchantment. Poor Raoul, his mind dominated by her hypnotic power, made no resistance, but was content to bask in the sunlight of her presence, drinking in with insatiable glance her incomparable beauty. Their conversation touched upon his recent adventure, and his honest eyes

glowed with gratitude as he told her he had learned that it was her influence over the Governor that had won the pardon.

“How can I ever thank you, my beautiful queen,” he murmured, “for your kindly interest in my behalf?”

Madame Duvivier seized upon this advantage, and replied in her tenderest tones:

“I would have been but a poor friend if I had not gone to every possible length in my endeavors for your safety.” Then reading in his eyes an impending love-scene, she gradually forced him into sleep. When he was fully under her spell, she impressed forcibly upon him the fact that du Tillet was his devoted friend, and urged him to seek and enjoy his society whenever possible. By the force of subtle suggestion she instilled into his brain the purpose of winning great sums at play for her; commanded him to view without discomfiture any possible losses, and when she had done with him, had succeeded in rousing the latent fire that could easily become the dominant feeling in his nature. “Yes, yes,” he murmured, “I will stake all in order to win.” When he left her she was content, satisfied that his condition of mind was such that it needed but the craftiness of du Tillet to lead him on to his doom.

While Raoul lay unconscious beneath the charm of the siren, the Governor sat, almost equally insen-

sible to his surroundings, meditating deeply upon the mystery surrounding his young friend's case. He had informed the surprised Council that he had learned certain facts which in his mind threw considerable doubt upon the young man's guilt; facts that justified him in the course he took, and which he would reveal to them at a later date. The Council were one and all prepossessed in Raoul's favor, and acquiesced readily in the wisdom of the Governor's course. The immediate difficulty, that of rescuing his friend, was over; it now remained for him to discover, if possible, the real culprits. The possibility of there being some truth in Farouche's words to Aimée was more deeply impressed upon his mind than at first. He accordingly sent for the poor fellow, but could gather no information from him, owing to the excitement incident to the interview. Aimée also endeavored to learn more, but her effort was fruitless.

The thought occurred to the Governor that it might have been part of an effort of some of his numerous political enemies to bring discredit on his administration, and to injure him by striking down one who they knew was very dear to him. The heart of the old man, although accustomed to witnessing every possible depth of base intrigue, was itself so generous and noble that he was loath to believe that a state of affairs such as this sup-

position would involve, really existed in Quebec. He therefore fell back upon the idea first suggested to him by Aimée; that it was an attempt on the part of some enemy of Raoul to involve him in disgrace. The more he thought of the matter, the more he felt certain that her womanly intuition was correct in ascribing some amount of complicity in the affair to Madame Duvivier. Her mysterious appearance, her secluded life (exemplary, however, in every way, so far as he knew), and her evident influence over the youth—all confirmed this impression. He awaited, therefore, with impatience, the answer to the letter of inquiry he had dispatched to Paris, asking for a detailed history of her life as far as it could be ascertained. The next ship, expected some two weeks hence, would probably bring the desired information, and he could do nothing of importance in the matter until its arrival.

He sighed as he realized that notwithstanding his pardon, Raoul evidently cherished some unkind feeling toward him, probably resenting the fact that he had not been released in the beginning on his bare word, in spite of the circumstantial evidence against him.

The next morning, as Raoul was dressing, he heard the cheery voice of Armand calling. He looked out of his window and beheld his friend riding up toward the house, his eyes bright and his

cheeks flushed from his early jaunt. Begging him to join him at the breakfast table, Raoul hurriedly finished his toilet, and soon the two friends were seated talking over their cups of steaming coffee.

"This seems more like the old days!" exclaimed Raoul, looking at his friend affectionately.

"Yes," was the earnest reply; "but somehow many things have changed of late."

"True," returned Raoul absently. "Things have changed with me exceedingly. Do you know, *mon cher* Armand, I am not the man I was a few short months ago? A new light has come into my life that dazzles my sight, yet holds me spellbound. You, my sober, cautious friend, do not know what it is to throw one's self without a thought or struggle upon the boundless ocean of love. It thrills the body, captivates the soul, enthralles the mind. It means hours of agony when separated from its fond object, and moments of a strange delight that drowsily permeates one's whole frame in its delicious sweetness when at last you both breathe the same atmosphere again."

"Who may she be?" queried Armand, striving to appear in ignorance.

"Who?" was the enthusiastic answer; "can you ask who? Whose beauty is it that transcends that of all mortal flesh, that exceeds that of fabled goddesses, the sight of which sends each drop of blood, a bit of living fire, pulsating through one's

frame? Whose voice is it that greets the ear in tones of liquid music? Whose touch is it that sets every fiber of one's being trembling, and sears one's brain with ecstatic desire? There can be but one such woman in all creation—Madame Duvivier."

"She is indeed beautiful," assented Armand. Then continuing as he saw his companion was silent, "but how about her qualities of mind, of heart, and disposition?"

Raoul hesitated. "Could the qualities you mention be other than the best? Could aught else be likely to be found in company with such beauty? Talk not to me of mind and heart, *mon ami*, you who do not know her save as a mere acquaintance. I love her madly, and she—I hope to win her ere long. I am unworthy her slightest thought, and yet, when I have achieved an end which I have determined upon, I shall throw myself at her feet, her willing slave forever."

Armand, while listening to his friend's words, was overwhelmed with pity for his blindness. He strove to control himself, but in vain. At length he burst forth:

"*Mon cher* Raoul, are you sure you are not influenced in your judgment by that which is merely sensual? that this strange fascination of yours may be only fascination after all? Who is she? Where did she come from? What was her previous life? These are all questions that, if you

were possessed of your cool, sober reason, you would feel ought in some way to be answered. How do you know——”

“Enough,” interrupted Raoul, pale with anger. “Do not let us quarrel, Armand. We will never touch upon this subject again, else our friendship ceases. However, to break down the force of all that you have said, I will tell you one thing: she it was who saved my life; who prevailed upon the Governor to sign the pardon. That is enough for me. My gratitude should make me love devotedly the woman who did that.”

Armand stared at his friend as though he thought him mad. Madame Duvivier influenced the Governor? He was silent, seeing that further argument would be useless. As he rose to leave he replied, meaningly, in a low voice:

“Your gratitude should indeed make you love devotedly the woman who did that.”

Chapter Nineteen

A COMET AND AN EVIL FACE APPEAR TOGETHER

WHILE these scenes of plotting and intrigue were being enacted, the whole Colony was convulsed with a feeling of horror and dread. A comet suddenly blazed forth one night and glowed in the clear, starlit sky, an angry portent of future disaster. Many were the surmises as to its meaning. Some saw in it the warning of an impending conflict with England. Some claimed to be able to read in its fiery outlines the approach of a devastating pestilence, while others interpreted it as being a sign of divine wrath because of the wickedness and frivolity of the people. All were affected more or less with a superstitious anxiety at the sight, and devoutly wished for its disappearance. Special services were held at the Cathedral nightly, and many prayers were said in the hope of warding off the unknown peril.

Raoul de Chatignac first beheld this sign of warning while riding toward the city one evening. He had intended spending an hour with Madame Duvivier, but the sight of this unusual phenomenon filled his mind with troubled thoughts, that for the

moment caused him to forget her fascinating personality. Ever since his pardon he had been weighed down in his moments of thoughtfulness by a feeling of disgrace. Although cleared of all legal guilt, he yet had a sense of tainted honor, of innocence unproved. That he had been the victim of a deliberate plot to involve him in ruin he was certain; as to the identity of his hidden foe he had no clue. Save Gaspard Roguin he knew of no enemy in the world, and even he was a hundred leagues away, an exile. A feverish desire seized him to seek until he found his secret adversary and, having made him clear his own proud name, place a sword in his hand, and thus honorably kill him. But who was the guilty person, and where was he to be found? In his perplexity he determined to go to the Château, and consult with the Governor, who might be able to suggest a way out of the maze he was in.

In spite of this determination, the sight of the comet in the sky above him as he journeyed along filled him with a vague uneasiness. To his perplexed mind it became a suggestion of personal danger rather than of national. It seemed to hint of further intrigue, that might well succeed the second time.

It was thus with a troubled face that he entered Quebec. Leaving his horse in the Lower Town, he walked rapidly up toward the Château. He

passed several groups of townsmen staring at the strange appearance in the sky, exchanging their opinions in lowered voices and with furtive glances. When near the Jesuit College he noticed the solitary figure of a man apparently absorbed in stargazing like the others. As Raoul's glance fell upon him he moved rapidly away. Passing through the light cast from a nearby window his features were revealed for an instant. Raoul stopped suddenly in astonishment. He recognized in the man the face and form of Gaspard Roguin.

Instantly all doubt vanished from his mind. He knew now who had been at the bottom of the plot that had all but succeeded. The presence of his enemy in Quebec cleared up the situation completely. At the same time all hesitation as to the line of action to be followed disappeared. With an angry cry Raoul started in hot pursuit. Gaspard Roguin turned at the sound and, recognizing his pursuer, quickened his pace and with a disdainful laugh disappeared around a corner. Raoul plunged on, sword in hand, not ten yards behind him. When he turned the corner a second later he could see no one. The street was deserted. The sound of a softly closed door was heard. His enemy had vanished.

Infuriated, Raoul rushed up the street a short distance, then returned on the other side, carefully

searching for any doorway where his foe might be in hiding. He found one, but it was empty. Looking up he recognized it as the rear entrance of the house occupied by Madame Duvivier. Going around to the front he saw that her windows were all darkened. Dismissing the impulse to stop, because of the lateness of the hour, he returned home. He knew that du Tillet would be apt to see Roguin on business, so he resolved to consult with his friend and try to gain his aid in bringing about a meeting with his foe.

At the same time that this strange and unexpected encounter between the two men occurred, the three conspirators, Berthier, Gaudais, and Lieutenant Liotot, were seated in the quarters of the former. The host had early in the evening grudgingly produced a bottle of brandy one-third full. Even this quantity bore unmistakable evidences of having been largely diluted. The bottle was quickly emptied, and, as there were no signs of any more being forthcoming, a gloom settled down upon the countenances of the two guests. Berthier strove to entertain them by relating the details of an execution he had once witnessed in Paris at the Place de Grève, in which three hapless prisoners were torn apart by horses. This did not seem to enliven them, so he began an account he had read of the terrible misfortunes of famine and plague that had followed the appearance of a comet in France

during the previous century. He was finally interrupted by Lieutenant Liotot.

“Blood and marrow! Stop it! You will be talking about graves and ghosts in another minute. If you cannot say something cheerful, keep quiet. This cursed burning-star seems to have made everyone daft, with their forebodings of danger and death. Curse you for a stingy fool, can't you furnish more than one candle to light up this black hole?” and he glanced furtively over his shoulder at the darkened corners of the room.

Berthier arose and lighted a second, placing it upon the mantel beside the other. The increased illumination did not seem to raise their spirits, so they all sat in moody silence looking gloomily into their empty glasses. Suddenly a large picture hanging above the mantel fell with a crash, extinguishing the candles. When Berthier with trembling fingers had relighted them he found Gaudais crouched in a far corner while a growl coming from beneath the table betrayed the presence of his other brave comrade.

“Imps and hobgoblins! What a night it is! Now I know this is an unlucky spot. One of us will surely die within a week.”

When they were all seated about the table again, Berthier produced a pack of cards. This mute suggestion was received with pleasure, and they were soon engrossed in their game.

Lieutenant Liotot paid but scant attention to his hand, and lost nearly every time. At last he threw down his cards.

“Pirates and picaroons! The spirit of this cursed night has entered my bones. I would not be surprised if the Foul Fiend himself were to tap on the window.”

Gaudais was about to reply when a smothered ejaculation from Lieutenant Liotot caused them all to look in the direction of his pointed finger. A human face was pressed close against the glass, and a pair of human eyes were glaring at them from the street. The face quickly disappeared, but not before they had all recognized it as that of their former companion, Gaspard Roguin, whom they knew to be at that moment hundreds of miles away.

Berthier was the first to recover. Rushing to the window he threw it open and looked outside. There was nothing to be seen but the empty street, save overhead where the baleful light of the comet glowed like an angry eye. When he closed the window and turned to the room again he found himself alone. His comrades had fled.

The next morning, on arriving at Quebec, Raoul met du Tillet on the street. Taking him one side he related his adventure of the previous night, and voiced his assured belief that Gaspard Roguin was the prime mover in the recent wretched plot against

him. He begged his aid in discovering his enemy's whereabouts, and vowed eternal gratitude if he could but bring about a meeting with him. Du Tillet looked greatly surprised at the news, and thought for a moment before replying.

"Strange!" he finally said. "If Monsieur Roguin has ventured back, it can be but for one thing, having failed in his scheme to ruin you, and that is, to obtain money. He will undoubtedly communicate with me. Leave everything to me, *mon ami*, I shall do what I can for you. If he has come to negotiate concerning his property, it would be dishonorable for me to betray him. However, you are my friend, and I shall do everything in my power toward the vindication of your name that an honorable man can do. Come to La Maison Sombre to-morrow morning and perhaps I shall have something to report. Till then, adieu!"

Early morning found Raoul at La Maison Sombre. Du Tillet was just sitting down to breakfast. He motioned Raoul to a seat beside him.

"Thanks, Monsieur, but I crave something besides food—news."

"And why may you not have both?" queried du Tillet, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You have seen him, then?" exclaimed Raoul eagerly.

“Yes, *mon ami*, as I expected. He came last night at dusk, and implored me to pay him the remainder of the year’s rent, offering a handsome discount for the present possession of the money. It seems that he lost all I sent him at play with one of the English officers at New York, and he is anxious for his revenge.”

“Well?”

“Well, I told him his request was very irregular, and that he had no right to expect me to comply with it.” Du Tillet stopped to drain his cup. Raoul waited impatiently.

“I spoke to him about you. In fact, I boldly accused him of having conspired against you. He denied it at first, but, seeing me firm in my belief, he finally admitted I was right, although he claimed sufficient provocation.”

Raoul’s eyes flashed, and he with difficulty repressed an exclamation of anger.

“I told him that you were my best friend, and that he could expect no favors from me unless he did his utmost to clear you of all stigma resulting from the miserable affair. The final result was—well, you can read for yourself,” and drawing a paper from his pocket he threw it upon the table. “Now, do not interrupt me further until I have finished this excellent omelet that my jewel of a housekeeper has prepared for me.”

Raoul seized the paper impatiently, and read:

“ *To all men:*

“ Be it known that I, Gaspard Roguin, because of personal enmity against Raoul de Chatignac, was the author and instigator of the plot to involve him in the charge of treason in the affair of the stolen plans. He was entirely innocent of any complicity in the matter. I alone was guilty. My project failed. Let him beware of me in the future.

“ (Signed) GASPARD ROGUIN.

“ Witness: Antoine du Tillet.”

Raoul looked at his companion with a glance of surprise.

“ How did you get him to write this? ”

“ *Parbleu!* That was easy. I offered to pay him what he asked, and refused to give him a sou if he did not.”

Raoul sprang to his feet and extended his hand.

“ You are a true friend indeed,” he cried warmly, “ how can I ever thank you? ”

“ *Mon Dieu!* What a silly question! By doing the same for me if the occasion arose.”

A moment later Raoul was riding post-haste to deliver his vindication to the Governor, and request him to read it at the next meeting of the Council.

To du Tillet the whole affair seemed vastly amusing, or perhaps the consciousness of having

done a kindly act put him into an exceptionally good humor, for he sat for an hour after his companion's departure gazing at the empty dishes before him with a smile of intense satisfaction on his lips.

Chapter Twenty

IN WHICH THE HERO TAKES GREAT CHANCES—
AND LOSES

THE next evening was spent by Raoul at La Maison Sombre in company with The Royal Four. Cards were produced, and he soon found an interest in something besides thought of self-congratulation or meditation upon his lady-love. He and Gaudais, at first the winners, left the house heavy losers to the other three. The next night, in the upper room of The Silver Fox, he made good in part his losses by winning from Berthier. The succeeding evening he and Lieutenant Liotot met at the house of du Tillet, and he lost heavily to his host, who, apparently indifferent to the game, wagered wildly, in order that his friend might revenge himself, as he explained it, but whose cunning manipulation of the cards won him every trick. Raoul rode feverishly home, leaving a large unsettled balance in du Tillet's hands in the shape of his written promise to pay, due in one month. A few nights later he entertained his friends at his own table, and at his suggestion the play was renewed. Du Tillet pro-

tested, saying that he had won far more than he cared to from his friend, deplored his ill-fortune, and suggested that he stop playing for a time in order that his luck might change. Raoul, however, declared that he would not wait, but would consider refusal an unfriendly act. The result was that du Tillet left as day was breaking with another bit of paper signed by Raoul, calling for the payment of a still larger sum.

