

## THE OLD HOME ON THE SEIGNIORY.

We lived together in the old house on the Seignior, as far back as I can remember, Madame ma mere, ma tante Babette and I, Lucille. All the year round, no matter if the great snow piles filled the windows, and the wind howled in through the cracks, or if the sun shone hot and the great river rolled free below the cliffs at the foot of the garden, without a thought of ice on its waves. I often wondered at which season I loved the old place best, in summer when I could follow Madame from field to barn and hear her give her orders and settle all disputes with her clear, decided voice, or ramble off at will among the sweet-smelling fir-balsams and flower-filled woods, or in winter when ma tante and I would play at shuttlecock and battle-dore up and down the hall to keep ourselves warm, or sew our long fine seams beside the fire, while she told me tales of when she and Madame were girls and of the pranks they played in their convent school in Old France, or later, of how they came to Quebec, and were the belles of the town, the beautiful Mademoiselles D'Aubigny. Of how Madame married and what a splendid gentleman my father was, how kind, how handsome, how noble. But here her stories always stopped short, and I could find out no more about my father, nor why we had left Quebec and lived on the Seignior. He could not be dead, I thought, for Madame always signed her receipts in his name and on state occasions spoke of herself as his "deputy," but I never dared question her on the subject, for her manner did not encourage what might seem idle curiosity.

She was but a little woman, was Madame, but so beautiful and dignified; and truly her word was the last upon all subjects. Even old Delima, the cook, who was so cross that she dared even to scold the squaws when they came into her kitchen and peeped into the pots to find out what was for dinner, even she was as sweet as sugar when Madame came round, and as for Monsieur le curé, when he came to visit us from Trois Rivières, he had never a word to say for himself, though Madame might contradict him flat, and I have heard him talk to Jean Baptiste till the drunken old sinner fell upon his knees and swore by all the saints in the calendar never to touch a drop of spirits in his life.

One winter evening, I remember it now distinctly, we sat together round the fire, I, a little black shadow in the corner, rejoicing in secret over a pocket full of popped corn, Madame in her arm chair, her little feet resting on an immense footstool, the firelight catching the shimmer of her gown through the folds of her lace shawl, and gleaming on the masses of brown hair, which stood high upon her forehead, her hands were folded in her lap, she never worked at woman's work, but would sit for hours thus, gazing into the fire and thinking. And ma tante beside her little work table near, her white hands fluttering to and fro over some bit of fine sewing, for she worked upon such things as well as could a cloistered nun. We had sat thus for almost an hour, when Madame suddenly broke the silence.

"Babette," she said sharply, "the child is growing up, she will be fifteen years old next year, and she has no more manners than a young colt; it is time she went to school.

When the river opens in the spring shall she go to France to school? How think you, Babette?"

"Oh! Madame," faltered ma tante, dropping her work, startled by the suddenness of the attack. "The little one, what would she do so far from home, and all alone?"

"Alone!" snapped Madame. "Babette, thou art a fool; she could not go alone; we would go with her, thou and I," then she continued more softly, almost as one who thinks herself alone: "Hast thou so soon forgotten 'La Belle France' and the convent at Versailles, our only home? Yes, Babette, with the first ship in the spring we three shall cross the ocean."

And thus, having by her speech decided her mind, Madame arose and, taking her stick and lantern, which stood ready for her at the door, prepared to go her nightly rounds. I followed her softly, dazed and excited by the splendor of the plan, and anxious to gather some further information. From window to window we went through the great winter kitchen, where a couple of belated squaws shared with the dogs the honours of the hearth. Here, all was safe. Then out through the covered porch way, and along the verandah to the front entrance. Here Madame made a pause, and I, anxious to avoid detection, slipped past her and in at the door; as I turned, I saw her little figure clearly silhouetted in the moonlight, and I heard her voice ring out clearly and passionately in the still night air:

"Rene," she said, "you may come back now, but I will not wait; the money is there just as it was when I lost it fourteen years ago. It may be I was wrong, but Babette has never known and she shall never know. We will go away, she, and I, and the child, and the place shall remain for you. Surely it is enough without us." Then she turned, and I, frightened at my part of eavesdropper, fled into the house before her.

