

IN TREATY WITH HONOR. A Romance of Old Quebec.

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CHAPTER VIII.

TWO WOMEN.

When I came to myself I was in a hut on one of the Thousand Islands of the Ottawa, cared for by a lady and two attendants. My chief nurse was no other than the desolate widow of the patriot-hero.

How strange are the ways of life! The hope of performing my promise to him, of protecting the woman he loved, had been the one thought that spurred me to struggle toward the bridge. Yet now it was not I who was shielding Madame Chenier from the brutality of the soldiers, but she who, assisted by Jacques the habitant and his wife, was aiding me.

"No, no," she said, "I will stay here where I was once so happy, and cherish my husband's memory. Even those who believe him to have been mistaken and reckless must acknowledge that his aim was noble. Encouraged by the success of the Americans in achieving their independence, he and those who fought with him thought, if they were only fearless and self-sacrificing enough, they would surely win."

"Madame," I answered, "in Jean Olivier Chenier were united the high-hearted chivalry and the spirit that, sixty years ago, led on the minute-men of Lexington. Who shall say he gave his life in vain?"

After a few days, having measured my strength sufficiently to feel that I might venture upon a journey, I took sad leave of this brave lady. For years I have not heard of her. Yet I, and the one I love best in the world, still pray that, whether she be living or dead, God will reward her for her goodness to me.

For to her care, under Providence, I owe my life.

My beautiful Fern Follet had been carried away by the redcoats. But when I sought out Monsieur Paquin in the cottage where he had taken refuge, he said to me—

"My son, since you must go, you shall have my horse. If you cannot send him back, sell him and use the money. Here is a small purse I have for you, too. Treat it as a loan if you wish, but take it."

"Monsieur le cure, you are too good," I replied, accepting his kindness, of which I indeed had need. "Ah, after all you were right in saying the inhabitants were not well prepared for resistance!"

"Although at St. Benoit, St. Scholastique, and Carillon every house displayed the white flag at the approach of the troops," he answered, "the men were taken prisoners, the villages burned, and the women and children driven out homeless upon the snowfields or into the woods. But we must have courage, better times will surely come."

Setting out, I was soon riding through the forest guided only by a pocket compass, the most precious of my possessions, which consisted besides of only the clothes I wore, the cure's horse, and three gold coins and some silver in the purse, almost all the good man had left after the fire.

"How I wish I might ride back to the Richelieu! How I long for a glimpse of Jacques! To hear her sweet voice, to look into her beautiful eyes, to speak a word that might bring a smile to her red lips," I said aloud, speaking my words to the snowbirds and the squirrels amid the loneliness of the thickets.

But since to return to the north was impossible, I set my face toward the southwest.

"Somewhere in that great country I may meet Ramon," I continued, commingling with myself, "together, perhaps we may still struggle for the Patriot Cause, which I trust may yet grow strong."

Many were the adventures of my way. In order to avoid the hands of soldiers now marching up and down the province making arrests, I took a round-about route. There were, however, a few French in the region through which I passed, and these good people sent me on from one to another. Among them the reputation of the magic words *couste qui couste* invariably procured for me food and lodging.

Once I was stopped by a farmer who took me for a horse thief. To get out of the predicament, I was forced to acknowledge myself a refugee. Luckily, the man was a friend of our people.

After this I sold the horse, since there was no chance to send him back. At another time I had to strip and swim across a stream thick with floating ice, carrying my clothes strapped on my back.

Again, disguised as a farm labourer, I had the pleasure of watching a party of soldiers as they searched a house for me.

At first I kept away from the St. Lawrence, although to cross it would mean liberty; but I had heard that the border was closely watched. One day, I came out of the woods to find myself near the banks of the river, just above a small village.

Before me extended the blue waters, ice-bound along the edge, but in the centre a strong sweeping current. Beyond was the small American shore. Could I but reach it I should find safety, friends, and freedom.

But of what did it avail me to gaze upon that shore with such delight? I was still alone; at any moment my flight might be cut off; I had eaten nothing all day; and to attempt to swim the great stream at this season would be simply to commit suicide.

"Eh bien, I may as well take my life in my hands as die of cold and hunger," I said to myself.

Emboldened by my laborer's disguise, I knocked at the kitchen of a house hard by, a more pretentious place than I would voluntarily have chosen; but it was the only one in the vicinity.

As the door flew open, schooled as I was to meet emergencies, I started. For there before me stood a pretty girl whose sudden appearance sent my thoughts back to Jaquette and the settle in the living-room at St. Denis.

It was only because her curls were dark and her eyes bright, however, for she was not even French, but a handsome English girl who, brought thus face to face with an unkempt and ill-looking stranger, stared at me in frightened astonishment.

Among the habitants I had thought it no disgrace to demand hospitality, but now, I must confess, I found it hard to ask for food.