The demon of play had taken possession of Raoul's soul; the lust of gain had permeated every part of his being. Where was his Guardian Angel, to exorcise this evil spirit? Where were the friendly voices to plead with him, the kindly hands to stop him ere his ruin was complete? Under the sway of this feverish desire he absented himself from all his former friends. The Château saw him no longer. Armand, since their recent interview, was powerless to aid him, inasmuch as Raoul expressed by his manner, when they chanced to meet, aversion to his company.

At last an evening came when Raoul realized that to take care of the debts of honor he owed du Tillet, all of his resources except his estate would be exhausted. By a judicious use of the powerful drug at his disposal du Tillet had fanned his passion to a feverish heat, although protesting the while that he would not allow him to play again.

“*Parbleu! mon ami,*” he exclaimed, “this is our last game. You have lost more than should have been wagered between friends. Allow me to return to you one-half of my winnings by burning this,” and as he spoke he took the largest of Raoul’s notes from his pocket and made as though to light it in the candle flame.

Raoul caught his arm hastily. “*Mon Dieu!*” he cried, “would you disgrace me, or think that I should be unwilling to bear my losses to their fullest extent? I demand as a friend one more opportunity to retrieve myself. Come, say to-morrow night.”

Du Tillet shook his head firmly. “No, *mon cher* Raoul, I shall play no more with you.”

Raoul’s eyes flashed. “Our friendship is at stake in spite of your past service, Monsieur,” he replied proudly. “A gentleman never refuses his opponent a chance for revenge.”

Du Tillet shrugged his shoulders. “You hear,” he said, turning with an appealing look to his three fellow conspirators. “What can I do? I have warned him, and he still insists.”

“Give him the one night more of play he asks,” suggested Gaudais.

“Thanks,” cried Raoul to the speaker, “for your assistance.” Then turning to du Tillet, “Your answer, Monsieur.”

“*Pardieu!*” was the reply. “Since you put it

in the way you do, and our friend here joins with you, I am willing. I can refuse you nothing when there is the danger of an alteration in our feelings of mutual regard and friendship."

The approach of the hour appointed was awaited eagerly by all the actors in this wretched tragedy. Du Tillet stayed at home and mused, enjoying in anticipation his coming triumph; his companions in the plot looked forward with anxiety to the final scene which would result in Raoul's humiliation, not without some feeling of uneasiness, however, as they thought of the daring of the scheme. Raoul arose late, after many hours of restless tossing to and fro. The coming night meant the fulfillment of his hopes. So engrossed was he with the one thirst for gain that all considerations of delicacy at winning unusual sums from a comparative stranger, though his friend, had vanished. His success, and the consequent material augmentation of his fortune, would place him, so he felt, at last in a position where he could lay at the feet of the woman whom he believed he loved madly, wealth worthy even of her high regard, and would make her winning certain. Madame Duvivier herself, having received instructions that morning from du Tillet, was all aglow with excitement as she realized the near approach of the consummation of her cherished plans, and exerted all her powers in one last effort upon the

mind and will of her victim to render him an easy prey to her confederate.

Aimée sat alone at the Château, the Governor having gone out immediately after dinner on business that promised to keep him all the evening. She was sad at heart, and discouraged. Raoul had not been near her for weeks, and Armand's reports of his appearance the few times he had met him, told her only too plainly that he was being hurried on in the grasp of some malign influence, against whose might both of his friends seemed powerless.

A dozen plans that had occurred to her proved to be impracticable, and she was forced now to the extremity of doing nothing other than to watch with Armand the current of events, hoping that some opportunity for action would present itself before it was too late. While thinking these sad and half-despairing thoughts, a caller was announced, and a moment later Farouche the Fool stood before her. He closed the door carefully, and, looking around to see that they were alone, ran and knelt at Aimée's feet, kissing her hand in mingled joy and agitation.

His companion, dismayed at his looks of alarm, cried: "My good Farouche! What evil news brings you here at this time?"

The poor fellow at first was unable to talk at all sensibly, owing to his excitement, but the sooth-

ing influence of Aimée's presence finally quieted him sufficiently, and he was able, although in disjointed sentences, to convey his meaning. It seemed that, being busy about the house all day, he had noticed his master's perturbation of mind as he walked or sat moodily in his great chair, and he had heard a number of expressions that impressed him with the idea that some event of great moment was to take place that night. Raoul's name came to du Tillet's lips a number of times, accompanied with such a fierce gleam of hatred that his poor, weak mind became greatly alarmed. He had hastened off, when Marie Girol supposed he had retired to his kennel for the night, to warn Aimée of an impending danger to the man whose welfare his mind had somehow come to associate with her happiness.

The girl, all alert now that the moment for action had come, thanked him and hastened him forth in quest of Armand, telling him not to cease his search until he found him, and having done so to send him to the Château.

An hour passed, and she still sat a prey to a hundred visions of danger to Raoul that flashed rapidly through her mind. Nine o'clock struck, and still no Armand. Watching, with her face against the glass of the window, in order to catch the first glimpse of anyone entering the courtyard, another hour passed. At length, after endur-

ing an agony of despair lest the poor crazed mind had failed Farouche at this crucial moment and he had wandered off, forgetful of the purpose of his errand, she saw Armand's familiar figure hurriedly approaching the Château. When he entered she told him quickly what she knew, and implored him to set out at once for La Maison Sombre, and rescue Raoul from the clutches of du Tillet and his crew, by informing him that he was wanted at the Château on important matters, or whatever excuse the conditions might demand. Armand promised to leave immediately, and, as soon as he could get his horse, went clattering off down the Beauport road.

Meanwhile, some hours earlier, the intended victim of the villainous du Tillet rode over the same road, and in the same direction. He urged his horse on impetuously, striving to make him equal in energetic action the restless workings of his own mind. When he reached his destination he found his four friends already awaiting his arrival. Five glasses of wine rested on one end of the table. Du Tillet seized one, in which he had carefully placed a double dose of his mischievous powder, handed it to Raoul, and supplied the other men with theirs.

“To your success this night, *mon ami!* I heartily wish it; upon my soul, I do,” was his cordial greeting.

Raoul smiled his appreciation of the sentiment expressed, tossed down the wine, and, drawing up a chair to the table, cried impatiently: "Come, I am ready." Then added, turning to the others: "Pardon me, *mes amis*, if I request that you remain spectators to-night. I wish to play with Monsieur du Tillet alone."

"So it is to be a battle royal, is it?" laughed du Tillet as he took his place.

"A battle royal," was Raoul's grim reply, "a fair conflict, with no quarter. That is the rule when great hazards are at stake."

"Agreed," was his companion's reply. "A fair conflict with no quarter," and with the last words he shot a meaning glance at his accomplices.

Silence ensued as the play began, broken only by the suppressed breathing of the interested on-lookers, the sound of the cards as they fell, or the rapping of the players' knuckles upon the table in an exciting moment. The two men engaged in the struggle presented a differing appearance. Raoul was eager, engrossed, his mind oblivious to the looks now and then exchanged between his adversary and his friends; the force of his entire nature was directed upon the game. When a stake was won, he smiled grimly; when lost, the glow in his cheek deepened, and his heart with a sudden throb sent more blood surging to his over-stimulated brain. Du Tillet, on the contrary, was

calm, playing his cards in turn with steady hand; when he lost, he smiled; when he won, the pupils of his eyes dilated; his face was immobile. Skillfully was the net cast; now tightened here, now loosened slightly there, but all the time its edges approached nearer and nearer.

At first, Raoul won. Little by little the pile of papers to which his name was signed, lying near du Tillet's hand, diminished, and appeared on his side of the table. A fierce joy filled him. The tide had turned.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed du Tillet, "what did I tell you, *mon ami*? Your luck has changed."

Raoul made no reply, but dealt the cards nervously. The exciting drug was beginning to exercise its dire effects. He saw nothing except the board before him; he knew nothing except that he was winning. If he could hold out a half-hour longer, with larger stakes he would gain his end. He gulped down a glass of wine.

"Come," he cried, with a mirthless laugh, "we must increase the stakes."

"As you please," was the reply of his opponent, who flashed a look upon his attentive allies, as one who says: "Watch! The moment to strike has come!"

The stake was doubled; Raoul lost; was quadrupled, and he lost again. All of his gains had vanished, and he was still further in debt. Once

more he cried desperately, as he brushed the hair away from his eyes, "Make it what you will."

"To give you one more chance to recoup," came in mild, purring tones from du Tillet, "I will make an offer worthy of high play. I will wager all of your indebtedness here," pointing to the pile of papers before him, "and, in addition, I will add, and I call upon our three friends to witness the transaction, the house we are now in and the entire estate belonging to it, on which a price has been set by its owner, and which I hereby agree to purchase, while on your part you can place against it your own broad arpents, your house and land."

The supreme moment had come. He watched his victim with the narrow look of a cat who waits to see if the mouse will come forth to nibble at the bait placed before its hole.

Raoul was bewildered. His hand shook; there was a roaring in his ears. He hesitated. But the fiend within him whispered "Victory!"

"Agreed," he cried hoarsely, with a wave of his hand toward the three silent spectators. "These are our witnesses."

The cards were dealt. Raoul picked them up one by one with trembling fingers. . . . The play commenced. . . . The last card fell from his grasp upon the table, while a moan issued from his lips. . . . Du Tillet had won. Raoul

started up from his chair with mingled rage and despair. Du Tillet stopped him.

"Be seated," he said in a cool but not unfriendly tone. "I do not wish to take any advantage of a friend. We will play once more."

"I have nothing left," murmured Raoul, and his voice sounded far and distant to his own ears.

"Your sword, your 'Heart's Desire,' " was the quiet reply. "I have taken quite a fancy to its workmanship, besides the gem in it has some value. I will wager all I have won from you, your estate and these bills, together with La Maison Sombre and its lands, against your sword. If you lose, 'tis but one weapon the less; if you win, you are doubly rich."

Stop, Raoul! where is your judgment; where your sober thought? Can that accursed powder in your wine have robbed you of all caution? You are poor now, but not dishonored. With your sword, and a brave heart, you may yet hew your way back to fame and riches. Without it, your future is a blank, your name disgraced!

His brain reeled with the conflict, as all his powers of mind and heart rose in one last fierce struggle with the subtle force that threatened to overwhelm them. The conflict was brief, a new wave of reckless impulse, of insane desire, overwhelmed him, and he was lost.

“A bargain!” he cried, and as he spoke the tones issued from his mouth dry and harsh as though from the throat of a man dying of thirst, and he threw a glance of defiance and of hatred at his opponent. It was victory or ignominious defeat this time.

Slowly were the seconds ticked with unearthly clamor by the clock above them. Slowly were the cards dealt. The minutes became eternities. A ray of delight shot from the eyes of the victim as he beheld his hand. He played hopefully at first, then with an air of triumphant expectancy. The last card would make or destroy his victory. He played it, and watched breathlessly while his opponent slowly laid his down.

With a cry of agony, Raoul arose. Du Tillet did so likewise, and their glances met. The mask was dropped at last. In place of the good humor and friendly smile Raoul had always seen, a sneer of conquest greeted him. An instant he stood unsteadily, while external objects whirled round and round, and a great blackness settled down about him. Through the darkness, however, he beheld du Tillet's eyes glowing like live coals with malignant enmity. Gradually his sight cleared, and the two men stood, rigid and silent, eye blazing back to eye its message of hostility.

By a superhuman effort Raoul obtained command over himself. Throwing back his head

proudly, he exclaimed in a clear, ringing voice that bade defiance to all enemies:

“If Messieurs, our witnesses, will have the kindness to meet us here to-morrow night, I shall deliver to you, Monsieur, the deeds of what is now your property, together with my sword.”

“Oh, as for that,” returned du Tillet in mocking tones, “you can keep the weapon a while longer; when I wish it, I will come for it myself.”

Raoul bowed stiffly, and walked with brave step to the door. When it had closed behind him, his strength failed, and, putting his hand to his brow with an agonizing gesture, he cried: “*Mon Dieu!* ruin and disgrace!” and staggered out into the night, only to fall into the sympathetic arms of Armand, who had just dismounted before the house.

Thus they rode homeward, Raoul supported in his hour of shame and wrath by the strong right arm of his friend, while the echoes of La Maison Sombre were awakened as never before by shouts of satanic joy and roars of roistering mirth.

Chapter Twenty-One

WHEREIN THE MASK IS DROPPED, AND THE SPELL
IS BROKEN

ARMAND deemed it wiser for Raoul to retire to his own home than to go to his lodgings in Quebec. Accordingly, he gently guided him to their journey's end, and with the assistance of Fidette got him to bed, then sat beside him to watch in case of need. Raoul soon fell into a light, restless slumber, in which he talked incessantly. This lasted several hours. Each scene of the miserable evening was enacted over again in his dreams, so that Armand, sitting with the shaded candle near him, learned the whole story of the night's adventure. His heart throbbed with pity for the young man as he heard spoken his alternate hopes and despair; now exultant, as he seemed to win; now agonized, as he realized the extent of his losses. As he heard the terms of the two final wagers rehearsed, his blood boiled with anger, and his hands clenched, recognizing, step by step, the end for which du Tillet aimed. Finally, as the last pitiful cry of desperation burst from the fevered lips and he experienced in his own soul a great measure of the pain and anguish

Raoul must have suffered, he broke into a sob, and, kneeling beside the bed, seized a restless hand, crying, "My poor friend, how you have been plundered! What have you not undergone!" At length a reaction set in; the wandering mind and tossing limbs were quieted, and Raoul sank into a heavy sleep.

Day had long ago come, and the bright sunshine was pouring in at the window when he awoke. He gazed wonderingly for a moment at the sight of his friend sitting there, but quickly closed his eyes as the recollection of the night came over him. Armand, who was watching him, remained silent, knowing full well the shock of awakening would bring bitter thoughts, and delicately surmising that a little time would be needed for the gaining of self-control before venturing upon conversation. In a few moments the knit brows relaxed, and Armand knew the struggle was over. The young man's eyes opened, and he smiled faintly at his companion, who, rising, approached the bed and raised a warning finger.

"Not one word of explanation, *mon ami*," he cried. "I know all, for you have talked of nothing else in your sleep."

Raoul grasped his hand affectionately. "Old friends are best. Had I but heeded Aimée's warnings, and spent more time in your company, I should not have suffered my present misfortune."

“Take heart, Raoul, all is not lost. From what I have gathered from your wandering speech, I have no doubt that you can successfully resist by law any attempt to deprive you of your property or to collect any notes you may have given. It was evidently a well-planned plot to rob you.”

Raoul shook his head sadly. “No, *mon cher* Armand, it has never been the custom of the de Chatignacs to evade payment of their gaming debts, and I shall not be the first to start the practice. That du Tillet took advantage of my weakness, of my excitement, that he supplied me with too much wine, I will readily admit, and for all of which I cordially hate him, but that he acted otherwise in any manner inconsistent with an honorable gamester, I have not the slightest evidence. I am resolved to fulfill my every engagement, without protest. Should our paths ever cross again with a future clash, I shall be glad to meet him armed, but I could not honorably quarrel with him at present.”

Armand's heart groaned within him at these words. Raoul, although partly disillusioned, was still under the sway of a nice distinction of honor in dealing with a thief, that would impoverish him, and was maddening to his friends.

“But Madame Duvivier——” he began.

“Ah! that is the hardest part of it all,” cried Raoul bitterly. “I have nothing to tender her

now, save poverty and disgrace. Still, if she loves me, as I believe she does, she will accept me, penniless and alone. It will not be long to wait. A year of successful fur-trading will put me on the way to prosperity once more, and she can share it with me."

"You will not offer yourself at present, then?" ventured Armand.

"No," was the reply. "I do not want to take any advantage of her generous nature; pity and loving impulse might lead her to do that which perhaps would be against her own interest. I shall not see her until I have completed my dealings to-night with du Tillet. The sight of her might cause me to waver in my resolution."

Armand saw he could do nothing against the fixed determination of his friend.

"You will allow me to accompany you?" he urged.

Raoul smiled. "No, *mon ami*, I prefer to go alone. There is no need of any protection."

"You will at least go armed?" he pleaded.

"No, that would look as though I feared personal violence. Besides, in case I become provoked at the sight of du Tillet I should choose to have no weapon at hand, lest I be tempted to use it."

