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OUR CENTENNIAL STORY.

THE BASTONNAIS.

A TALE OF THE AMERICAN INVASION OF CANADA IN 1775-76.

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

BOOK II.

THE THICKENING OF THE CLOUDS.

VI.

THE COVERED BRIDGE.

After this interview the two girls separated. Pauline was anxious to reach home in order to get information about her father. Zulma proposed driving back to Pointe-aux-Trembles. Her friend did her best to dissuade her. She pleaded that the day was too far advanced for safe travel, and entreated Zulma to postpone her departure till the following morning.

"And my old father?" objected the latter. "He will have no apprehensions. The news of the enemy's arrival will not reach him to-day." "Oh, but it will. Such news travels fast."

"But he can have no fear, knowing you to be safe with your friends in the city."

"My father has no fears about me, Pauline. He knows that I can take care of myself; but it is for himself that I am desirous of returning. He is feeble and infirm and requires my presence."

"But, my dear, consider the risk you run. The roads will be infested with these horrid soldiers, and what protection have you against them?"

For all answer the cheek of Zulma flushed, and her blue eyes gleamed with a strange light that was not defiance, but rather betokened the expectation of pleasurable excitement.

"Wait till to-morrow morning," continued Pauline, "and you can go under the shelter of some military passport. I am sure Roderick would be delighted to get you such a paper."

Zulma's lip curled with scorn, but she made no direct reply. She simply repeated her determination to go, tenderly reassuring her friend and embracing her with effusion.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the day had already considerably lowered, when Zulma's sleigh reached the outer gate of the city. The officer in charge would have prevented her from going further, but she stated her case so plainly and argued with such an air of authority, that he was obliged to yield to her wishes.

"Well," said she to herself, with a smile, "I have broken through one circle of steel. It remains to see how I will pass through the other."

She did not have long to wait. About two miles from the city, the road which she was following went down a steep hill at the foot of which flowed a little stream much swollen at this season with snow and cakes of ice. Over this stream there was a covered bridge whose entrance was very dark. As she began the descent, the gloom and solitude of the gorge rather agitated the nerves of Zulma and she stimulated her horse in order to pass through the bridge as rapidly as possible. Her eyes glanced over every point of the ravine and it was with a sigh of relief that she approached the bridge without seeing any human being. But suddenly, as the horse's hoofs touched the edge of the planked floor, the animal grew restive, tossed up his head, balanced right and left in the traces, and gave other unmistakable signs of danger ahead. Zulma attempted to urge him forward, but this only increased his terror. Her servant, a green young rustic, with more strength than courage, turned to her with consternation stamped upon his blank face, and muttered something about obeying the animal's instinct and not venturing to proceed farther.

"Jump out and see what is the matter," she exclaimed. "If you are afraid, I will do it."

The fellow slowly stepped from the vehicle, and feeling his way along the shaft, reached the horse's head where he paused and peered into the dark cavity of the bridge. He then seized the bridle and tried to lead the beast along. But the latter wrenched the bit from the driver's hand, raised his forelegs high in air, shaking the sleigh and imperilling the seat of Zulma. She, too, was about to leap forth, when her servant ran back precipitately, exclaiming:

"The Bastonnais!"

At the same moment the gleam of bayonets was seen under the arch of the bridge, two soldiers advanced into the light, and the sharp, stern summons to halt resounded through the hollow.

The servant stood trembling behind the sleigh. Zulma quietly signalled the two soldiers to approach her. They did so. She said a word to them in French, but they shook their heads. They then spoke in English, but she in turn shook her head. They smiled and she smiled. By this time, the horse, as if he appreciated the situation, having turned his head to look at the soldiers, became tranquil in his place. The servant had not half the same sense, and remained immovable behind the sleigh.

The soldiers consulted together a moment, then the elder signified to Zulma that she would have to return to the city. She replied in the same language that she must go on. They insisted with some seriousness, she insisted with a show of rising temper. The position was becoming embarrassing, when a tall figure appeared at the edge of the bridge and a loud word of command caused the soldiers to fall back. Zulma looked forward and an expression of mingled

surprise and pleasure was discernible upon her countenance. The new comer advanced to the side of the sleigh, touched his cap and bowed respectfully to its fair inmate.

