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IN TREATY WITH HONOR

A Romance of Old Quebec.

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CHAPTER XX.

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING HAVE.

A few days after this occurrence, I received a letter from Lord Durham, secretary of the war office, in which he was sent to England on a ship that had brought out military stores to Canada, the Royal Adelaide. A detachment of soldiers inactivated home were to go at the same time. From this hour, whenever I went on the ramparts, I alternately watched the wharf where the vessel was being laden with her new cargo, and turning my eyes to the heavens, prayed for rain.

I had made a small hollow in the top of the parapet wall by picking out a piece of the cement. On the fourteenth of October, when I went out as usual, I had the last details of our plan written on a scrap of paper and a letter to Jaquette telling her that if we were unable to get out of the fortress by the end of the week I must needs sail away. I observed Jaquette on the promenade with two ladies. As they turned, my heart seemed to stop beating, for one of the demoiselles was Jaquette herself.

When they came nearer she smiled, but betrayed by no sign that we were other than strangers. Her escort looked fixedly at me. In reply to his unspoken question I warily held up the bit of paper for an instant, and having made sure he followed it with his eyes, deposited it and the letter in the cavity in the wall and covered it with a piece of mortar. We were standing with our faces toward the city; thus the sentinels could not perceive the by-play. Then I sauntered around carelessly. But before my half-hour of exercise was over, I perceived that the young man had possessed himself of the communications. The next day I found his answer in the same place.

"The Royal Adelaide will not sail for two days yet," it said. "And if all else fails, the ship shall be delayed longer. From the appearance of the clouds we may expect a storm to-night. Your friends will be at the appointed spot, as they have been every night for four weeks."

When I had contrived to read the note, I looked toward the glacis beyond the ditch. There lay Droulet on the grass, with Jaquette's dog beside him. I signalled to him with my handkerchief, as was previously agreed. He glanced up at the sky, smiled, and turning, looked toward the mountains of Maine.

"Perfectly understood," I said to myself. "To-night we shall either be free or dead men."

Ten minutes later, the sergeant coming to me said, "He who does not go indoors now, sir, will get a wet jacket."

"Alas!" I answered. "Yet I should like after all to get wet to the skin to-night, just to see how it would feel."

The rain now began in good earnest. The sergeant stayed with us during supper in order to carry Sutherland's sinner when it should be ready. As Chuluis was leaving I bade him good-night, adding joyously—

"You are not put out with me, sergeant, for calling you Sutherland's aide-de-camp?"

"Humph, I would rather be his hangman," he retorted surlily. "For fifty pounds I would hang the whole lot of you."

"Not me, sergeant, surely not me?" "Yes, you as well as any of the rest."

"Ah, thank you. Good-night again, sergeant."

I laughed aloud, but as he closed the door and locked it after him, I shook my fist at him. "Rascal," I muttered, "that speech of yours has cured me of any sympathy I had for you because of the pickle you will be in to-morrow."

Three other men, Culver, Hull and Parker, having decided to go with my comrade and me, we agreed to try to get away early. Each man made up a small packet of clothing. Ramon and I rolled our cloaks lengthwise, so that we could take them through the space between bars. We each put on a double set of underclothes and stockings; our boots were rolled in our coats. This arranged, we distributed the rest of our belongings among the men who elected to remain. I also gave them all the money I had, to buy the little necessities with which I had been accustomed to provide them.

When the sentinel was changed at eight o'clock, we had agreed upon the part that each man going was to take in the carrying out of the plan, and the route each was to take.

"If we can be ready in time, and this sentry is a good natured fellow, we would better go during his guard," I whispered to the others.

"It was I, sir," replied the culprit, apologetically. "It is outrageous to cause such a disturbance after the gun has been fired too," I said crossly. "Come, men, get to your beds. It is time to stop your carrying on."

The task was over, I knew. But I kept the sentry engaged in conversation until the bar could be so replaced that its loose condition would not be observed without close inspection.