Armand gave up in despair, and, finding that he could render no further service, rode slowly

back to the city in a highly perplexed state of mind. He learned that the Governor was away, making an official visit to a tribe of Indians living down the river. He had not the heart to tell Aimée of her friend's predicament, without having some plan of action to suggest, so he contented himself with sending her the laconic message: "Raoul safe at home," and returned to his own room, where he flung himself upon the bed to obtain much-needed sleep, hoping that when he awakened his mind would be clearer.

Raoul spent the day in having the proper legal papers made out by a notary, signing and sealing them when done, and getting all things in readiness for their delivery in a business-like way at the appointed time. Again he rode over the road traversed at the same hour the night before, but with what different emotions! Then he was spurred on by the wild desire of a still wilder dream. To-night he was sustained by his pride, by a strong determination to show the world, and especially the man who had so wickedly plundered him, that he could make good his vaunted gentility and high honor. The prompt surrender of the deeds would serve, too, not to lessen the pain of the blow, but to restore his self-respect, possessing which, he hoped to be able to retrieve his fallen fortune.

On arriving at his destination he found his former companions awaiting him in the great hall.

He bowed slightly to them as he entered, and, striding across the floor, stopped in front of the table where du Tillet was seated, and tossed some papers before him.

“If Monsieur will kindly look over these to see that they are correct, and give me a receipt acknowledging the cancellation of my debt, signed, as well, by these gentlemen, our witnesses, I shall trouble him no further. As he requested me to hold the sword for the present, subject to his call, I have not brought it with me to-night.”

“Why this unseemly haste? Will not Monsieur de Chatignac occupy a chair, and take a little wine after his fatiguing ride?” inquired du Tillet with mock anxiety.

Raoul shook his head, and remained standing.

“*Pardieu!*” exclaimed the other with an insolent grin, as he took up the documents to examine them, “Monsieur Raoul, the beggar to-day, is as haughty as Monsieur Raoul, the rich young seignior of yesterday.”

Raoul’s face flushed, and he buried his nails in the palms of his hands at this insult; he had come to fulfill his agreement and obtain possession of a receipt, not to quarrel. The three satellites burst into a peal of laughter they did not attempt to suppress.

Du Tillet finally completed the examination of the deeds, and, finding everything satisfactory

drew up the form of receipt, signed it, and motioned to his three friends to affix their signatures. This being done, he presented the paper to Raoul with a flourish. The young man placed it carefully in an inside pocket, and turned to leave after a stiff bow to his companions.

“Stop a moment, Monsieur, if you will,” cried du Tillet. Raoul looked at him interrogatively. “You have had a marvellous experience, although somewhat costly,” he continued in a jeering tone; “one whose excitement it has fallen to the lot of but few men to enjoy. What a glorious struggle it was! How steadily you won until, just as you were about to seize final victory, it was snatched away from your grasp!” Here he glanced slyly at his three confederates, who immediately became convulsed.

Raoul’s eyes snapped with anger. “It has occurred to me, Monsieur,” he said with marked emphasis, “that my winning always up to a certain point and then invariably losing, was more than a mere coincidence.”

Du Tillet sat leaning back in his chair, with a gleam of approaching triumph on his face, surveying Raoul between half-shut eyelids.

“In other words, you suspect that you have been—a dupe, perhaps?” he insinuated.

“Precisely,” was the laconic reply.

“Oh, wise young man! oh, penetrating mind!”

du Tillet cried, raising his hands in mock admiration.

“ You admit, then——” exclaimed Raoul hotly, taking a step forward, his right hand involuntarily seeking the place where his sword-hilt should be.

“ I do,” was the cool rejoinder. “ But calm yourself, Monsieur; act not hastily. You are unarmed, you see.”

Raoul’s bitten lip and clenched hands were his silent answer, sure tokens of a rising storm.

Du Tillet leaned the elbow of his right arm upon the table, and pointing his forefinger at his victim, went on:

“ You have indeed been duped, Monsieur, you have been deceived, cheated, deluded, circumvented, over-reached, beguiled, cozened, imposed upon, tricked—do you catch my meaning? ”

Raoul trembled with emotion as he muttered: “ I shall have a friend call upon you to-morrow to arrange a meeting. Nothing but your miserable life will make amends for your villainy, your insults.”

“ Bah! ” was the quick reply. “ You will challenge me, and I shall refuse to meet you. I shall show to the world that you merely wish to avenge your losses! ”

“ And I shall show to the world that I have been tricked by a rogue.”

“ You will hardly care to do so when you learn that you have been tricked by—Wait a moment ! ” Here du Tillet rose and entered the adjoining room. Quickly divesting himself of his outer clothing he put on another suit hanging on the wall, which changed his appearance marvelously. Standing before a mirror, a few deft strokes of a razor removed all hairy growth from his lips. Having soaked a handkerchief with the contents of a bottle taken from the closet he proceeded carefully to rub his face and hands. The result was that the scar on his cheek disappeared, together with the tan, leaving the skin fair and white. Seizing his dark locks he whisked off a wig which he tossed across the room, revealing a closely cut head of light hair. This he covered with a hat from a nearby peg, and returned to his companion.

“ I repeat it, Monsieur,” he went on in quick, nervous tones in striking contrast to his customary drawl, “ you will hardly care to do so when you learn that you have been tricked by——” and with a quick motion he seized a candle, and, holding it to his face, leaned over the table until his head was close to Raoul’s—“ Guess ! ”

Raoul gazed at him in amazement for a few seconds, then a light of recognition shot from his eyes and he recoiled a step, with a cry of consternation:

“Gaspard Roguin!”

“Aye, Gaspard Roguin,” was the reply, “he whom you thought to banish from Quebec by intermeddling with his affairs that night at The Silver Fox, but who has returned, before your very eyes, and has gained his revenge by plucking you of everything you possess. Ah! it was rare sport to see you day by day drawing closer and closer to the trap, little dreaming whose hand it was that stood ready to spring it at the proper time!”

Raoul at first stood petrified by his discovery. In a flash the many scenes of the past few months in which du Tillet had had a part passed before him, and he could now trace his enemy's craft and cunning through them all. A blinding fury that rendered him speechless seized him at his companion's words.

“But my cleverest stroke of all,” continued du Tillet with a laugh,—“and really, Monsieur, you must admit that it was clever,—was to induce you to become desperately smitten with a woman who has wound you round and round her little finger; who has used you, under my direction, as her tool, Madame Duvivier.”

“Stop,” cried Raoul hoarsely, his speech returning at the sound of his charmer's name. “I command you not to sully her fair name by allowing it to pass your dastard lips, or *pardieu!* I will

tear your lying tongue from your mouth, unarmed though I may be."

"I repeat," continued du Tillet with a diabolical leer as he brought his face still nearer, "you have been made a fool of, under my direction, by Madame Duvivier, my ally and *discarded mistress*."

As these last envenomed words, hissed rather than spoken, reached his ears, Raoul struck out savagely at the face illuminated by the candle, aglow with hate and exulting revenge, but it was quickly withdrawn, and his fist met only the vacant air. The force of the blow precipitated him partly across the table. Quickly recovering his footing, he turned, with a cry of impotent rage, and rushed from the room.

Gaspard Roguin turned, with a smile of triumph, to his three friends. "Well, *mes amis*, the last act has been played. What think you of the comedy?"

Berthier and Gaudais sat motionless, staring at him in stupefied surprise. Lieutenant Liotot's lips moved inaudibly. For once in his life he could find no epithets that would adequately express his astonishment.

Gaspard burst into a roar of laughter. "Behold a miracle: three men struck dumb at sight of a ghost. *Pardieu!* this reminds me of the night when, in a spirit of deviltry I threw off my dis-

guise, and, wandering about the city in my own proper form, I looked in at the window and surprised you all at play. *Ma foi!* I would not have missed this sight for a kingdom," and he gave himself anew to unrestrained merriment.

Gradually the contagion of his mirth relaxed the features of his companions and they too joined in his laughter. Finally they all stopped from exhaustion.

"You are a wonder!" gasped Berthier when he could speak.

"A devil!" cried Gaudais.

"*Mille tonnerres!* A master of the Black Art," growled Lieutenant Liotot.

"*Peste!* It was so easy! With a dark wig and dyed mustache, carefully padded clothes, stained skin, and altered voice I have deceived even you, my old companions. You see my year in Paris was not spent in vain. And then my scar—that was a work of art! My limp was the hardest thing to cultivate. A dozen times I have caught myself walking briskly across the floor, forgetful of my infirmity. It is a wonder you did not suspect something wrong long ago."

"But how——" began Gaudais.

"Wait and I will explain everything. By the aid of some natural skill in imitation, which I developed while away, I forged a number of letters and documents for the mystification of the Governor.

With them and my disguise I was not afraid to venture back undetected in order to wreak vengeance upon my enemy, Raoul de Chatignac. No one save my housekeeper knows of my identity. Thanks also to a powerful ally I have been able with your aid to bring about de Chatignac's ignominious downfall, which gratifies my revenge, and, incidentally, lines your pockets with gold."

"But the Dutch trader!"

"And the English commandant!"

"That part of my story was strictly true. Have you not already received handsome dividends from the venture? But we waste time. Do you, Gaudais, follow our friend and report to me where he goes."

Gaudais, obedient to Gaspard's bidding, followed Raoul at a distance as he flew over the road on his way back to Quebec. His horse, plied vigorously with spur and whip, rushed fearlessly along in response to the reckless mood of his rider. The revelations of the evening seemed to have seared his brain as with a red-hot iron, but deeper than all, and more painful than any other, had been the villainous accusation against Madame Duvi-
viev. It was a lie, he knew, but she had always admitted her friendship for du Tillet, and now it was but right that she should know at once the terrible wrong that he had inflicted upon one to whom she had all but revealed her love. Perhaps

when she learned the news she could offer some helpful suggestion toward the avenging of his injury. At any rate his fevered mind needed the calming sympathy she was sure to give. On approaching her house he was relieved to see a light shining from her sitting-room window, indicating that even at that late hour she had not retired.

Upon entering the room, he found her sitting at a table, reading. She greeted him with her usual gracious manner, then exclaimed:

“*Mon dieu!* What has happened, *mon cher ami?* You look as though you had seen a ghost.”

Raoul stood before her. “I have indeed seen a ghost, or, rather, have beheld some equally weird sights this night, and have experienced some terrible things. Madame, I am ruined; ruined, and by one, your friend, whom you bade me trust. Monsieur du Tillet is not worthy of your friendship. He is a rogue and cheat, who, by his rascally methods at cards, has robbed me of my all. I had planned a far different meeting with you to-night. I dreamed I could win, and with more gold I had hoped to tell you that I loved you, to offer you everything. But now I am a beggar, one who will spend this night under his family roof, knowing that it is no longer his. And worse than all else, I find that he whom I thought my friend is not Monsieur du Tillet, but my former

enemy, Gaspard Roguin, in disguise, who has thus triumphed over me. And, last of all, I have heard your dear name insulted, have heard him, the foul-mouthed fiend, proclaim, in the presence of others, the fact that he had used you to aid him in my downfall; you, as he boastfully asserted, his discarded mistress. Oh! tell me, Madame, you who have been as a star of hope in my midnight sky, tell me that you have had no hand in this, no league with him, and bid me go and avenge the double lie upon his unworthy frame. I have lost my lands and gold, but I warrant that for such a cause my hand has not forgotten its cunning, and can yet pierce with unerring blade his treacherous heart."

During the first part of his outburst, Madame Duvivier sat calmly eyeing him, her heart beating exultingly as she learned of the final success of the plot against him. At the first mention of Gaspard Roguin's name she started, and as Raoul proceeded, and she began to grasp the meaning of his words, a chill terror fell upon her. This changed to a flood of supreme fury as the full import of the news was realized. When he finished speaking, he started back in astonishment at the change that came over her countenance. Her face was contorted by the frenzy of her passion, her eyes glittered like some wild animal's, while her fingers, arched like claws in her rage, twitched nervously

as though in readiness to spring at some hated object.

“*Mon Dieu!*” she shrieked, “I am tricked again, and by him. By him for whose proffered love I cruelly slew my own husband. By him who threw me to one side when he had tired of my companionship. By him I sought even beyond the sea, that, having found, I might kill, *kill*, KILL, and then trample upon his dead body, wreaking to the full my long-sought vengeance. Curses on his false heart for his treachery! Curses on these eyes of mine, that should have penetrated any disguise; should have recognized those deceitful lips, so often pressed to mine in a passionate embrace! Curses on my guilty ears, that should have detected his lying voice that has murmured so oft of love to me. Fool that I was not to have felt his very presence. And to think that he should have made a tool of me in snaring for his own ends this dunce, this devoted booby, offering in return to serve me by trapping the man I sought—*himself*, forsooth! But his fiendish cleverness shall not save him now, for I shall——”

Raoul, open-mouthed, staring dumfounded, stayed to hear no more, but fled, his dream broken, anxious only to get out of sight and sound of the malignant demon who paced up and down before him.

Du Tillet, or Gaspard Roguin, as he can now

be called, entertained his two visitors until the return of Gaudais.

"Where did our friend go?" he inquired.

"To the Château to awaken the Governor?"

"No, to Madame Duvivier."

After the three had left for the night, he sat quietly thinking. As he recalled the destination of Raoul's fierce ride, he blew at his forefinger a moment in unconcealed dismay. He surmised that his enemy would inform her of his discoveries that evening. This was inconvenient. She would learn his identity prematurely, and a woman is likely to do anything. At length he came to a decision, and shortly afterward was riding slowly toward Quebec.

The clock in the Château had struck two when a dark figure glided in at the rear of Madame Duvivier's house, ascended the stairs and taking out a key softly opened the door and entered. By the light in her bedroom he could see her lying, partly dressed, upon the bed. She had at last succumbed to the violence of her emotions, and had sunk exhausted into a heavy slumber. The figure crossed the room silently, and stood over her. On the table where the candle rested was a glass of wine conveniently placed in case the sleeper awakened. The figure smiled. Everything was as he could wish. He slipped a tiny phial out of his pocket and silently poured a few drops of its con-

tents into the glass. This done, he stealthily withdrew within the shadow at the head of the bed. He had not long to wait. Presently the sleeping form stirred uneasily, and the woman's eyes opened. They fell upon the wine glass and with a sigh of satisfaction she put forth her hand, brought it to her lips, and drained it feverishly. The figure in the shadow drew out his watch and waited. A minute passed. Then another. At this juncture the figure stepped into the light, watch in hand. His first glance at the woman's face told him that the poison had commenced its work. At the sound of his footstep the eyes opened and beheld him. Madame Duvivier rose on her elbow, with a cry of alarmed recognition.

“Do not excite yourself, my dear Antoinette,” said the figure, with a mocking smile. “I have merely come to warn you. Some unscrupulous person, who, perhaps, found your presence in Quebec disagreeable, placed some of that poison which you know so well, in your wine. From past knowledge of its effects you will remember that it is fatal within three minutes. As it is now more than two since you drank it, you have less than sixty seconds to live. This is my last visit to you. Permit me to thank you for your services in entrapping my enemy. I accept them as a partial return for my patient submission to your many whims and caprices in the days of our companionship. You

kept your word. I shall do no less. You wished me to deliver to you the person of Gaspard Roguin, that you might gloat over him when he was once more in your power. Behold him! Waste no time, however, in enjoying your revenge, as you have but ten seconds remaining."

He closed his watch, and stood smiling derisively at his companion. During his cruel speech she had listened with terror-stricken gaze, which was intensified as the preliminary symptoms produced by the deadly drug bore witness to the truth of his assertion. When he stopped speaking she summoned all her strength and arose to a sitting posture, reaching forth a trembling hand to seize him. This exertion only hastened the effects of the poison, for with a thrilling shriek of impotent rage and hate she fell back—dead.

The figure remained motionless beside the bed for a few moments, then departed the way he had come, carefully locking the door behind him. In a short time he was riding homeward, and, as he gazed upon the objects about him, made half-visible by the early light of the coming day, his eyes wore a look of triumph, as though some dangerous obstacle in his path had been removed.