With the next three months came such a time of bustle and excitement that it would have been hard for a stranger to recognise the old place. Our wardrobes must be replenished and set thoroughly in repair, and we had only our own resources and the scanty aid of the Trois Rivières shops to trust to. Then, too, all about the estate must be set in thorough repair and good working order, and a head steward appointed from the men about the place who must needs be coached in his various duties, and the thousand other worries attendant on a prolonged absence. But Madame was equal to the occasion; indeed, she seemed to hurry all preparations, so that when the spring found a small vessel sailing from Trois Rivières we embarked upon her in preference to one of the large Quebec ships, which would entail a tedious land or water journey with our luggage.

At the beginning of our journey all seemed propitious, crowds gathered to see us start, and though Madame was impassive I was wild with excitement. I think ma tante Babette would gladly have changed places with any of the crowd, with a chance to stay at home, even Mere Françoise was there, leaning on her crutch and shouting blessings as long as her voice reached us. We reached Quebec with good weather and my country eyes were dazzled with the seeming magnitude of its crooked little streets and crowded houses.

Surely, I thought, nowhere, even in France, can there be any place greater or more splendid than Quebec.

On leaving Quebec, however, our troubles began; high winds sprang up, driving us before them down the Gulf, and we were confined to the stuffy little cabin, where ma tante suffered dreadfully from "mal de mer," as also did I, but nothing seemed to affect Madame. Momentarily the storms increased, the motion of the little vessel as the seas struck her was fearful to us shut up in the cabin, and we feared every moment would be our last. On the fourth night after leaving Quebec we were ordered to secure any valuables upon our persons and come on deck, as the ship was helpless and was drifting to some unknown breakers. We obeyed orders and came up. Such a scene as met our eyes. We clung to each other, trembling. Torn rigging and timbers everywhere encumbered the deck, which was lighted from time to time by vivid flashes of lightning. One of the masts had gone overboard and around the stump of this we crouched. The rain fell in torrents, and in the distance we heard the dull roar of the angry breakers, towards which we drifted.

Presently—I have no idea how time passed that dreadful night—a shudder, followed by a grinding noise, ran through the ship. We had struck!

The sailors at once attempted to launch one of the boats, and a place in it was offered to us, but Madame declined, for herself and us, to venture into any new perils.

All night long we huddled together expecting each moment to find the ship go to pieces beneath us, and being too miserable to realize fully our danger. Towards morning the wind dropped somewhat and the rain ceased falling. With the first grey streaks of dawn the captain looked anxiously about to discover our position. We seemed to be wedged upon a ridge of rocks and not far distant to the southeast lay a low and desolate-looking coast which the captain supposed to be Anticosti.

The boat load which had left the ship during the night had evidently succeeded in reaching the shore, for a weak and dispirited smoke which curled up from thence attested the success of their efforts and filled us with envy.

Encouraged by this, and finding the ship in a much worse plight than he had hoped, the captain ordered the remaining boat to be launched, and, willy-nilly, we must get into it. Never, though I live to be an old woman, shall I forget the horror of that journey through the huge waves which threatened every moment to engulf us, nor yet the relief and joy when I found myself lifted by the rough sailors from the boat and deposited on shore. I cannot tell how that day passed, only that the ship broke up about noon and at night I was sheltered under some of her timbers which had come ashore and the sailors had made into a sort of lean-to against the rocks. I was too miserable to feel or care what happened. Next day, however, matters improved, the sun shone out and gave a much more cheerful tone to affairs. Some casks of provisions had come ashore and we put heart into ourselves with a goodly meal. After a slight exploration it was decided to take up our quarters on the rising ground to the north, and all who were not collecting the cargo as it came ashore