"Excuse my men, mademoiselle," said he, in excellent French, "they have detained you, I perceive, but we are patrolling the roads and their orders are strict. You desire to pass out into the country?"

"If you please, sir."

"With this man?"

"Yes, he is not a soldier, but a family servant. We entered Quebec this morning before the investment, and it is absolutely necessary for me to reach my home to-night."

Zulma's tone was not that of a suppliant. Her manner showed that, as she had not feared the commands of the soldiers, so she had no favor to ask of the officer. The latter, no doubt, observed this and was not displeased thereat, for instead of giving the permission to proceed, he seemed to linger and hesitate, as if he vain would prolong the interview. Finally, he managed to introduce a link into the conversation by asking Zulma whether she did not fear to pursue her journey at that late hour, declaring that, if she did, he would be happy to furnish her with an escort. She answered laughingly that perhaps the escort itself would be the greatest danger she would be likely to encounter on the way.

"Then I will escort you myself," said the young officer with a profound bow.

Zulma thanked him, adding the assurance that she needed no protection as she anticipated no annoyance. She then called her servant to his seat beside her, and was about driving off when the loud report of a gun was heard in the direction of the city. She and the officer looked at each other.

"A stray shot," said the latter, after listening a moment. "It is nothing. You are not afraid, mademoiselle?"

"Excuse me, sir," Zulma replied, "but this is the second shot I have heard to-day. This one may mean nothing, but the first was terrible and I shall never forget it."

The officer looked at Zulma, but said nothing. "Is it possible that you do not remember it too?"

"We are so used to it, mademoiselle, that—" "The man who fired that shot is a scoundrel, and the man at whom it was fired," exclaimed Zulma, sitting upright and fixing a glowing eye upon the officer, "is a hero. Good evening, sir."

And, as if impelled by the spirit with which his mistress pronounced these words, the horse dashed forward and the sleigh plunged into the gloomy cavern of the bridge.

VII.

CARY SINGLETON.

It was Cary Singleton. He stood a moment looking in the direction of the bridge, then walked slowly away buried in thought. He was perplexed to understand the meaning of the words which the beautiful Canadian had spoken.

Which was the shot that she referred to, and who was the fortunate man whom she proclaimed a hero? At last, the suspicion flashed upon him that perhaps the young lady had witnessed the scene of that afternoon under the walls of Quebec. It was very probable, indeed, that she was one of the hundreds who had lined the ramparts at the time that the flag of truce advanced toward the gate. In that case, she may have meant the treacherous firing on the flag, and if she did, her hero must be the bearer of that flag. But this was almost too good to be true. The girl was doubtless a loyalist, and to speak as she did, if she meant as he thought, would argue either that she was a rebel at heart, or that she was actuated by higher principles of humanity than he had a right to look for in exciting and demoralizing times of war. And then could she possibly have recognized him, for it was no other than he that had borne the ill-starred flag?

This last question gave a new zest to his excitement, and he stopped short on the brow of the hill to nerve himself for a sudden resolution. A second rapid analysis convinced him that he had indeed been recognized by the lovely stranger. Her whole demeanor, her animated glance, her inflamed cheek, her gesture of agitation and her last passionate word, as he now vividly remembered them, pointed to no other conclusion. Yes, she remembered him, she knew him, and, in a moment of unguarded enthusiasm, she had expressed her admiration of him. And to be admired by such a woman! He came from a land proverbial as much for female beauty as for manly chivalry, but never had his eyes been blessed with a vision of such transcendent perfection. Every rare feature came out in full relief on his memory—the great blue eye, the broad entablature of forehead, the seductive curl of lip, the splendid carriage of head, and, above all, the magnificence of queenly form.

Cary Singleton was transported. He stormed against himself for having been a fool. Why had he not understood these things ten minutes ago as he understood them now? But he would make up for it. He would run over to his en-

campment, a few rods behind the wood which skirted the road, procure a horse, and start off in pursuit of the beautiful girl. He would learn her name, he would discover where she lived and then... and then...