Chapter Twenty-Two

TREATS OF THE HERO'S SAD AWAKENING

WHEN Raoul fled from the presence of Madame Duvivier, he cared not whither his steps led him. His one idea, an idea that was preëminent within the seething cauldron of his brain, was flight: to place leagues between himself and the surroundings among which the rapidly enacted events of the past forty-eight hours had occurred. By the nearest road he hurried from the city, unconsciously seeking to counterbalance the intense mental agony under which he labored by exhausting physical effort. Leaving the highway, he soon entered the woods, where the moonbeams, glancing between the limbs of the trees, afforded a faint light to guide his feverish footsteps. Now stumbling over a fallen log; now raising his hands involuntarily to push to one side a drooping bough; now slipping upon the mossy surface of a rock as he resolutely climbed the hillside; now plunging down into a gulley, sliding, falling, clambering, crawling; now erect once more, and diving into a dense thicket, heedless of the branches and briars as they scratched

his cheek or tore his garments,—on, ever on, he went. Ignorant of the direction he took, he turned to right or left as the impulse moved him. Once, pausing by a little stream, he bathed his fevered temples and took a long, refreshing draught of the cool water. This did not allay his restless desire, so on he hastened, despite the weariness that began to manifest itself.

His thoughts, which had been in one chaotic, turbulent whirl, gradually arranged themselves into something like rational order, and, as they became distinct, they brought with them the bitterness of despair as he realized his condition. Although stripped of all his possessions, he had felt that with his self-respect intact, with his young blood and strong arm, with the power of a great passion thrilling him, he could bravely meet the future and yet triumph over all. But the revelations of the night had shattered his hope and strength. Instead of a pure, sweet, womanly nature in keeping with her physical beauty, he found that he had been worshiping at the shrine of a she-devil from the pit—had learned from her own words that she whom he had trusted implicitly was but the accomplice of his hidden foe, exerting all her powers to aid in bringing him to the dust—had discovered at last that she was all that du Tillet had tauntingly claimed her to be—and more. He reviewed his own conduct, and saw

clearly the lengths to which his blind infatuation had led him: how he had disdained and rebuffed the friendly aid of Armand; how he had cherished unworthy thoughts and feelings against his faithful well-wisher, the Governor; how he had slighted and neglected the gentle, ennobling influence of his old playmate, Aimée de Marsay.

He stopped in his wanderings, and stood upon the edge of a high rock rising sheer a hundred feet above the valley. It was the hour when all the world was still, that instant between night and day when the awakening bird hesitates to break the solemn stillness with its morning trills; when the night-wind, joining in the worshiping awe of creation, remains hushed a moment before rousing the sleeping woods with soft whisperings of the coming dawn. It was the precise moment when Madame Duvivier drew her final, short, mortal breath, thus breaking irrevocably the last chain of her weird power over her victim. As he stood panting with his impetuous flight, his bloodshot eyes gazing at the scene before him, his mind became clear once more, as though the mists that had beclouded him these many weeks, distorting his mental vision and leading him astray, had suddenly parted and vanished, leaving him his normal self.

At the thought of Aimée, his eye caught sight of a bright star burning steadily in the heavens, while all its lesser comrades had faded before the

early streaks of the approaching day. And in the heart of the young man there welled up with increased force all the old-time tender feeling for his friend. How like the star she was, shining stanch and true despite the clouds and mists, ever gleaming with loyal, steadfast purpose, whatever his folly and imprudence. And a great wave of shame at his own unworthiness swept over him as he fell to his knees in an agony of self-reproach. He had failed miserably in remaining true to the manly ideals within him. Could he face the vacant future again? could he go back to meet those kindly eyes, filled—not with reproach—he could bear that bravely—but with compassion? He could not stand erect in the presence of his own self-respect; how could he ever raise his head before these noble-hearted friends? His eyes glanced over the precipice into the shades below. 'Twas but a step, and the difficulty would be solved forever; a fall from the rock, and he would escape all! But he raised his head again, and there glowed the star, seeming to vibrate with the intensity of its message, a message of hope, flashing with every ray a word of joy, of consolation, a promise of better things to come. Who knows but that the heartfelt prayer that fell from the lips of the young girl who knelt at daybreak in her lonely room at the Château, in an agony of apprehension for the man she loved, reached the court of high

Heaven, and was thence reflected back to the desolate man upon the mountain side, bearing to his heart a word of cheer and inspiration!

Silently he watched the star until at last it, too, vanished, and day had come. As he descended from his lofty station and wended his way back through the forest, resounding with the matin-songs of many birds who fluttered from branch to branch, conjubilant, free, beautiful in form and feather, his own spirit, agitated with a new purpose, joined in the music of the woods about him. His eyes gleamed with a noble resolve, his step, despite his weariness, was firm with all the abundant energy of youth. For him the darkness had indeed fled, and it was dawn.

It was almost noon when he reached his home and found Armand waiting for him. He ran up to his faithful friend and embraced him affectionately.

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried the latter, as he looked in astonishment at the tattered clothes and scratched face, “where have you been?”

Raoul smiled as he observed his glance. “I do not wonder at your surprise. I have been up there all night,” pointing to the blue line of hills in the distance, “hunting for a lost man, *mon ami*, and have at last found him—myself.”

Armand looked puzzled. “You were lost in the woods?” he queried.

“Yes, *mon cher* Armand,” returned Raoul, laying his hand on his friend’s shoulder, “I lost myself, my better self, months ago, in the woods of folly. You knew it, for you tried to save me, but I would not let you. Aimée, with her sweet woman-heart, knew it and put out her feeble hand to stop me, but I brushed her aside. But now, *Grâce à Dieu*, I am found; I have awakened.”

Armand’s face glowed with honest joy. “Madame Duvivier——” he murmured.

“Speak not of her. Your idea of what she is would make her out an angel compared to what I now know her to be. We are strangers from henceforward. Instead of a friend, I have found her to be an enemy, worthy only of my revenge were she a man; luckily for her she is a woman, and is safe.”

“She is beyond your reach now,” was Armand’s calm rejoinder; “she was found dead in bed this morning. All Quebec is astir at the news. It was to tell you this that I came.”

In spite of himself, Raoul was shocked. Not that there was any lingering remnant of his old infatuation left; but because of the thought of their recent interview. He shuddered, remained silent a moment, then related all his experiences of the previous night, both in regard to the false du Tillet, and Madame Duvivier. When he had finished,

Armand was breathless with amazement. At length he asked:

“What are you going to do? Of course, you will see the Governor and lay the matter before him, so that he can cause the villain’s immediate arrest.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” was the cool reply. “Do you suppose the sight of him in chains will satisfy the feeling here?” He struck his chest fiercely. “Would the knowledge that he was ending his days in the Bastille efface the memory of his taunts, his insults? Only one thing can do that—to feel my sword-point penetrating his vile breast on the way to the heart. No, no, *mon ami*, do not interfere with any such advice as that. Before I do anything or say a word, I shall seek him out alone and, armed only with my sword, shall force him, under his own roof, to fight, and if he refuses—spit him like a dog.”

Armand saw that it was useless to attempt to swerve his friend from his purpose, so he remained silent. At length he said:

“The Governor, and Aimée—will you not see them first? Remember they know nothing of all that has happened during the past few days. They are anxious, I know, at not seeing you for so long, and will be doubly so since the death of Madame Duvivier.”

Raoul mused a moment before he replied:

“No,” he said thoughtfully, “I do not want to meet the Governor until I can say, ‘A rat has bitten me, and I have killed it.’ As for Aimée—ah! Armand, what a wonderful woman our friend is, so noble, so true. Before this wretched nightmare that has just passed, assailed me, we were the best of friends, the very best of friends. I fondly imagined that we could go on as we did when children, hand in hand in innocent, joyful companionship. But a day came—would that it had come earlier—when I awoke to the fact that we were children no longer, and I knew that there existed something stronger, deeper than mere childish affection in my heart for her. But at that moment came the darkening shadow, and I fell under the unearthly influence of that—that woman. As I look back now I can see how I was first attracted to her. It was by her beauty; by a certain sensual charm; by that subtle something that appeals to our animal nature, that thrills, intoxicates, and makes one dizzy—and that was all; nothing deeper, nothing nobler, nothing more lasting. But my former feeling for Aimée—how different! There was no thrill, but rather a peaceful calm, a restful security; no intoxication, but a purifying influence, a clearing of the vision for better, higher things, an easy interchange of lofty thought and aim and purpose, and all that beautifies, that exalts, that makes a man develop his true manhood. My love

for her was something strong and sweet and holy. It was a mighty undercurrent, destined to control the course of my whole existence."

Raoul paused, and a troubled look came into his eyes.

"But I did not tell her. Whatever her feelings may have been, they can scarcely be as I would wish them now, after all my acts of folly and ingratitude. Her tender nature undoubtedly recoiled with pain under my repeated slights and neglect. I do not blame her. As for me, I told you, *mon ami*, that I had found myself, and in doing so I discovered that the old love, covered up so long, had smoldered and spread until now it permeates my whole being. Let me but get this affair with my enemy settled, and I will go, sword in hand and hew down every difficulty until I can come back to her covered with honor and glory, having proved my manhood once more. If then she can forget the past and face the future with me, all will be well. If not——"

Here Raoul paused without finishing his sentence. Armand, patiently listening to his friend, whose every word was a stab to his own heart, was dumb. Then seeing the look of blank despair and the light of hope quenched in Raoul's eye at the mere thought of losing his prize in the end, he was deeply stirred. Summoning all his strength to aid him, he replied:

“Be of good cheer, *mon cher ami!* I doubt not your success when you have carried out your plans to their completion. In proof of my encouragement, let me remind you of the affair of the Governor's pardon. You thought it was Madame Duvivier who had influenced him. It was not.”

He then related the details of Aimée's ride, and the result, ending with: “You see, at that time, at any rate, you had reason to hope. A woman does not do a thing of that sort for a mere friend.”

Raoul laughed, and there was a joyous ring in its tone.

“Thus is another lie revealed; thus do I find one more debt of gratitude I owe the woman that I love.”

But a moment's thought sobered him. “That happened at the beginning of my folly. What can I hope for when she learns its full extent?”

After Armand had taken his departure, Raoul ate a hearty meal, and sought refreshing sleep. When he awoke it was already dark. He made preparations for his visit of vengeance upon the false du Tillet. He laid aside his father's sword in shame, and chose another and a lighter blade, and in due season was on his way to La Maison Sombre.

Meanwhile the members of “The Royal Four” had gathered, as was their nightly custom now, in the great hall of their leader. They were espec-

ially anxious that night, because it was necessary to map out some concerted plan of action to meet any move of retaliation that Raoul might make. The audacity of their past misdeeds had made them reckless, a mood greatly augmented by the huge goblets of wine that their host pressed upon them.

Gaspard himself was in an ugly frame of mind, which he evidenced by throwing an empty goblet at the head of Marie Girol when she entered with a refilled flagon. She dodged the missile with a frightened look. Some time later she reappeared in response to a summons from her master, with a tray bearing more wine. In passing to the table on which she was about to place the tray, she tripped over the outstretched foot of Roguin, who sat half-lying in the seat of his great chair, and fell, the flagon of wine spilling its contents over the floor. With an infuriated cry he sprang up and, seizing the unfortunate woman by the throat, shook her vigorously.

“A murrain seize you for your clumsiness!” he cried, and pushed her from him, then in an access of fury he kicked her as she fell to the ground, once, twice, thrice, accompanying each movement with a torrent of abusive epithets.

The poor creature received the shaking without a protest, but when she had suffered the last indignity she half raised herself and, glaring at her tormentor with blazing eyes and raising a warning

finger which she pointed at him, she cried in a voice at first feeble, but gathering strength until it became a shriek:

“Cruel son of a cruel father that you are! Faithfully did I serve him,” here she pointed to the slab in the floor, beneath which the elder Roguin lay buried, “and to my hurt. Faithfully have I served you, despite your wickedness. But the cup of your wrong doing is filled up. The day you raise your hand against me, whom, if you but knew my power, you would honor and overwhelm with kindness, that day sees us enemies. I am only a woman, old and without strength, but I have a tongue and can *talk*—he! he!” Launching this tirade she slowly and painfully arose, and with sounds of eldritch laughter, disappeared through the door.

Gaspard, who had watched her in silent astonishment, now that she was gone, burst into a loud guffaw. “*Pardieu!*” he cried, “the old hag has found her tongue at last. I never knew her to speak more than two sentences at any one time before.” Then, as he saw his comrades seemed frightened at her menacing words: “Come, drink up what is left to the success of my new plan for putting our beloved Raoul where he can never trouble us again.” After the goblets were emptied he continued:

“The only difficulty in our path is to get him

here. If he once enters this room before he tells all he knows, we are safe, and he is lost."

A loud knock thundered at the door. The four men looked at one another in consternation. They heard the sound of the servant admitting someone, followed by the click of a boot heel upon the floor, and Raoul de Chatignac stood before them.

Chapter Twenty-Three

CONTAINS AN UNEQUAL FIGHT, A CAPTURE, A
DELIVERANCE, AND A BOMB-SHELL

THE four conspirators started to their feet and stood motionless, staring in astonishment at the unexpected appearance of the person concerning whom they had been talking. Raoul walked deliberately across the room and halted in front of his enemy.

“Monsieur,” he said in clear, vibrating tones, “I have the satisfaction of telling you that you are a cheat, a rogue, and a scoundrel. I have come to kill you. Will you fight? If provocation is yet lacking, perhaps this will aid you in your decision,” and as he spoke he raised his hand, which grasped a glove, and smote his enemy a vigorous blow across the eyes.

Gaspard smiled vindictively, and bowed. “I accept, Monsieur.”

The two men then removed their coats and waistcoats. Raoul was ready first and stood, sword in hand, awaiting his antagonist. Roguin was assisted by Gaudais, to whom he gave a few directions in a low voice. He then placed all the can-

dles on the mantel so that neither would have the light directly in his eyes. When all was done, and the three spectators ranged themselves along the side of the room, he stepped briskly to his place.

“*À votre service!*” he said, and drew his sword. The blades touched, crossed, and the duel began. Raoul attacked with ardor, pressing his enemy vigorously, who in return remained on the defensive only, as though it were his idea to tire his adversary out. This evident purpose angered Raoul still further, and he renewed his assault with increased energy. Backward and forward they moved, now advancing a step, now retreating, now gradually working to right or left. Raoul had taken up a new position, with his back to the three bystanders, when Gaspard, suddenly abandoning his conservative plan, made a quick rush upon him with a vicious lunge. Raoul parried the blow, but at that instant he was assailed from the rear, and was borne to the floor by the combined weight of the three accomplices, while his sword was snatched from his hand.

He struggled vainly in the grasp of his captors. “Coward!” he cried, as he saw Gaspard standing above him, resting his sword point on the floor, with a derisive smile playing about his features, “I might have suspected some treachery at your hands.”

“A clever plan, well executed,” was the reply.

“I really could not do otherwise, Monsieur, for you surely do not expect me to fight with every penniless youth I meet.”

Raoul glared at him, but did not deign to speak.

“Come, my good comrades,” he continued, addressing the three who held Raoul, “bring our excitable friend with you, and we will place him in retirement. Perhaps by morning he will be less agitated.”

So saying, he seized a candle, and led the way to the door of a room on the first floor, which he unlocked and entered. Raoul was forced along in the grip of the men behind him.

“I will leave you this light,” went on Gaspard with a mocking air, “so that you can accustom yourself to your surroundings before seeking repose. The chamber, as you see, is cheerful, while the bed is excellent.”

The three confederates, giving their prisoner a vigorous push which sent him staggering against the wall, hastily withdrew, and the door was closed and locked after them.

Raoul, trembling with rage, sprang to the only window in the room, but he could see through the glass that escape in that direction was barred by heavy wooden shutters fastened from the outside. Looking about the chamber, he found that it was large and scantily furnished by a huge chest of drawers, on which the candle had been placed, a

large bed, and a fur rug upon the floor. There was not even a chair which he could break and use for a weapon. The door was one massive piece, with huge iron hinges that could easily defy any attack by even sword or ax. There was evidently no means of escape. Not daring to go to sleep for fear that he might be surprised and murdered without a chance to strike a blow in his own defense, he paced up and down the floor.

Here was a new and unfortunate state of affairs, brought about by his cursed stupidity, and desire for vengeance. He could blame no one but himself for his predicament. Had he taken Armand's advice and appealed to the Governor, his enemy and his precious crew of confederates would ere now be lodged behind the bars. He comforted himself, however, with the thought that Armand knew of his expected visit, and would probably be at his house early in the morning to learn the result. Not finding him there he would immediately surmise some villainy on the part of Roguin, and would undoubtedly hasten to his rescue, with assistance, by noon. There was nothing for him to do then but wait until morning. Wearied at last by his walking he carefully snuffed the candle and lay down upon the bed, his head resting at the foot and his feet toward the head in order to keep an eye on the door and detect any attempt at opening it silently.