"Madame, I am seeking employment," I began, and stopped short, partly for the reason that my pride rose up in arms, but more because I was really faint.

"I am sorry, we already have a servant-man," she said, recovering from her alarm and flashing at me a roguish smile. "But come in, my good fellow, and I'll set out a dinner for you by the fire. You are in the nick of time. We have dined well to-day, having for company an officer from the garrison at Prescott, who is now smoking a pipe with my father in the parlor. He has been sent away up here to intercept a refugee from Lower Canada, who it is thought may attempt to cross to the States at this point."

With a little show of haste as might be I drew back.

"Thank you, madame," I said, turning away nonchalantly. "I spoke only of employment. Since I cannot obtain it from you, I would better go on."

But she laid a hand upon my arm. "My father does not entertain his guests in the kitchen, and to-day I would make one welcome here," she insisted.

I saw that the room was unoccupied. To enter, even with the knowledge that an enemy bent on my capture was only a few feet distant, was hardly a greater risk than to seek to return to the woods. A man who needs bread is desperate. I looked into the girl's eyes; they seemed to me kind and true. I suffered her to draw me inside the house.

My pretty hostess was as good as her word. Not since I left St. Denis had I dined so comfortably, while her bantering conversation cheered and enlivened me. Ungratefully I let many of her sallies pass unnoticed, as I debated whether I should ask her help to get over the river.

I had just got upon my feet to take leave, when a hearty English voice called out from across the hallway—

"Phoebe! Phoebe, I say! Here is the captain coming because you are so long out of his sight. Ezad, captain, Phoebe's a famous housekeeper. No doubt you will find her in the kitchen."

A younger man's voice laughed gaily, and a firm step sounded in the passage. Muttering an oath under my breath, I turned sharply to the girl.

"But the curses which, regardless of consequences, I was about to hurl upon her for betraying me, died upon my lips. For her face was pale as death, and I felt at once that if there was a plot to trap me, she had not known of it."

"Wait a moment," she said in a tense whisper.

Then, springing forward, she opened the door and met the officer in the hall. "Were you looking for me?" I heard her ask.

A ripple of girlish laughter mingled with the deeper tone of his reply, and I knew he had turned back with her to the parlor.

The chance to escape was before me. Many who read this history will think I was a fool not to embrace it.

Yet in lingering I did not fall. After a few moments Phoebe reappeared.

"You are still here! Then you believe I did not mean to entrap you, sir," she said, clasping my hands in her earnestness. "I knew you as the man who had been on the watch. I sent our maid-cryant home to visit her people, and the man-servant lies in a besotted sleep. Luckily for you, he is fond of his cups. Our rosebush lies beside the house. Leave it at the boathouse on the opposite shore, and it will be restored to us."

"How can I ever thank you, Phoebe?" I whispered, raising her rosy fingers to my lips.

"Do not misunderstand me," she replied. "I abhor the rebellion, but my sympathy goes out to a man who, having failed in an attempt to aid his friends, finds himself friendless. The captain is bound in honor to do his duty, but I am going to save him from the unpleasant duty of sending a fugitive to the gallows."

Bidding me exchange my coat for another which she took down from a peg in a corner, she made me tie down my cap with a gray knitted scarf that also belonged to the bibulous servant-man.

"Now go," she said, "while I return to entertain our visitor. Whatever happens, put off boldly, like one going about his affairs."

"In effrontery I have never been backward," I said.

And after pressing her hands once more I walked out.

The boat was beside the house, as she had told me. Laying hold of it, I began to shove it down the bank to the river.

While I was thus engaged the officer came out of the front door and paced the veranda.

My heart beat faster than usual. I will admit, but I continued to push the boat, at the same time stealing a glance at him. He was a good-looking fellow, and his appearance was strangely familiar.

In another moment I recognized him, and my astonishment almost betrayed me. He was Captain Weston, whom Ramon had arrested at St. Denis, the prisoner whose plight had aroused Jaquette's sympathy, the man whom Dr. Nelson had sent to St. Charles, where, probably, at the arrival of the soldiers he had regained his liberty.

"What hol! Who are you, and what are you doing there?" he cried out, and I heard the click of his pistol as he

covered me with it. But I kept on, as one deaf.

At this critical moment Phoebe, wrapped in a red cloak, came out of the house and spoke to him.

"Captain, please!" she cried. "Do you want to frighten our old servant out of his wits? Peter has no more hearing than a post, and he is not over clever. If you object to my sending him across the river to buy some bits of woman's finery which cannot be had in the village, I will recall him."

"Oh, if the man goes on an errand for you, Phoebe, I have no wish to restrain him," answered the captain, lowering his weapon, "but I thought—"

"Yes, I know, you officers will see a political refugee in every country bumpkin until you have caught your fugitive," she answered with a laugh.