But a bugle-blast startled him from his dream and shattered his resolve. It was a call to quarters for special duty. He looked up and saw great clouds of darkness roll into the valley. Alas! the day was indeed done and it was all too late. He walked grimly to camp bewailing his lost opportunity and devising all kinds of impossible schemes to recover it. As he tossed upon his cold pallet of straw that night, his dreams were of the lonely gorge, the covered bridge, the fairy apparition, and when he awoke the following morning, it was with the hope that such an adventure would not remain without a sequel. He felt that it would be a mockery of fate that he should have travelled so far through the forests of Maine and over the desert plains of the Chaudiere, suffering hunger, thirst and fatigue, and facing death in every shape, to see what he had seen, to hear what he had heard the night before, and then be denied the fruition of eye and ear forever.

It must be remembered that Cary Singleton was barely one-and-twenty years of age, and that in him the enthusiasm of youth was intensified by an exuberant vigor of health. Your wildest lovers are not the sickly sentimentalists of tepid drawing-rooms, but the rollicking giants of the open air, and the adventures of a Werther are baby trifles compared to the infinite love-scrapes which are recounted of a Hercules.

Cary Singleton came of a good stock, Maryland on the side of his father, Virginian on that of his mother. The Cary and Singleton families survive to our day, through successive generations of honor, but they need not be ashamed of their representative who figures in these humble pages. He had spent his early life on his father's estate, mingling in every manly exercise, and his latter days were passed at old Princeton, where he attained all the accomplishments suited to his station. He was particularly proficient in polite literature and the modern languages, having mastered the French tongue from many years of intercourse with the governess of his sisters. Cary had prepared himself for the law and was about entering on its practice, when the war of the Revolution broke out. He then enlisted in the corps of Virginia riflemen formed by the celebrated Captain Morgan, and proceeded to Boston to join the army of Washington, in the summer of 1775. He had not been there many weeks before the expedition to Canada was planned. Washington, who agreed with Congress as to the importance of this campaign, gave much personal attention to the organization of the invading army, and it was by his personal direction that Morgan's battalion was included in it. When the force took its final departure in September, Cary received the honor of a hearty clasp of hand and a few words of counsel from the Father of his Country, and this circumstance cheered him to those deeds of endurance and valor which distinguished his career in Canada.

VIII.

THE SONG OF THE VIOLIN.

It was the hour of midnight and all was still in the solitary cabin of Batoche. Little Blanche was fast asleep in her sofa-crib, and Velours was rolled in a torpid circle on the hearth. The fire burned low casting a faint and fitful gleam through the room. The hermit occupied his usual seat in the leather chair at one corner of the chimney. Whether he had been napping or musing it were difficult to say, but it was with a quiet, almost stealthy movement that he walked to the door which he opened, and looked out into the night. Returning, he placed a large log on the fire, stirring it with his foot till its reflection lighted one half of the apartment. He then proceeded to the alcove and drew forth from it his violin. The strings were thrummed to make sure of their accord, the heel was set in the hollow of the shoulder, and the bow executed a rapid prelude. The old man smiled as if satisfied with the cunning of his hand, and well he might, for these simple touches revealed the artist.

"What will you sing to me, to-night?" said Batoche, looking lovingly at his old brown instrument. "There has been strange thunder in the voice of the Falls all the day, and I have felt very singular this evening. I do not know what is abroad, but perhaps you will tell me."

So saying, he raised his violin to his shoulder again and began to play. At first there were slow broad notes drawn out with a long bow, then a succession of rapid sounds rippling over one another. The alternation was natural and pleasing, but as he warmed to his work, the old musician indulged in a revelry of sounds—the clash of the tempest, the murmur of the breeze, the sparkling clatter of rain drops, the monotone of lapsing water. The left hand would lie immovable on the neck and a grand unison issued from the strings like a solemn warning, then the fingers would dance backwards and forwards to the bridge and the chords vibrated in a series of short sharp echoes like the petulant cries of children. A number of ravishing melodies glided and wove into each other like the flowers of a nosegay, producing a harmonious whole of charming effect, and sweetening the very atmosphere in which they palpitated. Then the perverse old man would shatter them all by one fell sweep of his arm, causing a terrific discord that almost made his cabin lurch from its seat. For one full hour, standing there in the middle of the room, with the flickering light of the fire