The house was still. No noise was audible out-

side save that of the night-wind as it made its rounds shaking the shutters to see that all was secure. A feeling of weariness came over him and he would fain have slept. Resisting this desire he kept his eyes open, counting the moments as they passed, impatiently watching for the day. At length he dozed, but was suddenly awakened by the sound of the stealthy turning of the key in the lock. He started up in alarm as the door slowly opened and he beheld by the light of the guttering candle the form of the old housekeeper. She placed her fingers to her lips in sign of caution, and then beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed and she glided into the hall. After carefully locking the door behind them she led the way and guided him through the darkness to a door which opened into the outside world. A moment later he was speeding down the avenue of trees on his way home just as the first gray streaks of dawn appeared.

Gaudais remained all night at La Maison Sombre for the simple reason that he could not get away. The huge quantity of wine that he drank after Raoul was safely under lock and key seemed to pass immediately to his legs, for they soon refused to be of any service to him whatever. Accordingly Berthier dragged him to a couch and left him snoring there when he and Lieutenant Liotot took their departure.

When he awakened late in the morning he arose

and with difficulty made his way to Gaspard's room, where he found him dressing. After this operation was finished and they had partaken of the two cups of strong coffee Marie Girol brought them, Gaspard took from beneath his pillow (where it had been returned by the old house-keeper after releasing the prisoner) the key to the room in which Raoul had been confined, and summoned Gaudais to attend him.

"Come, we will see if our guest is more submissive than he was last night. Perhaps hunger has changed his warlike spirit."

They listened outside the door but heard nothing. Throwing it open, Gaspard said in a taunting voice: "Good-morning, *mon cher* Raoul; did you rest well?" No answer from the darkened room. Advancing to the bed they found it empty. They made a hasty examination of the room but found no prisoner. Gaudais ran for a candle. When it was lighted they peered under the bed, opened the chest of drawers, but discovered no trace of Raoul. Gaspard examined the window carefully; its fastenings were intact.

"Ten thousand devils!" muttered Gaudais. "He has escaped."

Roguin's face became livid with rage. He sank upon the bed and writhed in the intensity of his passion. At length he found voice, and gave vent to a volley of imprecations. Finally spring-

ing up he hastily led the way downstairs into the great hall, whose air was heavy with the odor of the past night's orgy. Going to a window he threw it open, then sank into the great chair. "Curse him!" he growled, "he bears a charmed life. The bird has flown, and will soon be back with a company of troops with the Governor at their head, and we shall all be in chains before we know it."

His companion paled. Gaspard noticed it. "Yes," he said fiercely, "in chains, with a good chance of being stood up as a mark for their infernal bullets."

"Can nothing be done? I will help in any way I can," Gaudais ventured to reply.

Gaspard looked at him with a sneer. "A precious lot of assistance you can render,"—then relapsed into silence, moodily knitting his brow and nervously drumming with his fingers on the arm of the chair.

"Our only hope," he murmured to himself, "is to decoy him here again before he has seen the Governor. We have but little time. What pretext will be strong enough? If he comes he will bring his friend with him. But my fool accomplices can take care of him; they will be three to one, thus leaving my enemy to me."

Again he relapsed into silence, his brain busily engaged in seeking a solution to the difficult ques-

tion. Plan after plan suggested itself, and was rejected with a scowl as being inadequate. At last a thought, black with the murk of hell from whence it came, entered his mind. This seemed to please him, and he laughed, an uncanny, crackling sound, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Rising impetuously he went to the table and taking from a drawer several notes which Raoul had written him during the period of their intimacy, he studied them carefully. This scrutiny finished, he began a letter which he soon tore up. Another met the same fate. The third time he seemed to be satisfied with the result, for he finished, and after carefully folding and addressing it, he laid it to one side, muttering: "That will fetch her." He then dashed off with careless hand a second brief message, which he likewise addressed and placed beside the other. "That will bring him in a hurry."

He then explained his plan in detail to his companion, instructing him in the part that he was to play. Gaudais at first rebelled vigorously, but, cowed by the menacing look of his friend and a few threatening sentences, at length surrendered whatever scruples of opposition he may have had.

Raoul reached home utterly exhausted. Fidette brewed a strong, hot drink which he brought with hands trembling with age and anxiety. Before he

could prepare breakfast Raoul had sunk into a deep slumber and was left undisturbed.

The young man slept heavily on through the afternoon and night and it was not until the sundial before the house marked the advent of a day that he awoke. When he opened his eyes, he found Armand sitting beside him.

"I know, *mon ami*," smiled Raoul, "that you are eager to hear from me an account of the adventures I met with when on my vengeful errand." He then began at the beginning and related in detail all that had transpired since they had parted; the mock duel; the interference of Gaspard's friends; his confinement and unexpected escape through the aid of the old housekeeper. Armand greeted the early stages of the narrative with exclamations of amazement and growls of anger and dismay. As the tale proceeded his excitement increased until at the close he was pacing up and down in extreme agitation.

"The contemptible viper!" he exclaimed at the close. "He is capable of any hellish villainy. I promise you, *mon cher* Raoul, that I shall not let you out of my sight until that reptile and his odious crew are safely placed behind iron bars."

Raoul looked at him with an affectionate glow as he seized his hand. "Good comrade mine," he replied while tears glistened in his eyes, tears that he did not deem unmanly, "the artful vil-

lainies of these men have only served to bring out more clearly your own fidelity and kindly care, from which a hundred other Madame Duviviers or false du Tilletts that might arise shall never entice me."

Armand's heart leaped at these words. Raoul was once more the generous-hearted comrade; with the benefit of his past experience he would remain the affectionate friend of yore. The influence of the moment banished all thought of action, of past events and future dangers. Two friends estranged were now as one again. They left the house and visited the many familiar nooks and childhood haunts without a thought for the great world outside their own two hearts. Again they roamed the meadows or sought for berries on the hillside; again they lay outstretched on the soft turf beneath the spreading branches of the huge forest trees. An afternoon of light-hearted joy it was, ending with a stiff climb to the crest of a neighboring hill where they stood together with flushed faces and panting breath, gazing at the beauties of the dying sun, whose glowing rays but reflected the light of brotherly love that was shed abroad in each manly breast. An hour later and the two were seated about the supper table to discuss together some plan of immediate action.

"My advice, *mon cher ami*," said Armand, "is to give up all thought of revenge. *Mon Dieu!*

can an honorable man condescend to fight on equal terms with a scoundrel, an assassin? To do so but gives dignity to his offenses. To adopt his methods but degrades one to his level. No, a thousand times, no! Go to the Governor and state the details of every event and let his wiser brain suggest to you the proper, lawful, and dignified course to pursue. He returns to Quebec tonight after a couple of days' absence. Let us go to the Château the first thing in the morning."

"I suppose you are right," was Raoul's reply, "but it is impossible to forget the studied insults, the plundering, the cruel blow from behind, the indignities suffered. My blood boils, too, at the thought that in some manner, through the law's delays or the bungling execution of military orders, the wretch and his miserable tools may escape."

"True," was the reply, "but New France, or at least its civilized portion, is small and affords small chance for hiding."

"He might turn Indian, or find the life of the roving *coureur-de-bois* preferable to the risk of being caught and shot."

"It would only mean that he would fall a prey to hunger or some wild beast in the wilderness, or be relieved of his scalp by a redskin more crafty even than he."

"Yes, but in that case I should never have the satisfaction of knowing of the event," and Raoul

smiled grimly. Then continuing, "But I shall do as you say, *mon ami*; I have been following my own leading and disregarding the advice of my friends, and behold to what a pass it has brought me. I place myself entirely in your hands."

At that instant there was a sound of breaking glass, and a small, heavy object fell to the floor; at the same time they heard the thud of hoofbeats retreating rapidly from the house. Raoul ran to the window through which the missile had been thrown, and strove to make out the identity of the messenger, but the approaching dusk prevented him from seeing anything distinctly. Armand picked up the object and handed it to Raoul. It was a small dagger, around which was securely tied a bit of paper. Removing this Raoul found it to be a note addressed to himself. He read it aloud:

"My deluded friend: Why did you leave my hospitable roof so unceremoniously? Since you have been freed from the enchantment of the lovely Madame Duvivier, I learn that you have returned to your first love, whose charms, I hope, will prove less disastrous to you. Realizing your present unfortunate predicament and wishing to spare you the humiliation of delivering to me in person your 'Heart's Desire,' according to our agreement, I have called for it myself and have carried it to La

Maison Sombre, where I am at this moment rejoicing in its possession.

G. R."

Raoul looked blankly from the writing before him to his friend's face and back again in amazement. "Returned to your first love," he repeated with flushed cheeks. "He must refer to Aimée de Marsay. But what connection has that sentence with the remainder of the note?" He laid the paper down and hurried from the room, returning with a still more puzzled look. "Here is my sword, my 'Heart's Desire,'" he said, holding it up. "And yet he claims to have carried it off." Armand, who during his absence had been thinking vigorously, gave a start; a look of horror overspread his features, and he was about to speak, but at that instant they both heard the sound of an approaching horse hard ridden. They remained silent and motionless, waiting. A knock was heard, and a moment later a servant entered. "A messenger from the Governor," he said, as he handed a missive to his master. Raoul tore it open hurriedly, and again read aloud to his friend:

"I have just arrived, to find that Aimée left the Château yesterday afternoon. She has not yet returned. Have you any news of her whereabouts? I have already started a search for her in two directions."

Chapter Twenty-Four

A DESPICABLE CHAPTER, IN WHICH A BIRD IS
CAGED

ALTHOUGH time had passed rapidly enough for the chief actors in the stirring events of the past few days, yet for Aimée de Marsay, shut up to inactivity and anxiety, the hours dragged themselves along in wearisome succession. Left in suspense as to the whereabouts of the man she loved, she was compelled to be satisfied with the short note she received from Armand, informing her of Raoul's safety. She strove to comfort herself with the thought that the continued absence of her two friends was due to some adequate reason, and that her anxiety would be relieved by one or the other of them at the earliest possible moment. Still, comforted though she was in part, her mind dwelt continually upon the possible dangers to which they might be exposed, while not an hour passed without a silent prayer for their safety. She endeavored to occupy herself about the Château, fearing if she went out she should miss the coming of her friends; but this was after all a sorry pretense, for she dropped whatever

she was doing at least every five minutes to run to the window to catch some glimpse of a familiar form or spy the approach of a messenger bearing long-wished-for news. At night her sleep was broken by horrible dreams; dreams in which she saw Raoul in company with his friend exposed to a thousand dangers, while through them all the face of an old hag, withered, worn, and witchlike, the evil spirit of each scene, leered at her with wicked eyes as though enjoying her distress. To make matters still worse for her, the Governor was obliged to absent himself from Quebec for two days. His absence made it all the more distressing, for with him within call Aimée felt a sense of security as having one to whom she could appeal for succor for Raoul if the need were urgent. As the day wore on all the nervous tension of the past week culminated in an overwhelming desire for fresh air and exercise to replace the inactivity that had bound her. At length she gave way to it, and early in the afternoon set forth for a long, fast ride, hoping that the change of scene might distract her thoughts for a time. She paid no attention to the direction taken by her horse, and it was only after several miles had been covered that she realized that they were on the Beauport road, and that she was already more than halfway to La Maison Sombre. Upon discovering where she was she stopped the horse and began to chide him playfully for taking

her so near the habitation of one she felt was Raoul's enemy. As she was about to turn his head homeward, she caught sight of the familiar figure of Farouche coming at a jog-trot and waving at her to wait. She greeted him with a smile and an outstretched hand. The man's face wore an anxious look as he produced a letter directed to her. She seized it eagerly, as she thought she recognized the writing. Hurriedly tearing it open she read the few lines it contained.

“ I am ill and in great distress. Should you wish to see me again alive, accompany the bearer, who will conduct you to me. RAOUL.”

Her cheek paled as she realized the import of the message, and flushed again as she read the name, dearer to her than all else. She had longed for action; here was the opportunity. Raoul, her Raoul, was ill, perhaps dying, and had roused his failing strength to write this appeal for her to come to him! She turned to her companion:

“ Tell me, my good Farouche, do you know anything about this letter? ”

“ No, Mademoiselle, I was sent for, and Monsieur du Tillet handed it to me, saying, ‘ make all haste. Monsieur de Chatignac has urgent need of the help that this young lady alone can bring.’ ”

“ And whither will you lead me? ”

“To La Maison Sombre.”

Aimée shuddered at the name. Raoul, then, was in his enemy's hands. She must hasten to him.

“Monsieur de Chatignac—is he ill or—injured? Have you seen him?”

“I have not. I only know that he came last evening. But Monsieur du Tillet seemed distressed when he bade me go for you.”

Aimée's mind was made up. Without a thought of danger for herself, she was eager to respond to her loved one's call for aid. Farouche's words confirmed her worst fears. Raoul had gone there the night before; some quarrel had sprung up, swords had been drawn, and even now his life-blood, perchance, was oozing away while she delayed upon the road. She might be too late! Motioning her companion to proceed, she followed, accommodating her speed to his. Not a word was spoken the remainder of the way. Her mind was filled with sad, apprehensive thoughts for her friend's safety. Finally they stood before the gloomy entrance of the house, and she alighted, gave the rein to Farouche, and hastened toward the door. Before she could knock, it was opened by Gaudais, who bowed respectfully as she entered. She noticed that his face was grave, and fresh alarm seized her. “Am I too late?” she asked anxiously.

He shook his head silently, and, beckoning her to

follow, led the way up the gloomy stairs, opened the door of a room near the top, and motioned her to enter. On doing so she found herself in a dimly lighted chamber, large and forbidding. When her eyes became accustomed to the obscurity she saw a large bed in the further corner, on which she descried the figure of a man covered with a cloak. She hastened across the room with a wildly beating heart, and approached the bedside.

“Raoul!” she cried anxiously, and kneeling beside the bed she leaned forward to catch his reply, faint though it might be. Receiving no response, she essayed to pluck the cloak from about his face in order to see for herself, if haply he were unconscious. As she did so she started back with a shriek, as she found herself looking into the features, not of her lover, but the supposed Monsieur du Tillet. Realizing that he was recognized, he sprang up, cast aside his cloak, and stood bowing with a mocking air before the young girl, who was too stupefied with alarm to speak, but stared with terror at the figure before her.

The false du Tillet, observing her silence, gave her what he intended to be a reassuring smile, but which to Aimée’s startled eyes was a hideous leer, and said:

“You doubtless expected to meet our mutual friend, Raoul de Chatignac. He has not yet arrived. Until then you will please accept of such

hospitality as this place affords. Anticipating your desire for privacy, I have had this room set apart for your use. My housekeeper will attend to your wants," and with another leer he glided from the room, closing the door behind him and turning the key in the rusty lock.

Aimée had remained as one in a trance during his words, but the harsh, grating sound as the bolt slipped into its place awakened her to a grim realization of her surroundings: that she was in the power of the man whom she feared, and a prisoner. With a cry of agonized terror, she flung herself against the door, vainly endeavoring to match her puny force against its massive oaken strength, smiting in an energy of despair with her tender fists against its hard, stained surface. She cried loudly for help, imploring her captor to liberate her, threatening him with the Governor's anger, and Raoul's vengeance. Alike fruitless of results were her entreaties and threats. Finally, wearied with her exertions, she ceased, and tottering to the bed sank down in utter despair, a prey to the most horrible fears. The strain of excitement under which she had labored at last told upon her, and notwithstanding her effort to remain vigilant, she fell into a heavy sleep. Hours passed, and she awakened with a start at the sound of a turning key, to find the room darkened with the shadows of approaching night, and the figure of Marie Girol

standing in the doorway. She bore a lighted candle in one hand, and in the other a small tray filled with several dishes, a glass, and a bottle of wine.

Aimée shrank back in fresh terror, for before her she saw the hideous features of the hag who had so terrified her in her dreams of the previous night. The old woman, after carefully closing the door, placed tray and candle upon a small table in one corner of the room, and, turning to Aimée, said with a chuckle:

“Come, my pretty bird, here is meat to strengthen and wine to hearten you.” Then, seeing that her companion drew back and shook her head, continued: “That is what they all do at first, but they soon make the best of things, and are glad to eat and drink whatever I bring them. You are not the first captive butterfly I have waited on in this house, and from what I know of father and son you will not be the last.”

Aimée, further terrified by these words, ran to her, and, kneeling, caught her dress. “My good woman,” she cried in wild entreaty, “save me, save me! Help me to escape from this horrible place, and the Governor will reward you well for the good deed. I am Aimée de Marsay, his ward, and he will deal generously with you if you but return me to the Château.”

The woman’s look changed, and seizing the

candle she held it close to Aimée's fear-stricken face.