Our lights were out and all was quiet when the relief came. The new sentinel was an old soldier. He remained a little while in the porch before the door, glad of the shelter from the wind. I went to the window, opened the sash, and called to him. He came out.

"Ah," I said, pretending to recognize him, "is that you? How are you to-night?"

"Well, sir, thank you."

"Sentinel," I continued, "one of my men has a severe cold and I want to light a pipe. Indeed, a taste of it would do you no harm this wild night. Will you please search outside for a few chips to kindle the blaze?"

"Certainly, sir, but I fear they will be too wet to burn," he replied, as he laid his musket inside the porch and began to pick up a few bits of wood.

"Thank you, I am sorry to trouble you, sentinel," I declared as he handed them through the bars.

I busied myself, talked to my imaginary sick man, got the fire burning, and returned to the window.

"You see, sentinel, I want to do all I can for my poor fellows while I am still with them," I said.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "We hear you are to be sent away in the morning."

"So soon? How did you learn this?" "Have you not been informed of it, sir?"

"No, indeed."

He forthwith proceeded to tell me the news had come up from the guardroom. Having listened in silence, I seated myself and ostensibly forgot I had promised him a draught of good liquor. At last arousing myself, I exclaimed—

"Well, well, my friend, since I must go in the morning there is all the more reason why we should drink to-night. Will you have old Jamaica? Or stay, I have some fine London porter. The doctor advised me to get it because I have not been well."

"I'll take the porter, if you please, sir," he chuckled.

I brought a bottle to the window and began to cut the wire, still talking to him.

"Captain Rycorski, please hand me a glass."

Ramon brought one, holding it in such a manner that the soldier could not see the few drops of laudanum he had put into it. I poured a draught for the sentry and handed it to him. My comrade brought a second glass, and taking a smaller quantity for myself, I wished the sentry good luck.

ready. One of those who had elected to stay took my place with the sentry and twisted his arm around the fellow's neck as mine had been.

"What am I to do if he makes any noise?" he asked.

"Choke him, but don't kill him," I said, with no waste of words.

It was now my turn. But black, being larger than the others I could not get through the narrow space. Drawing back I stripped off my coat and waistcoat, and tried again.

Ah, this time I was able to force myself through, but not without compressing and scraping my chest and shoulders. Leaving the waistcoat, I carried my coat in my teeth over the fence. I descended easily by the aid of the rope of sheets. The other men were waiting for me. Noiselessly we skirted along the walls, keeping within the shadow of the lamps that were over the ditch. Fortunately for us they shed only a faint light.

The rain was now only a drizzle, but the sound of the water pouring down from the conductors into the tubs placed to catch it, and the moaning of the wind, covered the sound of our footsteps. One by one we moved along toward the sheltering eaves of a small cook-house, our first rendezvous. All had reached except Parker. Unluckily, in coming around, he stumbled against a tin pail that had been placed under a spout to catch the water.

"Merciful Heavens, we are done for," exclaimed Ramon.

The clatter of course attracted the attention of the sentinel on the wall above us. As we pressed close to the wall, we were peering down through the darkness at the very spot where we were crouching.

"Who goes there?" he challenged.

We held our breath and remained motionless, expecting every moment to be discovered. Again he cried out, and still a third time.

This last challenge was answered by the guard just emerging from under the gate where the guard-house was. Happily for us, at that minute they were coming to relieve the different posts, and the noise made by Parker in upsetting the bucket was ascribed to them.

They came on, changed sentinels at the first post and continued up the hill actually passing within a few feet of where we were. Though the night was dark, from the glimmer of the lantern carried by the drummer boy we saw their path. They were buttoned up in their watch-coats, and wore tall bearskin caps. They relieved the man above and returned. As they passed us again, we crouched lower. One of our men had tied his pocket in a white handkerchief. Fearing it might be seen, I leaned forward and covered it with the skirt of my coat. The rounds went on, pursuing their way outside the enclosure of our prison.