falling upon his face, Batoche played on without any notable interval of rest. At the end of that time, he stopped, tightened his keys, swung his bow-arm in a circle two or three times as if to distend his muscles, and then attacked the single E string. It was there that he expected the secret which he sought. He rounded his shoulders, bent his ear close to the board, peered with his grey eyes into the serpentine fissures of the instrument, pressed his left-hand fingers nervously up and down, while his bow caressed the string in an infinite series of mysterious evolutions. The music produced was weird and preternatural. The demon that lay crouched in the body of the instrument was speaking to Batoche. Now loud as an explosion, then soft as a whisper; now shrill as the scream of a night bird, then soft as the breath of an infant, the violin uttered its varied and magical language responsive to the touch of the wizard. There were moments when the air throbbed and the room rocked with the sound, and other moments when the music was all absorbed in the soul of the performer. Finally, the old man drew himself up, threw his head backward, ran his fingers raspingly up towards the bridge and made a desperate plunge with his bow. A loud snap was heard like the report of a pistol. The string had broken. Batoche quietly lowered the instrument and looked around him. Little Blanche was sitting up in the bed gazing about with wide vacant eyes. The black cat stood glaring on the hearth with bristling fur and back rounded into a semi-circle.

"Good!", muttered Batoche, as he walked to the alcove and laid by his violin. Then going as quietly to the door, he opened it wide. Barbin and two other men closely wrapped in hoods stood before him.

"Come in," said Batoche; "I expected you." There was no agitation or eccentricity in his manner, but his features were pinched and his grey eyes shed a sombre light upon the deep shadows of their cavities.

"We have come for you, Batoche," said Barbin.

"I knew it."

"Are you ready?"

"I am ready."

And he stepped forward to take his old carbine from its hooks.

"No gun," said Barbin, laying his hand upon the old man's arm. "You are not to attack, nor will you be attacked."

"Ah! I see," muttered Batoche, throwing his wild-cat greatcoat over his shoulders.

"You know the news?"

"I know there is some news."

"The day of deliverance has come."

"At last!" exclaimed the hermit, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

"The Bastonnais have surrounded the city."

"And will the wolves be trapped?" asked Batoche in a voice of thunder. "Ha! Ha! I heard it all in the song of my old violin. I heard the roar of their march through the forest; their shout of triumph when they reached the Heights of Levis and first saw the rock of the Citadel; the splash of their oars in crossing the river; the deep murmur of their columns forming on the Plains of Abraham. Thus far have they come, have they not?"

"Yes, thus far," responded the three men together, amazed at the accuracy of the information which they knew that Batoche had not obtained that day from any human lip.

"But they will go farther," resumed the hermit, "because I have heard more. I have heard the boom of cannon, the rattle of musketry, the hiss of rockets, the wail of the wounded, the shriek of the dying, the malediction over the dead. Then a long interval, and after it, I have heard the crackling of flames, the cry of the hungry, the moan of those who suffered, the lamentation of the sick, and the loud, terrible voice of insurrection. And all this in the camp of our friends, while within the city, where the wolves are gathered, I have heard the clink of glasses, the song of revelry, the shout of defiance, the threat against treason,—mark the word, my friends. Are we traitors, you and I, because we love our old motherland too well, and hate the wolves that have devoured our inheritance? Yes, I repeat, I have heard to-night the shout of defiance, the threat against treason, the mocking laugh against weakness, and the deep growl of inebriate repletion. Another interval and then the catastrophe. I heard the soft voice of the night, the fall of the snow, the muffled tread of advancing regiments, the low word of command,—then all at once a thunderous explosion of cannon—and, finally, silence, death and defeat."

Barbin and his two companions stood listening to the old man in rapt wonder. To them he appeared like a prophet as he unfolded before their eyes the vision of war and desolation which the genius of music had evoked for him. And when he had concluded, they looked at each other, as doubtful of what to say. Batoche added:

"I fear that things will not turn out as favorably as we could wish. We may hurt, but shall not succeed in destroying the pack of wolves. However, we must do our best."

The men did not reply, but abruptly changed the current of the old hermit's thoughts by walking towards the door, and urging him to follow them.

"It is late," said Barbin. "We have work to do and must hurry."

The four then walked out of the house, leaving little Blanche and Velours to the calm slumbers which they had resumed so soon as the voice of the violin was hushed.

(To be continued.)