"Strange! Strange!" she muttered, "Aimée de Marsay is dead, yet the features of the de Marsays are in your face." The old woman continued to gaze in reminiscent wonder. Aimée, seeing that she had made an impression, followed up her advantage. "I am indeed Aimée de Marsay, the only child of Félix de Marsay. Did you know my father?"

The hag nodded. "Many a time have I seen him, and once did I hold on my knee the little Aimée, as sweet and dainty a babe as I ever saw."

"If you have seen him then you may recognize this," and Aimée drew from her bosom a locket containing a miniature, which she opened and thrust hopefully before her companion's eyes, who gazed at it long and fixedly. At last she murmured, "It is he, the gallant, noble gentleman. You must be she whom Pierre Roguin told me had died. Small wonder I knew no better, for it is over fifteen years since I have been off this gloomy place."

Aimée gave a cry of joy. "You will then help me? For the sake of my father, whom you knew and must have admired, for the sake of the little helpless child you once held in your arms, for the sake of doing a noble action, for the sake of our common womanhood——"

Marie Girol interrupted her. "I dare not. Gaspard Roguin would kill me if I interfered."

"Gaspard Roguin?" gasped Aimée in astonishment.

"Yes, my master, who sent me here to help you. He who was in the room when you came."

"But that was Monsieur du Tillet," cried Aimée in wonderment.

"Du Tillet, or whatever name he calls himself by, he is still Gaspard Roguin, my master, whom I fear—and hate."

Aimée was unable to reply. The overwhelming revelation that du Tillet and Gaspard Roguin, Raoul's bitterest enemy, were the same, deprived her of speech, almost of reason. Several moments passed; the young girl, lost to her surroundings in the grip of the terrible news, knelt motionless; the hag, with scowling face, in which lurked an intense hatred and a growing passion for revenge, gave herself up to her own dark thoughts. At length she looked down at the fair form before her and her features softened somewhat as though in pity, then glowed with exultation. "So Aimée de Marsay is alive. Strange chance it gives me of revenge on the ingrate who raised his cruel foot against me,—me, who hold his future destiny in my hand." Then addressing Aimée she continued: "As for you, my child, you are in evil hands, and I can do little to help you. Believe me, although

I do not know that villain's designs, yet I do not believe he dares do you any harm. However, take this whistle, which I use for calling Farouche. Should you be in danger, blow on it, and I will do my utmost to save you. I owe you some return for the means of revenge you have given me; all the sweeter because it is unexpected," and loosening Aimée's hold upon her, she glided to the door and was gone.

The unfortunate girl was somewhat reassured by the woman's words. She felt that she had an ally, albeit a half-hearted one, in the enemy's camp. Her thoughts left her own unhappy condition, and turned to Raoul. Where was he? Was he concealed, ill, or wounded somewhere about the house, a prisoner like herself? Or was his note a forgery, merely a blind to entice her to the trap? Her heart leaped at this thought, for if he were free and well, it would be only a question of time before her absence would be discovered, and a search would be made for her. On the morrow the Governor would return, and he would quickly communicate with Raoul and Armand and they would undoubtedly not leave La Maison Sombre out of their quest. Realizing that she would need all her strength to meet future events, whatever they might be, she partook sparingly of the food the housekeeper had brought in. Having finished, she took the candle and examined the door

carefully. She was surprised to find on each side of the frame a grooved piece of iron, solidly riveted, that had evidently been made to hold a bar of iron or wood in case a barricade was needed. But the bar was missing. She then proceeded to make a careful search of the room, at first finding nothing that could be used for the purpose. Finally she opened one of a chest of drawers and gave a low cry of joy as she discovered a long piece of hard wood that fitted easily into the iron frames. This was of considerable protection in case anyone tried to force the door. Last of all she snuffed the candle, and, lying down upon the bed, watched its flickering light. Her immediate fears at rest, she was asleep long before the candle had burned itself out, and awoke to find the gray light of dawn stealing in through the window. When the sun had fairly risen she saw the figure of the false du Tillet riding down the avenue, bent on some early errand. Soon a knock at the door warned her of the approach of Marie Girol. Hastily removing the bar, she greeted the old woman with a smile as she entered with her breakfast.

“And how has my pretty one passed the night?” inquired the housekeeper as she set the tray down. “You will have naught to fear to-day, for your captor has ridden away and will not return until evening.” Aimée looked up eagerly. “The way then is clear——” she cried, but was

interrupted by her companion, who continued, "but he has left Monsieur Gaudais on guard in a chair not ten feet from your door."

"And would no appeal to his manliness, to his generosity, move him?"

Marie Girol shook her head. "He stands in deadly fear of Gaspard Roguin, and would risk his life rather than that you should escape."

When Farouche, who had been sent on a distant errand at daybreak, returned a little after noon, he was much disturbed at finding Aimée's horse still standing in the stable where he had placed it the day before. He retreated to his kennel to think the matter over. The subject was a puzzling one to his weak brain, and he sought in vain for a satisfactory solution. The only conclusion he could reach was a dim, uncertain consciousness that all was not well with his fairy princess, which finally deepened into the thought that she was in some danger. His first impulse was to hasten to the city and find Raoul and tell him of his fears, but that would necessitate an absence of several hours, and his desire to protect the object of his worship forbade his leaving the place again. He thereupon arose, and, slipping unnoticed into the house, disappeared and could not be found later, although the old housekeeper searched for him vainly everywhere.

The long day passed wearily for Aimée, who

viewed the approaching twilight with renewed fear and apprehension. Shortly after dusk she heard the sound of voices below stairs, and knew that Gaspard had returned. The sound of horses' hoofs soon announced the arrival of other guests. Ere long loud laughter and snatches of song told that the evening meal was finished and the wine was going round.

About the table in the great hall were gathered Gaspard Roguin and two of his boon companions. Gaudais, who had emptied several bottles while on watch near the door during the afternoon, was highly loquacious. "So this is the night we are to see our enemy completely crushed. Look out, *mon cher* Gaspard, that he does not give you the slip again."

"No fear," was the exultant rejoinder; "with one bird already in our cage, it will be but a short time before the other one flutters in."

At this moment Berthier appeared. Gaspard looked up anxiously. "Well?" he interrogated.

"He and his friend were seated, eating. The window being closed, I threw your message through the glass. I saw someone stoop to pick it up. They will be here within the hour."

"Well done!" cried Gaspard, slapping him upon the back, "here is a flagon of rich, red wine to recompense you for your long ride. Fill up, all of you, and pledge the success of this night's work."

All joined him heartily, and soon their tongues were loosened and the spirits of the party rose under the wine's potent influence.

Gaspard fully realized the desperate position his abduction of the Governor's ward would place him in. He had made all his arrangements for flight after the expected successful encounter with Raoul, leaving his three accomplices to face the consequences of his deeds. A canoe was waiting for him at the river's edge, and he counted on being able to slip away unnoticed in the confusion. With a couple of hours' start he could laugh at all attempts at pursuit. Hence he awaited coming events with a cool audacity not shared in by the other three, who needed many goblets of wine to bolster up their courage and make them forget the danger in which they were placed.

"Where is the lady—your decoy?" asked Gaudais, with drunken gravity. "Is it fitting that she should keep herself so secluded when there is a gallant party ready to drink to her sweet face and lovely eyes?"

The others gave signs of approval of these sentiments.

"You're drunk, Gaudais," was Gaspard's reply to his guest's suggestion.

"Drunk or sober," was the answer in an injured tone, "I know that some respect is due a comrade's wishes. This, *mes amis*," he continued,

turning his tipsy head, "is our reward for aiding our friend in his infernal plots. I for one refuse to take part in any further proceedings to-night unless the girl is produced, bless her pretty lips, that I have admired and hungered for at a distance these many months! But I know why you do not produce her, *mon cher* Gaspard. Listen; it is because you can't."

Roguin frowned angrily. "Can't," he exclaimed sharply, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that if you went to her door and whispered, 'Please, Mademoiselle, will you not appear and meet a few choice spirits, my friends, in the room below?' she would say 'No,' and you would have to return crestfallen, and with an excuse for her non-appearance."

A loud laugh greeted this sally. Gaspard flushed, and replied in a nettled tone:

"*Peste!* you drunken fool, do you not know that all in my house obey my wishes? Did she refuse, I would drag her here, even though I had to break the door down to reach her."

"*Ma foi!*" hiccoughed the other, "the world has it that it was her father that did the ordering, and yours the obeying."

Stung into a rage at this reference to his father's former subordinate position, Gaspard jumped to his feet, exclaiming with an oath: "Since my power and authority are questioned, I will soon

prove who is in command here," and he rushed from the room and hastened up the stairs.

Reaching the door of the room in which Aimée was confined, he knocked gently, but received no response. Turning the key, he endeavored to open the door, but found it fastened on the inside. Then in a respectful tone he said: "Mademoiselle, I should esteem it a great favor if you would accompany me downstairs and meet several gentlemen whom you already know by sight. You need stay only a moment, and then return, and I pledge my honor that you shall be treated with all deference and respect." He waited a moment, and not hearing any reply he continued, striving not to show his impatience in his voice: "I consider it a matter of considerable importance, and beg of you to grant my request." No response. There was nothing to do but return alone to his companions, as Gaudais had predicted. Throwing aside his courteous tone, he spoke once more sharply: "Do not provoke me, I beg of you, Mademoiselle, by barricading the door and persisting in your refusal to comply with my reasonable request, or I shall be compelled to take measures to force your obedience." Still no answer. Although he had striven, in view of the probable imminent conflict with Raoul, to indulge but moderately in wine, yet enough had been taken to loosen his control over his naturally high temper.

The contemptuous silence of Aimée exasperated him. The unsteady tones of Gaudais' voice reached his ears in the taunt: "I told him he would fail," and roused him to fury. With a cry of rage he dashed down the stairs, and soon reappeared in the great hall before his companions, bearing a large ax.

"Come, you drunken fools," he shouted, "follow me with all the candles and I will show you how I compel obedience." His companions followed, Berthier and Liotot bearing in each hand a candle which they deposited on a table in the upper hall so that the place was brilliantly illuminated, while Gaudais brought up the rear, clinging unsteadily to the balusters as he pulled himself up the steps.

Gaspard approached the door. "This is your last chance, Mademoiselle," he cried, and a fiendish look flashed from his eyes. "If you refuse to come now, I shall force my way in, and shall not be responsible for the consequences."

No reply was vouchsafed. With an oath, he raised the ax, and half buried its head in the oaken panel. Again its bright surface flashed in the candle light as it descended, this time bringing away with it a huge splinter. Blow after blow followed from the hands of the infuriated man, until one entire panel had been battered in. His friends stood in the background, wondering spectators of

his impetuous attack. Gaudais, unable to stand in the excitement, had slipped to the floor and sat with his back against the wall, blinking his stupid eyes at the candles and looking at his comrade's vigorous onslaught in maudlin dismay. Another blow had made a small opening in the second panel, when a cry of alarm from Berthier caused Gaspard to look up. He glanced in the direction in which his friend's finger pointed, and involuntarily drew back in astonishment. The figure of a man clad in armor had just reached the topmost step and speedily took up its station before the beleaguered door, waving awkwardly its huge battle sword, crying in a hoarse voice: "Give way! Give way! Farouche to the rescue!"

Gaspard grasped the situation in an instant. The Fool had secreted himself in the old armor in the great hall, as he had done before, and, hearing Gaspard's plan of attack upon Aimée, had followed him as well as he could up the stairs. Strongly imbued with the thought that his beloved Princess was in danger, he was determined to defend her, even though he gave his life in the struggle.

The appearance of Farouche but infuriated his master the more. Approaching him with uplifted ax, his face pale with passion, he ordered him to begone. For reply Farouche brandished his sword yet more valiantly, and cried: "The Fairy Princess in danger! Farouche to the rescue!"

With a cry Gaspard fell upon him and, easily evading the wild lunges of his sword, brought the keen edge of the ax down with full force on the old helmet. With a moan Farouche staggered to one side and fell. At the same instant the shrill call of a whistle sounded from the interior of the beleagured room, and, as if in instant reply, the gaunt figure of Marie Girol glided into view and took its stand before the partly wrecked door. As soon as she saw the prostrate form of Farouche upon the floor, a strange light blazed from her eyes. Pointing an accusing finger at Gaspard Roguin, she cried: "Woe unto you, you bloody murderer, for you have spilled your own blood. He who lies there, butchered at your hands, was your father's son, your elder brother, son of your father, and of me, who, in my youth, before his marriage, was his favorite. The sin of the father is to-day followed by the greater crime of the son. The doom of your house is sealed; to-night you also meet a violent death."

Gaspard staggered back, turning his gaze from the threatening glance of the old woman to the terror-stricken faces of his companions. At the same instant a feminine cry of joy issued from the room, and a moment later the sound of hurrying feet was heard in the hall below, causing him to turn toward this new source of alarm.

Chapter Twenty-Five

SHOWS HOW THE HERO PAID OFF OLD SCORES

WHEN the true meaning of the two notes had flashed across the minds of Raoul and his friend, they stared at one another in silence for a moment, overcome by the audacity and villainy of the deed. Raoul was the first to move. Seizing a near-by cord, he soon had the bell in the servants' hall jangling like a thing possessed. Orders to prepare their horses were given in a low, calm voice, nothing either in word or action betraying the storm of emotion that filled his breast. He coolly buckled on his father's sword, patting the hilt fondly as though to encourage a friend, and then walked slowly up and down the floor in deep meditation. After some delay, owing to the breaking of a girth, the horses were announced. Then for the first time did Raoul speak to Armand. "Are you ready?" was all he said as they clasped hands in a grip that indicated a common purpose, silently pledging each to each the faithful performance of a sacred duty. Without a word they swung into their saddles, and were soon pounding along the feebly-lighted moon-lit

road. When they reached the city a halt was made at the Château, a few hurried words were whispered in the Governor's ear, who nodded approval, and promised to follow at once with all speed, and they were off once more, hastening along the Beauport road, no sound escaping from them save the steady foot-fall of the horses as they forged rapidly ahead. Ere long they were dashing along the leafy avenue and stopped before the gloomy pile of La Maison Sombre. It was this approach that Aimée had beheld from her window, and which had caused her cry of joy and relief.

Much to their surprise they found the front door unlocked and unbolted, thanks to the precaution of Marie Girol. Sword in hand, they rushed impetuously in, the sound of voices leading them up the stairs. On the topmost step they paused an instant. A glance at the broken door, with the maddened Gaspard, ax in hand, before it, and they understood the situation. Liotot, with a cry of fear as he saw these two avenging figures, was soon clattering down the back-stairs and out into the night in his frantic efforts to escape. A shout of exultation broke from Raoul's lips, the first sound he had uttered, as he sprang toward his enemy; with a snarl of defiance Gaspard dropped his ax and drew his sword. Armand stepped over the body of Gaudais, who by this time lay sprawling

on the floor, sunk deep in drunken slumber, and engaged with Berthier, while Marie Girol, who had meanwhile dragged the form of the unfortunate Farouche out of the way, sat with his head in her lap, crooning in a low tone a weird song as she strove to loosen the rusty fastenings of the ancient helmet. Aimée's pale face appeared in the broken panel of the door, as she stood a petrified witness of the fray. No sound was heard save the clink of steel and the deep breathing of the combatants as they warmed to their deadly work. Backward and forward they lurched, with lunge and parry, thrust and counterthrust, the lightning flashes of the bright blades matched by the gleams of passionate hatred from their eyes. Raoul faced his antagonist coolly, and used his weapon with deliberation, choosing to wait for just the proper opening before delivering the blow that would rid him forever of the crafty enemy who had almost wrecked his life. Gaspard Roguin, although nearly blinded with fury and lust for the life of his foe, still exercised his natural cunning, endeavoring to get his opponent in an unfavorable position. Failing in his effort to force him to stand with the candle-light shining directly in his eyes, he next maneuvered to bring him with his back toward the head of the stairs, hoping that when this was accomplished he would be able by a series of desperate rushes to send him falling backward over

the edge. Raoul, however, understood his designs and thwarted them, while he increased the fierceness of his own attack. He had forced his enemy back against the shattered door and by his brilliant play of sword kept him there, deciding in his mind that the time for the fatal stroke had come.

