

"Freemason two years," replied the Indian, holding up two fingers illustratively. "Made a mason down Albany. Mason good."

"Horo, Rouelle," said one of the officers, "if you are, as we suspect, to have command of this expedition, your chief ally is a brother."

"A brother what?" questioned Rouelle, with surprise, who up to that time had not heeded the conversation.

"A brother mason, so he leads us to believe."

"My friends, is this not strange?" asked Rouelle.

"Not at all," answered the Jesuit, "many of the chiefs, but more especially those of the Iroquois, have received masonic degrees, and although our holy church looks with disfavor on your fraternity, yet I must acknowledge that it has been the means of saving many lives, and robbed many stakes of victims whom the Indians would have otherwise sacrificed."

One by one the officers and savages retired, and the Jesuit and Rouelle were alone.

"Father," said the officer, "I deem it probable that the honor of leading this expedition will be conferred on me. This is the third time a dangerous, but for that reason a welcome, service of this character has been confided to me. You once expressed gratitude to me, for what you termed favors received when you were in France, from members of my family in years gone by."

"It is true, my son," said the silvery-toned priest, "and the recollections are now vivid in my mind. Why do you speak on this subject?"

"Because circumstances have arisen which make it necessary that I should ask of you protection for one whom I hold most dear."

"Mademoiselle de Blonville!" said the priest, with a slight start.

"The same. You were Marie's confessor, and to your guidance will she commit herself. I was about asking leave of absence in order to conduct her myself; should I do so now, the act might be construed into a desire to avoid duty."

"Where is she to go?"

"I forgot, Father, that your absence had prevented your knowing the occurrences which have transpired. We are betrothed; Colonel de Blonville gave his consent to our union before he departed. He is now on the verge of death. His dying wish is, that Marie should close his eyes. He is at Fort Jamonville, near the St. John's river."

"A dangerous place, my son; It is beyond St. Jean, and not far from the line of march which must be taken by Putnam. The garrison, too, is small, and should the enemy attack it, must fall. Look at the map, and you can judge of the danger to one so young and beautiful, traveling thus far with but my slight protection."

"Your protection alone," replied the officer, "is greater than that of an escort. Who would harm a woman when under the guidance of such as you? As for danger, Marie is a soldier's daughter, and devotedly loves her father. No fear or danger can deter her from attempting to reach his bedside. The messenger who brought the news of Colonel de Blonville's illness, would have conducted Marie, but he is now in the hospital, prostrate with fever; I cannot leave, an escort cannot be spared, and thus we are left to ask you for assistance. Father will you do this kindness?"

"I will."

As the priest assented, a chill appeared to creep over him.

"When are we to set out?"