We were still so near the point of our escape, and so short a time had elapsed that I could hear the man we had left at the window pulling in the sheets from the fence, and the low voice of another rousing the soldier whom we had dragged. Surely these sounds, so loud to our ears rendered acute from anxiety, must be heard by the rounds. They, however, having no suspicion, and on our hands and knees, making a circuit as we passed the storehouses, in order to keep in the darkness beyond the sperm-oil lights. Again Parker made a slight noise, and a sentinel moved down towards us. We were indeed near discovery, and lay prone on the ground.

"See more, almost as if by a special providence, we were saved. Dogs were always present, and the sentry, though we apparently mistook us for some of these homeless animals, for when he had wellnigh come up to us; he wheeled about, paced back over his beat, and entered his sentry-box."

A third time we moved forward as cautiously as ever Indian stole upon his foe. At last we were in the centre of the parade and opposite to the magazine. All of a sudden, danger was close by; and it came from an unexpected direction.

From the darkness behind us broke a sharp call. "Who goes there?"

Down on our faces we lay, every man of us. Some one came running our way, passed us, and made across the parade to the officers' quarters.

"It is an alarm," Ramon whispered to me. "The man came direct from our prison and has gone to the adjutant."

"No, it is not," I maintained, although I really did not know; but the courage of our party must be kept up at all hazards. "I'll wager it is the sergeant who has rooms next to ours. His child is ill. Perhaps he has gone for the doctor. Keep cool, my lads, there are now only three sentinels between us and the main walls. It will not be so difficult to pass them as it was to get by the others."

and halt, and so on. In this way I had sent forward all except Parker, whose nervousness prevented him from hearing my directions. I encouraged, flattered, threatened him, but to no purpose. At last, laying hold of him, I dragged him up to the others and gave him into Ramon's care.

We marched again and halted, all except Parker who kept on. Instead of going in the direction agreed upon, however, he ran toward the sentinel, who hearing the slight noise he made, promptly called out the challenge. Of course he received no answer.

"Onward," I whispered to the others. "Keep to the left, pass the old telegraph station. (This was merely a signal post rendered practicable by Morse only the year before, that is, in 1837), and come around to the flagstaff. I will try to find that fool Parker."

"Do you think he means to betray us?" asked Hull. "He has acted strangely ever since we started."

"No. Sickness and imprisonment have told upon him. He does not know what he is doing."

His whereabouts was soon made plain to us, for we heard a crash at the woodpile and knew he had fallen there. To go to him now was impossible without discovery. The challenge was taken up by the sentinel at the officers' mess, and the only course left to me was to go round the telegraph building to the right side, near the officers' stables.

The sentinel there had, I knew, nothing but side arms, and I intended to keep far enough away from him to prevent his using them.

I stopped short, unfastened my cloak, put on my cap, which from its gold band and its shape resembled those worn by the officers, and boldly walked forward. I had nearly passed the guard without being noticed, when suddenly he cried out: "Halt! Who goes there?"

"Officer of the guard," I said in a low tone.

"Advance, officer of the guard, and give the countersign."

As I have said, we had not the countersign, because the prison rounds had not made their visit before our departure. But it was generally an odd number and in the "teens." There was nothing for me but to make a guess at it. Putting my hand to my mouth, I said, "Teens," leaving him to fill in the blank as he fancied he caught the sound. The ruse succeeded.

"Pass, officer of the guard; all's well," he bawled.

I passed, made a circuit, and gained the ramparts. The rest were waiting for me, and my comrade ran forward.

"Our friends are not here," he said in desperation.

"Impossible," I cried. "Have you given the signal?"

"Yes, but they do not answer."

I ran along to the different points to see if those who had promised to help us were below; but no flash of a light came to us, through the darkness beneath our feet. Meanwhile Parker among the wood was making noise enough to arouse the whole garrison, or so it seemed to us.