At that instant a cry of warning escaped from Armand, whose sword had been wrenched from his hand by a clever thrust of Berthier. Realizing that some new danger threatened him, Raoul whirled quickly about, only to behold Berthier rushing at him from the rear. Like a flash he turned the threatening sword-point to one side, his own slipping along his new opponent's guard and entering his breast. Berthier fell with a scream of pain, and Raoul again faced Roguin, who, at sight of his enemy's back, delivered a vicious thrust that would have been highly successful had Raoul delayed a fraction of a second longer before turning. "Wretch!" he exclaimed as he again forced Gaspard against the door. "Your days of assassinating are past." Then, as he resumed the conflict with increased vehemence, he continued in a low, steady voice, repeating the talismanic inscription engraved upon his weapon: "Fight not for maid, unless your heart be pure." At the sound of these words, Gaspard started, and paled with a premonitory fear. "Fight not for country, save for love, not gold."



The fear changed into despair, although he struggled vainly against it.

“Fight not 'gainst man, except your cause be just.” These words rang in his ears with the sound of doom.

“I have promised to deliver to you this, my sword, Monsieur,” continued Raoul calmly, as his weapon described a flashing circle about his enemy's head. “Receive it now, with my compliments,” and at the word he made a terrific lunge that carried his sword-point through the breast of his antagonist, and on, halfway through the wood-work of the door. Gaspard's own weapon fell from his grasp, and his head dropped forward as he hung an instant transfixed by Raoul's blade. His eyes turned upon the victor with a last dying look of concentrated hatred; a convulsive shudder passed through his frame, and his lifeless body fell to the floor, carrying with it the avenging sword.

Raoul sprang to the door. “Aimée! Aimée!” he cried anxiously. A sound was heard as the protecting bar was removed, the door swung open, and with a cry of joy he bounded over his fallen foe into the room and seized the form of his beloved, and for one mad moment poured into her ears a flood of endearing words. Only for a moment, however, for loud shouts and the sound of running feet were heard in the lower hall, and Raoul looked out to behold the Governor, sword

drawn, with flushed face and flashing eyes, coming up the stairs, with a dozen soldiers at his heels. Aimée, more beautiful than ever for the blushes that suffused her features, slipped past Raoul and flung herself into the Governor's outstretched arms.

Finally disengaging himself, he advanced to Raoul, who stood with blazing eyes, and chest still heaving from the recent struggle, and, seizing his hand, laid one of his own upon the young man's shoulder. "Raoul, my son, I see we have come too late. You have done good work this night," he said.

They then joined Armand, who was examining the extent of Berthier's wound as he lay groaning in the place where he had fallen. They soon found that the point of Raoul's sword, striking a rib, had glanced off, inflicting an ugly flesh wound, but one not necessarily serious. This was soon stanching, and the sufferer made more comfortable. Aimée's quick eye caught a glimpse of the old housekeeper seated in her corner, still holding the lifeless head of her much abused offspring in her lap. She had removed the helmet, and now was stroking his brow gently with her withered hand, whispering fondly unaccustomed words of endearment into his deaf ears. Aimée approached, knelt down beside her, and leaning over kissed the pale forehead of her defender, while a tear of pity and

gratitude fell, bedewing his mass of tangled hair. A smile of surprise and delight still lingered about the dead man's mouth. Farouche the Fool had found the fairies at last!

Aimée looked about her wearily, and for the first time a full realization of the horror of the scene—the flaring candles, the murdered Farouche, the dead Gaspard, the wounded Berthier, the astonished glances of the soldiers—fell upon her, and with a slight shudder, as though a sudden breath of icy air had struck her, she advanced toward the Governor, and, like a tired child, laid her hand in his, murmuring, “Take me home, Père Philippe.”

Horses were obtained from the stable, and soon the entire party, the wounded Berthier and the drunken Gaudais supported in their saddles, were wending their way slowly back to the city.

Within the desolate walls of La Maison Sombre quiet reigned, the servants retiring, leaving Marie Girol alone with her dead. Absorbed in her grief, she sat until the hour of midnight resounded through the gloomy halls. Aroused by the noise, she arose and lifting carefully the shattered frame of her long-neglected child, she partly carried, partly dragged him down the stairs into the great hall below. Returning, she repugnantly seized the body of Gaspard and conveyed it to the same place. She then slipped from the house and

going to the stable soon returned with an armful of hay. She repeated her errand a score of times, until she had accumulated a large quantity of the dry material, out of which she made two small piles, one on each side of the slab beneath which old Pierre Roguin lay. With some difficulty she placed the two bodies, one on each pile. Having done this she surveyed the results of her labor with satisfaction. "At last," she murmured, "they are in their right places; the two sons, one on each side of his father, the proud, cruel man who refused to recognize them both in life, but who is powerless now to prevent the outcast one, the eldest born, from taking his lawful position upon his right hand. How proud, how calm he looks, compared with that silly woman's brat who supplanted him! My son has at last come into his own, and I am satisfied."

She then began a careful distribution of the remaining huge heap of hay about the room, upstairs in all the dismal chambers and throughout the lower floor. When all was arranged to her satisfaction, she seized a candle and, passing rapidly from pile to pile of the inflammable material, applied the light, and chuckled as she heard the ready crackling. A few moments more and all the curtain hangings were also lighted. As she heard the roar of the advancing flames she burst into a mocking laugh, crying in a shrill

voice: "They shall have no other burial, but shall burn all together, with the rest of this accursed house." Running to the upper floor, she roused the servants so that they could escape, and returned once more to the scene of destruction.

The old woodwork, dry and blackened, caught fire and soon involved the whole interior. Flames broke their way through the windows, letting in more air to fan their fury. High above the roar of destruction came the voice of the exulting Marie Girol as she ran from room to room, like a fire-spirit, singing a weird song of defiance and triumph, oblivious of the heat, careless of the sparks falling all about her. At length she was obliged to withdraw, but hovered near, chanting like a witch above a seething caldron until finally as day broke, a blackened heap of smoldering ruins was all that remained of La Maison Sombre.

Chapter Twenty-Six

WHEREIN A CONFESSION IS MADE, AND A RESTITUTION OFFERED, CLOSING WITH MILITARY STRAINS

THE next day, when a party of soldiers arrived on the desolate scene, sent by the Governor at Aimée's request to bring the remains of her gallant defender to Quebec and give them Christian burial, they found a worn figure stretched motionless upon the hay in the stables. Whether it was that the superhuman exertions of the previous night were the last desperate flicker of a light already doomed to extinguishment, or whether the injury inflicted by the brutal foot of Gaspard Roguin had developed into a fatal illness, could not be determined. At any rate the rough men, as they stood about the ugly, worn form of the old housekeeper, recognized upon her the mark of death. She begged them in a weak, but insistent tone, that they return to the city with all speed and summon the Governor and Aimée de Marsay to her side, saying that she had strange yet highly important information to deliver to them before she died. Her request was heeded, and

before many hours both the Governor and his ward were hastening to her.

By the aid of restoratives she was strengthened sufficiently to deliver the message that was on her mind.

“Strange though it may seem now,” she began, looking at Aimée with a softened glance, “when I was young I was possessed of beauty not far inferior to your own. But, alas, I had not your goodness, and fell a victim to the importunities of Pierre Roguin, my master. I was a great favorite of his, and lived in a fool’s heaven, dreaming of the time when I should become the lawful mistress of the grand house in which he lived. When Farouche was born to me, all was changed. My master soon found he was a witling, and from that time his regard for me began to wane, and a dislike, almost a hatred, finally took its place. He rushed off to Montreal one day and soon reappeared with a wife, a weak, silly thing, and I was doomed to serve in the home where I had hoped to rule. Years passed, and I still lived on. Whenever I looked at the weak babe in my arms, the cause of all my troubles—the wrecker of my future plans and hopes—I hated him. A score of times did my itching fingers seek his throat as he lay in his cradle, to strangle the little life that had come between me and my happiness. But I drew back in time. Wicked though I was, I could not kill

my own flesh and blood, so I contented myself with the thought that, feeble in brain and body, he could not live long. With this in mind, I took little care of him, hoping to hasten the end. But the greater my neglect, the stronger he grew, until I realized that he was destined to live on, a constant reproach and irritation to me. So it was that I lost all natural feeling, and vented on him by blows and harsh words the full bitterness of my miserable life. It was only when I saw in his brave defense of this young lady a glimpse of the old reckless spirit of his father, and in his brutal murder by his wicked brother the working out of a cruel destiny whereby I and mine were continually sacrificed to the advantage of the other woman's child, that there was awakened in my breast all the old mother's love that I thought had died with his birth. And when I saw by your sympathetic kiss upon his dead brow, Mademoiselle, that others recognized in him traits worthy of admiration and kindly gratitude, I was shamed, and loved you for so shaming me.

“ But my strength is going fast, and I must tell you the more important part of my story. As you know, your Excellency, Pierre Roguin was originally the steward of Félix de Marsay, and looked after his estates while he was away bravely fighting for the Colony, or wasting his time in Paris vainly endeavoring to interest the King and his

minister more fully in New France. His long absences gave ample opportunity to an unscrupulous man to gain many advantages for himself. Such a man was Pierre Roguin, yet I loved him fondly, despite his many faults. Often he told me, with a chuckle of delight, of the various ways in which he tricked his absent employer; how, pretending necessity for the sale of a piece of land to make up for a bad crop, he had been able to purchase it himself for a song with money he had stolen from the good Monsieur de Marsay. You also know how, because of his master's careless habits of business, Pierre Roguin was found in practical possession of his entire estate at his death.

“Gaspard was the joy and delight of his father's life, after his foolish wife sickened and died. On him was centered every hope. But the son seemed to have inherited only the evil traits of his father. Among these was a terrible temper, that, when once aroused, brooked no interference from anyone. I well remember the day when Gaspard was fifteen. He made some outrageous demand upon his father, which was indignantly refused. This aroused the tiger in the boy's soul. His fury knew no bounds. He stormed at his father, threatened him with physical harm, and cursed him to his face. That night when I brought in the candles I found the old man seated alone before the fire, in deep meditation, with an angry scowl upon his face. He refused

all food, and soon busied himself at the table with his writing materials. Young Gaspard stalked in later, and, without a glance at his father, went off to bed. The light burned late that night. As I passed his door my master called me in and bade me be seated. Then it was for the first time in many years that he talked to me in the kindly confidence I had once been used to. He opened his heart as he talked, and told me how he had come to realize that Gaspard would grow up into an unworthy man. 'He has too much of me in him, and not enough of his angel-mother.' I clenched my hands at those last words, but said nothing, hoping that at last he was going to acknowledge as his legal child the offspring of his early infatuation. But no, his mood was strange that night, one I had never seen before, a mood of an awakened conscience. 'I robbed old Félix de Marsay when he lived, leaving his baby-girl penniless that I might enrich the son who this day has shown his unworthiness. I have made a will to-night, restoring all that I possess to the heir of the rightful owner, leaving only a small sum to my worthless child, that will afford him either support while he works out an honorable career, or an opportunity of hastening his profligate end. To-morrow I shall have the legal witnesses sign this paper, and shall deposit it here.' He walked to an old *secrétaire* and, pressing a spring, showed

me a secret drawer. 'You alone know where it is hidden. When I die you must deliver it to the Governor.' That was all, save that he turned and kissed me in a dreamy sort of a way as though he saw me standing before him as of old in all the freshness of my youth."

A terrible weakness here seized the old woman, and it was with difficulty that she was again aroused. "Where was I? Oh, yes, I remember. Well, that mood did not return, and the matter was apparently forgotten, as he never referred to it again. Once only did he ever seem to have it in mind. One day he exclaimed to me with a bitter laugh, 'One's good intentions do not seem to become fulfilled. I hear a child died last night at the Château.' Knowing that the Governor had taken you, Mademoiselle, under his care, I could think only that you were dead.

"There being no wrong left to be righted, I allowed the paper to remain in its hidden place, and quite forgot its existence. It was only when I learned from this young lady's lips that she was, indeed, Aimée de Marsay, the heir to the good Félix de Marsay, that I remembered. The desire to revenge myself upon the base son was fresh in my mind, and I planned to produce the will and thus with one blow deprive him of nearly all that he thought he possessed. But *le bon Dieu* directed otherwise. Last night, before setting fire to the

house that has been worse than a prison to me for so many years, I went to the old *secrétaire* and found the will in the same hidden drawer Pierre Roguin had shown me. I placed it——” Here the voice of the speaker, which had grown weaker and weaker, suddenly stopped. She cast a look of despair upon her hearers, as though she realized that she had been foiled at the last moment in her desire to deliver the precious document. Her lips moved inaudibly; her hand stretched upward and plucked helplessly at her bosom, then fell to her side, and all was still. The message was delivered; the messenger had gone.

With a woman’s quick intuition, Aimée interpreted the last movement of the dying hand, and slipped her own into the dress where that hand had sought to find something, and quickly withdrew it, bringing forth a folded paper, which she handed to the Governor. He took it to the door and examined it carefully. “She was right,” he muttered joyfully to Aimée, who had followed him, “and it is properly drawn and witnessed.”

That evening Raoul called at the Château, and requested a private interview with the Governor, who greeted him warmly when he entered the room, albeit with some surprise. He motioned him to a chair, but the young man remained standing, hat in hand, in an embarrassed way, as though

not knowing how to begin. He caught the kindly glance of the Governor directed on him, and it gave him courage.

“My honored friend,” he began, “and the staunch ally of my noble father, I have a confession and a request to make.”

The Governor smiled encouragingly, although wondering what the young man could have to tell him.

Raoul with an effort began, and soon was fully launched in a recital of all the events that had transpired since the arrival of Madame Duvivier and the false du Tillet. He even went back to the time of his first meeting with Gaspard, on the doomed vessel. He did not spare himself in any particular, but laid bare his weakness unflinchingly.

“And now,” he continued, “regarding Aimée,”—and at the name a troubled look came into his eyes. “She has suffered, poor girl, through the wiles of those who sought to destroy me. I love her, your Excellency, and have from the beginning. I would have told her my love one night, but I was interrupted, and then—that accursed woman spread her net and I became entangled in her snare. At one time I believed her former friendship had passed into a deeper feeling, but now, after what has happened, my apparent neglect, my foolish recklessness and all, I dare not think what her atti-

tude toward me may be. To-day I am penniless, and guilty of unmanly weakness in allowing myself to be duped by an intriguing woman and a cunning villain. Until these matters are righted or atoned for, I can speak no word of love to her. First of all, I must vindicate my manhood. I, therefore, beg that you permit me to join the force I hear you are about to dispatch against the English Colonies. May *le bon Dieu* afford me opportunity in the campaign to retrieve myself. If I fail, I shall fall upon the field of battle, with my sword drawn, facing an open enemy, and Aimée may then forget all except that I died fighting in the front rank for King and Colony. If I return, I can meet her as one who has redeemed his weakness. I will then be free to whisper to the woman that I love the glad message of my heart's deep adoration and desire. Tell me, sir, for the sake of one who was your gallant comrade, my honored father, that you will not deny me the assistance that I ask?"

While the young man thus earnestly pleaded, the Governor thrilled, recognizing in him the same spirit that had so distinguished his friend of other days, and as he gazed his heart warmed toward the youthful nature that from the midst of ruin stood upright and faced the unknown future fearlessly. So moved was he that he remained silent for a moment after his companion had ceased speaking. Then in a voice broken with emotion he said:

“Not for your father’s sake, my son, will I do all that you ask at my hands, but for your own, his worthy successor.”

After Raoul had gone, the Governor sent for Aimée, and, drawing her down into her favorite position, laid his hand affectionately upon her head and told her all that her lover had told him. “We must do nothing, *ma chérie*, to thwart his plans of gaining once more his self-respect,” he said in conclusion. “Above all must we be silent as to your recent good fortune. Let him believe himself penniless, with nothing but his sword and undaunted spirit with which to win and provide for you. *Le bon Dieu* will surely send him back to us. Such noble natures are too rare in this sordid world; they must needs be spared.” And Aimée, woman that she was, assented readily with a dutiful smile upon her face, but with a sigh in her heart.

Arrangements for the expedition were soon completed, and once more Raoul stood before the Governor, flushed with hope and enthusiasm, clasping his hand in farewell. “Sir, a thousand thanks for my lieutenancy! It was more than I had hoped for! I shall prove myself not unworthy of your confidence.”

A moment later he and Aimée were taking leave of one another. Few were the words exchanged. “I shall return,” he whispered, “and

we shall once more be children, and tell each other tales as of yore. Will you listen then as you have before?" For answer the girl extended her hand, which he seized eagerly.

"But one thing I lack," he continued. "In all our stories of brave knights and fair ladies, the warrior has always borne with him on his quest, his lady's colors, a talisman against misfortune, a banner beneath which to fight, a constant reminder of her thoughts of him."

Aimée quickly unfastened a bow of blue ribbon from her hair, touched it lightly to her lips, pressed it into Raoul's outstretched hands, and fled.

When the fleet of canoes containing the war party swept over the surface of the river, the rhythm of the flashing paddles kept time to the song of the men. But in the heart of one of the members of the expedition another refrain sounded that was destined for many days to thrill him with its cadences. Over and over again it sang itself:

"A blue knot,
A true knot,
A lover's knot of blue,"

filling him with courage, hope, and joy.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

DEALS WITH THE CAMP AND BATTLE-FIELD, AND
INCLUDES A SAFE RETURN

THE expedition had been gone scarce a week when Quebec and all the fair Colony of the King of France was assailed from another direction and quickly conquered. The Spirit of the North sallied forth in all his strength from his frozen retreat, and breathed upon the surface of the mighty river, imprisoning for a time its sparkling waters in fetters of ice. He waved an unseen wand, and lo! the rugged surface of the earth was clothed in dazzling white. The birds, all save a hardy few, fled southward with affrighted cry before his frosty breath, while man, proud man, whose puny hands essayed to subdue a continent, bowed stubbornly to his yoke.

To Aimée, the approach of the winter season was always a time of dread, for it meant the cessation in a great measure of her active outdoor existence, and in its stead days of irksome duress in the house before the drifted streets could be made passable for even her youthful vigor. This year it brought increased bitterness to her anxious heart.

When, seated before the great fireplace, she heard the whirling of the snow against the panes and the growling of the wind as it strove vainly to descend the chimney, her thoughts wandered afar off and she saw in the blazing logs, not graceful air-castles aglow with maiden fancies, but, rather, a company of brave men, stumbling resolutely on through the deepening snow, facing undauntedly the stinging blast and the darkness of night. And later when she bowed her head upon her tiny *prie-dieu* she besought the protection of the God of battles, who was also the God of storms, for her lover, who perhaps at that moment was braving unknown dangers and suffering untold hardships.

The Governor, too, went about his daily duties weighed down with his burden of cares, not the least of which was his solicitude for Raoul. The same ardor that had imbued the life-purpose of the father, he could now behold thrilling and vibrating in the heart of the son. Many times did he bitterly reproach himself for sending Raoul on this winter expedition against the New England colonies, fearing lest the youth might succumb to cold and privation, rather than that he should fall in battle.

Meager reports were received of the fortunes of the war-party. After varying success they finally went into winter quarters in a strongly fortified position, awaiting the first oncoming of

spring, that would enable them to make a succession of onslaughts upon the enemy. Twice during the winter did the Governor hear of Raoul; both times a mere mention of his gallantry in the dispatches of the commanding officer. Armand, who had joined the expedition so as to be near his friend, managed to send one brief letter to Aimée, in which he reported Raoul well. Aimée was at first a little piqued at her lover's silence, but the Governor readily understood it to be but a part of Raoul's plan to keep himself entirely separated from his friends until he could return a new man, and point to the record of his achievements as proof of his regeneration.

Many an evening was spent before the fire by the old man and his ward talking of Raoul, and surmising as to his welfare and return. And often when conversation flagged and the resounding bell of the great clock warned them repeatedly of the passing of the hours, they still sat in contemplative silence watching the life of the dying embers fade into blackness, the Governor dreaming of past glories, while Aimée, with open eyes, dreamed only of the future.

One evening, after the Governor had slipped into his warm seat before the fire, he turned to his companion with a smile:

"I am late, little pigeon," he said in a joyful tone, "but I bring you good news. I was called

to the bedside of a dying man, one of Raoul's former associates, Monsieur Gaudais. Poor fellow, his love of liquor has brought him to an untimely end. As soon as he learned that he would surely die, he told his confessor that he must see me at once. I found him weighed down with a secret he felt it necessary to divulge before partaking of the holy sacrament. In the presence of witnesses, he dictated and signed a confession that explains in detail the mysterious intrigues of Gaspard Roguin and Madame Duvivier, whose history, as I learned from Paris, was none too savory, in their efforts to ruin Raoul. You see, *ma chérie*, you were right when you believed in your lover's innocence in the face of a remarkable chain of circumstantial evidence, and compelled me to pardon him in spite of the judgment of the Council."

Aimée gave a low cry of delight at these words as she flung her arms about the old man's neck, while her eyes glistened with tears of joy.

"But that is not all, *ma petite*," continued the Governor. "His confession further disclosed the fact that fraudulent methods were used by Gaspard Roguin in play, whereby Raoul lost his money and estate. This furnishes me with legal means of restoring to him all his property, so that he will be no longer the penniless soldier he believes himself to be."

For reply there was a convulsive sob, and he felt the warm tear-drops on his cheek.

“Tut, tut! For shame!” he exclaimed tenderly, “this is no time for grief, but rather thankfulness to *le bon Dieu* for the goodness He has vouchsafed to us all,” and his fatherly hand stroked soothingly the bowed head. A moment later a grief-stricken voice whispered in his ear, “It is not that, Père Philippe; I am truly thankful, believe me. But now, now my own riches have lost their value. I cannot help Raoul as I had hoped to do; he will no longer need me.”

The winter dragged its dreary length until it seemed interminable. At last one morning Aimée was awakened early by bird-notes outside her window, and she took courage. But the most youthful of all the seasons quickly retreated with true feminine capriciousness, as though fearful of being too forward, and snow and ice once more reigned supreme. A few weeks of alternate freezing and thawing followed, until at last the great river, after much struggle and many groans, broke its icy bonds, and the lately imprisoned waters gleamed joyfully in the bright sunshine. The snow, too, disappeared before its ardent touch, and soon both men and nature rejoiced again in the warm embrace of spring.

Word arrived of the partial success of the expedition, and the probability of its early return,

due to the loss of a great number of men from wounds or sickness and the rumored approach of an overwhelming force of English. This was, indeed, good news to the apprehensive heart of Aimée de Marsay, and it beat with a strange delight as she realized that the time of her disquietude and foreboding was nigh past. Each day as she walked on the ramparts her gaze wandered down the river in fond hope of catching a glimpse of the returning fleet of canoes, and as she turned away in disappointment a voice within her whispered softly, counseling patience. Late one afternoon, as her eyes scanned again the long stretch of water with a look of mingled weariness and longing, she gave a little gasp of delight as she beheld a tiny, black dot just rounding a distant point. With breathless interest she watched; another speck appeared, and then another, until she could count a dozen, and knew that the long-wished-for day had come. Running to the Château, her tremulous voice resounded through the empty rooms: "Père Philippe, Père Philippe, they are coming!" The Governor, just rousing from a nap, started up in surprise. "Impossible!" he exclaimed, "I do not look for them for two days yet." At this moment a soldier appeared and with a stiff military salute announced that the returning expedition had been sighted.

Together they repaired to the rampart and stood, the old man's arm affectionately encircling his fair ward, watching with absorbing interest the swift approach of the flotilla of tiny craft. Nearer and nearer they drew, until finally the eager eyes of the watchers caught the glint of the sun on the swiftly moving paddles, and the first soft breeze of evening wafted to them the sound of men's voices singing as bravely and light-heartedly as when they had set out so many weary months before. The Governor viewed them with swelling breast and proudly flashing eye, which gave way to a troubled look and a deep sigh as he counted their number, and discovered that, whereas a hundred canoes had left Quebec, but fifty were returning. On through the gathering dusk they came and finally, when the darkness hid them from view, the two still stood listening to the cheers of the soldiers and the welcoming cries of the excited populace, gathered at the landing place in the Lower Town. At last the Governor led his companion into the Château. "Another hour, and we shall have Raoul with us again. In the meantime, *ma petite*, you must eat."

Joy as well as sorrow can destroy the most robust appetite. The old man made but a sorry pretense of eating, while Aimée made no effort at all, but chattered away in her excess of happiness, keeping a listening ear meanwhile for the

first sound of the expected visitor. Suddenly she stopped talking as she heard a heavy tread in the adjoining room. Her heart stood still an instant in expectancy, when the door opened, and Armand, with his handsome countenance darkened somewhat by exposure, stood before them. Aimée uttered a cry of glad recognition and running to him seized his arm, while the Governor, rising more tardily from his chair, grasped the other, and both uttered in one voice their welcome at seeing him return. The good fellow reddened with pleasure as the Governor led him to the table and forced him to sit down, while Aimée, without waiting to call a servant, prepared a plate full of tempting food and placed it before him beside a glass filled from the Governor's own decanter. The young man gave a sigh of intense satisfaction as he surveyed the good things, and murmured: "Begging your Excellency's pardon, but this is the first civilized food I have seen since I left Quebec."

"Fall to, then, like the gallant soldier that you are," was the kindly reply; "or we shall overwhelm you with a score of questions, the answers to which will prevent you from enjoying your feast."

"I have had occasion more than once since leaving you to fight and eat at the same time. Why should I not eat and talk as well? What

is your first question? But stop," he continued, as he turned a mischievous glance on Aimée, "you need not ask it. He is alive and well, and has covered himself with glory, and will be here as soon as his duties permit him." The girl blushed deeply at his friendly thrust, and her confusion increased as he went on with a sly laugh: "You wonder, perhaps, why he is not here instead of me, and are just a little disappointed at his delay. Perhaps he felt a delicacy in coming to the Governor before the commander of the expedition had appeared at the Château to make his official visit to His Excellency. I had no such scruples, but allowed my personal feelings full sway, so came at once without regard to military etiquette. But then, unlike Raoul, I am no soldier-hero."

"And how did our young friend acquit himself? He was worthy of his illustrious father and his European training, I hope?" queried the Governor, trying vainly to conceal his eagerness to learn all of Raoul's experiences.

"Magnificently!" was the reply. "What a splendid soldier he is! He set an example to the men that aroused them to fight like tigers, better far than a dose of brandy and gunpowder would have done. He first won their admiration by his brave and gallant actions, then their enthusiastic devotion by his thoughtfulness for their safety. He never ordered those under him to go where

he was unwilling to lead them. When they were sick or wounded, he visited them, and shared his own wine and food with the sufferers. Were he to command them to follow him into the jaws of Death they would rush to obey him with a cheer. He will yet be another Condé, a Turenne, a Saxe."

The Governor smiled and rubbed his hands with pleasure as he muttered, "I knew it, I knew it."

The three then adjourned to the Governor's room, where Armand, now fairly launched upon a full account of his friend's exploits, held his audience of two spellbound with delight at his hearty praise. While they were conversing a servant appeared and announced that the commander of the expedition was come to see the Governor. Word was given for him to enter, when the door opened and Raoul de Chatignac stood alone upon the threshold.

Aimée's surprise was so great at this unexpected apparition that she was speechless, and could only gaze at the stalwart figure of her lover in open-eyed amazement. Armand watched her with a smile of suppressed delight. The Governor was the first to rally from his astonishment, and after returning his salute, addressed the young man with mock gravity:

"Welcome back, Lieutenant Raoul de Chati-

gnac. Pray overlook our surprise, for we had expected the entrance of your commander."

"He is before you," he replied with some embarrassment. Throwing aside his dignity he rushed upon the bewildered Governor and embraced him heartily, then approached Aimée and seized her hand, which he kissed repeatedly. No words were spoken on either side, for in the language of love the eye is a more facile organ of speech than the tongue, and far more eloquent.

Armand meanwhile was chuckling with delight. At last, unable to contain himself longer, he burst into a merry shout:

"Was I not correct, *mon amie*, when I said he was unwilling to approach the Governor before the commanding officer had done so? You see it was a physical impossibility, for they are one and the same. In the last skirmish before we turned our faces northward, our old leader fell, mortally stricken, and Raoul, our Raoul, was unanimously chosen by his fellow officers to lead them on the homeward march; not an easy task, I assure you, for any commander. The wisdom of their choice was proven by the orderliness of our return, instead of an ignominious retreat as it would have been had other than our friend been chosen. Did I not warn you we would see him a General yet, perhaps ordered across the sea to be made a *Maréchal* of France?"

“A truce upon thy praises, *mon cher* Armand; I am satisfied to return, thanks to my father’s invincible sword, not a hero, but a man once more.”

“A man indeed!” was the Governor’s glad reply. “Gaudais made a full confession on his death-bed of the plot to involve you in ruin. He also confessed to Roguin’s cunning trickery at play whereby he won your possessions. I am, therefore, able to return to you your patrimony intact. Lieutenant Liotot has never been heard from since that dreadful night at La Maison Sombre. Rumor has it that he has gone to take up the life of the outlawed *coureurs-de-bois*. Berthier, because of heavy losses at play, blew out his brains. Thus have your enemies been brought low by the hand of God.”

“*Grâce à Dieu!*” was Raoul’s fervent exclamation. Then, taking advantage of the animated conversation arising between the Governor and Armand regarding the recent campaign, he drew near to the corner where Aimée sat, strangely silent and abashed.

“Come, *mon amie*,” he said tenderly, “have you no words of welcome for me?”

“So great a hero-warrior, flushed with his victories, I fear would not miss my feeble voice in the loud chorus of praise arising on all sides to greet his home-coming,” and Aimée dropped her

eyes demurely as she carefully studied the rug at her feet.

“Your voice, however feeble, would be heard above the loudest cheers of the multitude. I would rather hear its friendly welcome than the highest commendations of the King in the presence of the entire Court of France. But if my words are powerless to melt you, let this dumb thing, this silken knot of blue plead for me. See how faded it is; that speaks of cold and dampness, rivers forded, snowdrifts used for a resting place. See how discolored; that tells of bleeding wounds, gained in the thickest of the fight for King and Colony. I have worn it constantly here above my heart that it might inspire its every beat and strengthen my arm and brain for deeds worthy of my love for you. In the hour of conflict it has spurred me on to greater efforts to atone for the folly of the past. Through the cold, lonely watches of the night, it has whispered of a glorious day with you for sun to banish darkness; of a calm, peaceful twilight with you, my evening star, to guide, refresh, sustain. Ah! Aimée, my joy and my desire, let me tell you——”

The reserve of the young girl disappeared before the sight of the love token. Gradually her eyes lifted until they rested, with a look that only one man in all the world could fathom, upon that man's earnest countenance. For one glad in-

stant she felt the flood-tide of his loving eloquence surge round about her until it threatened to engulf her unresisting spirit in its depths. Suddenly rallying her strength she put out her hand interruptingly, and murmured faintly: "Not now; not here."

"If you were at the old mossy stone, my love, early on the morrow, beside the brook where you last made me your knight, I should have a story to tell, one you have never heard, one that I fain would have you hear——" Just then the Governor called to him, with a twinkle in his eye: "Come, Monsieur le Capitaine, let me share in the secrets you two are whispering."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

THE LAST, WHICH IS STRICTLY PERSONAL

BRIGHT with all the splendor of its new birth dawned the spring morning. Crowned with the glory of love's own radiance did Aimée de Marsay fare forth to meet her lover. A calm, peaceful joy was in her heart, a joy without fear or hesitation, that suffused itself throughout her entire being until every fiber tingled with its gentle stimulus. The horse she rode neighed and whinnied as though in glad secret sympathy with her happy errand, while mating birds from every bush or budding twig caroled forth in free, liquid notes their joyful greeting. Never before had life seemed half so sweet; never before had dawned so blissful a day; never before had the great mother-heart of Nature throbbed so tumultuously with its message of springtime joy.

When Aimée reached her destination she dismounted, and after tying her horse, approached the mossy stone. To her surprise she found that Raoul had been there before her, for on the rock

lay a huge bunch of dark red blossoms still sparkling with dew, and about them was tied the faded blue ribbon that had been his companion during the perils of the last few months. Nestling among the flowers she discovered a note, which she hastily opened, her fingers shaking with a strange tremulousness, and beheld in Raoul's familiar writing these lines:

Take a message to my loved one hidden deep amid your petals,
Where none but she can find it, none but she can read aright;
A message precious, golden, from my heart's most cherished
treasure,
Whose answer, long awaited, thrills my soul with strange delight.

Go tell her that I love her, that my heart is longing ever
For the tender telltale pressure of her dainty finger-tips.
Yes, tell her all my story in a whisper perfume-laden,
As you blush a deeper crimson when your petals touch her
lips.

Tears of happiness fell from her eyes and mingled with the dew of the freshly-picked blossoms as she buried her face among them. A flood of supreme delight overwhelmed her for a moment. The Past was gone, gone with its weary hours of anxious fears, of loneliness, of hidden danger and alarm. The glorious Present was hers, and the Future, redolent with hope and joy, symbolized by these flowers—her first betrothal gift. At length a muffled sound recalled

her, and, raising her head, she looked through the golden haze that seemed to fill the air about her, enveloping all nature in its resplendent light, and beheld her lover riding down the leafy glade to meet her.

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