"What is to be done?" queried Ramon.

"Cut down the halcyons of the flag, with rope we can descend the wall," I cried.

leap from the wall into the ditch. If taken, we should be promptly executed. Nothing worse than death lay before us.

"I will go first," I said. "If I am killed, you may attempt the feat or not as you please. I am the heaviest among you. If I succeed, there will be all the greater chance for you."

Mounting the wall, I swung down over it and for an instant hung on my hands. I let go. During the next moment all the acts of my life seemed to pass before me, as a man's deeds and misdeeds are said to pass before his mind when he is dying. Providence did not desert this to be my last hour. I lighted on my feet on the solid rock; then I fell back on my head and lay for a moment stunned. I thought every bone in my body was broken.

"Are you hurt?" The question came anxiously from my comrade on the height above.

"I am alive. Throw down your cloaks and I will spread them out, so that you may not come down with full force upon this accursed rock, which is a little harder than even a Tory's heart," I answered, writhing with pain. In striving to get upon my feet, I found I had sprained my ankle, the consequence of the folly of bracing myself as I fell.

The others threw down their cloaks and packets. I arranged them in a heap, and, in a low tone, directed Culver at what point to let himself down. He fell, as I had done, and the blood rushed from his nose and mouth. One of his legs was broken. Our plight did not deter Hull and Rycorski. Hull jumped a few feet to the right where Culver had dropped and he was so fortunate as to alight on the pile of cloaks.

"Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "What a jump!"

I could not but laugh at him, although we were in so serious a predicament. Ramon also dropped on the pile and toppled over upon us. He, too, was unhurt. He had cut off the end of the flag rope and brought it with him. There were about fourteen or fifteen feet more of the cliff to descend.

Hull and Ramon held the rope and I slid down. At one extremity of the ditch and against the bastion, we found a piece of cedar-post which helped us much at this juncture. Culver managed to follow me. Then Hull held the rope alone and Ramon came down, Hull following after having tied the rope to the post.

They clambered over a wall at the base of the descent—Culver and I were already on the other side of it. He could not walk, so they helped him up the ascent to the glacis on the farther side of the ditch. I was able to crawl along unaided, dragging my leg after me. The wall was faced with dry stone and, by thrusting our hands into the interstices and using knees and feet—I could only trust to one foot—we reached the summit.

"At last we may rest a few moments," I ejaculated as we threw ourselves upon the ground.

From our position on the height we witnessed the search made for us. Lighted torches were flashed into every nook and corner of the ramparts, while we sat opposite to them with only the width of the fifty foot ditch between us.

But we had no time to waste in moralizing over the matter. Taking off my cravat I tightly bound it around my ankle, and we resumed our way. Hull carried near Culver, and I hopped along leaning on Ramon's shoulder. From where we were, there was a descent to a natural terrace used as a public promenade. We gained it, reached a turnstile, passed through it and found ourselves in one of the streets of the town.

CHAPTER XXI. WANDERERS.

We were now outside the palisaded wall of the old chateau. From the ramparts, we had often seen ladies walking in this garden and knew it to be connected with the residence of the governor-general.

"We would better separate," I suggested as we halted before it. "If the town watch encountered four men, two of them almost disabled, they will ask unpleasant questions."

It was agreed that Hull and Culver should hide in the garden while my comrade and I would try to find our Canadian friends. If successful we would send back for our comrades. If they heard nothing from us after waiting a reasonable time, they must needs shift for themselves. We then made a pact that, if taken, nothing that could be done to us would induce us to reveal anything of their future plans, nor would they betray us.

"God keep you," I exclaimed, as I grasped the hands of those who were to remain behind.

When Ramon had bidden them a hopeful adieu, he also, he and I descended the terrace. At the residence of the receiver-general the sentinel mistook our cloaks and caps for those of officers, and presented arms to us. We politely returned the salute in military fashion, and passed on.

direct me to the house of some good French Canadian? You are, I presume, patriots?"

"That we are not," said the first man, tersely. "And since we are two and two, you shall go no further. We must turn you over to the authorities, who are already searching the city for you."

"H'm, you must, eh?" I cried, thrusting my hand into my breast.

He thought I had a weapon, and not being armed himself changed his tactics.

"Oh, have nothing to do with detaining them—they are desperate men," implored the lady.

Willingly enough to get out of their dilemma by yielding to her entreaties, they directed us to the gate, and proceeded on their way.

We did not immediately follow the route they indicated, fearing that in spite of a promise they made they might betray us. Crossing a market-place we came at last to one of the gates of the town. A party of soldiers stood about it listening to a distant commotion and wondering what it was all about. Not daring to pass them, we made a detour, creeping along in the shadow of the sloping roofs of the houses. In this way we reached the wicket and slipped through it unperceived. Scarcely were we outside the gate, when the voice of the sentinel rang out in challenge. A party of military were approaching in double quick time.

"Rounds, sergeant, turn out! It is the rounds, turn out!" cried one of the loitering soldiers.

We hid in a clump of bushes by the wayside until the rounds had passed. The party was, we afterwards learned, a posse of men hot in pursuit of us. Such a detachment had been sent to every gate of the city to prevent our leaving it. But we were too alert for them. They had actually shut us out, and we had no wish to be shut in again. I shall always remember that the way by which we came out was called Hope Gate.

"Whether the next man we meet be friend or foe we must compel him to take us to a place of safety," I declared.

Before long we descried a youth coming toward us. In his hand he swung a lantern and, doubtless to beguile the loneliness of the way, he was whistling blithely.

"He is English," muttered Ramon.

"No. British ever whistled that air," I answered. "He is a French Canadian."

The tune was that of a French ballad, sweet to me because I had first heard it trod by Jaquette at St. Denis. While I listened now, the words of the old song came to me involuntarily, as she had sung them.

When the young fellow got opposite to us, I called to him. For an instant he wavered. Then he crossed to where we were and held up his light boldly to look at us, keeping himself in shadow. Nevertheless, as I peered at him, I uttered an involuntary cry, while he, on his part, recoiled limply, and the lantern fell to the ground. For the face that looked forth at me from the disguise of the pulled down cap and the turned-up collar of a student of Laval College, was the face of Jaquette.

"My God, Nial, is it you or your ghost?" she faltered, almost fainting from excitement, joy, and fear. "Ramon, dear friend! God be thanked, you are both free!"

"Jaquette, what madness is this? You alone here, and at this hour?"

"A boy is safe anywhere and at any time," my dear love replied with a catch in her voice. "Oh, Nial, did you think I could stay calmly at home while you and Ramon were struggling for liberty and life? Droulet, Monsieur Beaufait—the other friend who volunteered to help you—and I watched at the appointed spot until long after the hour you named. But you did not come and they concluded you had been unable to pass the guards. In vain I entreated them to wait a little longer. They said you would not make the attempt to-night, and they took me back to Madame St. Germain's. She is not living in Quebec, and I am staying with her. Louis Droulet is her nephew. But I could not be content, so I slipped around to the kitchen, called Pascal, who was dozing over the fire waiting for any orders I might give him and, with him for a protector, I stole away again, hoping, praying that in some way I might be able to help you. Pascal is just behind; and we thought it less noticeable to travel thus, and I wished to let him know all was well."

"My brave darling!" I cried. "Mademoiselle, I shall never forget your thought of me," exclaimed Ramon with passionate earnestness.

Pascal, Dr. Nelson's old servant, who it seems had accompanied Jaquette in all her wanderings, now came up. He carried a stout club and at sight of us sprang forward ready to engage us for crossing the path of his lady.