The wind fluttered the red cloak. Weston thrust the pistol into his belt again. What he said I do not know, but I saw that his thoughts were of Phoebe now.

As I pushed out from the shore, she began a merry dispute with him. Presently I was well in the current. I could see the girl's scarlet cloak as she and the captain walked up and down the veranda. He had apparently forgotten both the boat and the boatman.

A few days later, I dare say, the report went to headquarters that no refugee had crossed at this point; for Phoebe, I am sure kept her own counsel.

CHAPTER IX. A SHIP OF FATE.

Steering the little dory through the floating ice, I succeeded in reaching the opposite shore. Here a farmer lent me a horse, for which I paid well afterwards. I did not forget the curse of St. Eustache. The next day, after landing once more on "American soil," I reached Ogdensburg, where I was warmly welcomed, and found rest and refreshment.

I learned, too, that large and enthusiastic meetings were being held at Albany, New York, and the cities on the chain of Lakes, at which sympathy was expressed for the patriots and money subscribed to the cause.

Disappointed at not obtaining news of Ramon, however, and eager to push on, I took a place in one of the sledges of the merchant train bound for the region that promised me a chance to distinguish myself.

It was a clear, crisp morning. The sunlight on the snow was fairly dazzling. The drivers, in their fur coats and caps, stamped about with their heavy raw-hide boots, and cracked their whips as they awaited the signal to start.

The strong, deep-chedered horses, impatient to be gone as were the men, tossed their heads and pawed the snow, while all the bells of their harness tinkled, and the scarlet streamers that tied their braided manes fluttered gaily. Enlivened by a cheer from all the boys of the town, we at last set out.

During the days that I followed when wrapped in bearskin robes, I was borne swiftly across the icy crust of the snow; or in the evenings when I sat in the room of some hotel where we put up, my thoughts often wandered on in search of my comrade or reverted to the time when we were together at St. Denis.

Still I marvelled at his forwardness in snatching at the mission to St. Albans, his eagerness to leave the Richelieu; and still I could discover no reason for his strange conduct.

Naturally, from these cogitations my reverie turned to Jaquette. I recalled how piqued she had been, at his going away so willingly, and at last a solution of the enigma came. I said to myself, "Yes, that is it. I said to myself, 'Ramon must have discovered Jaquette's girlish fancy for him. In the beginning I thought his heart was stirred by her beauty and goodness, even as mine was. Evidently I was mistaken; he felt for her only the admiration of youth for a pretty and charming girl. He did not love her; therefore he felt bound to go away.'"

Another man might have lingered, accepting the flattery of her innocent affection, basking in the sunshine of her smiles, yet giving nothing in return. But Ramon was the soul of honor. The name Rycerski signifies 'knightly,' and never was chevalier worthier of the title. If Jaquette imagined in his courtesy a tenderer significance than the language of compliment, it was not his fault, I know. Nevertheless, I was actually inclined to be angry with him for not loving her. "He is hard to please, indeed," I soliloquized scornfully, feeling myself her champion. "Is there in the whole world another girl so beautiful, so lovable, and so warmly-hearted as Jaquette? He is not worthy of her. Ah, yes, he is—there's the pity of it. He is and she knows it; therefore his departure wounded her cruelly. It must be that his word was pledged before he came across the sea."

Poland, perhaps, or one of the noblest of Europe, he met, and loved some royal or noble. Brave Jaquette! With what spirit she strove to conceal her sadness, yet her apparent indifference and gaiety were but as the jewels and laces beneath which many a sweet woman hides an unhappy heart. Ah, how true is the saying, 'Love one who does not love you, answer one who does not call you, please, indeed, I soliloquized scornfully, feeling myself her champion. "Is there in the whole world another girl so beautiful, so lovable, and so warmly-hearted as Jaquette? He is not worthy of her. Ah, yes, he is—there's the pity of it. He is and she knows it; therefore his departure wounded her cruelly. It must be that his word was pledged before he came across the sea."

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"The Caroline, lying at the wharf before me, will go over in the morning," he said.

I lodged with him, therefore. Sleep came readily enough, but some time in "the wee sma' hours" I was awakened by a voice crying through the darkness outside—

"Boat ahoy? Answer or I fire."

It was the sentinel of the Caroline challenging some one who rose, and began to whisper about, began to get into my clothes.

"The countersign? Halt! I must have the countersign!" continued the guard.

"Hush, I'll give it to you when we get on board," came the answer, cautious and low, "there are British boats close by."

As I peered through the window I saw the outline of a rowboat astern of the steamer.

The report of a musket broke the stillness of the night, and the next moment all was uproar on the little vessel.

By this time I was dressed. Thrusting my pistols into my belt, I ran down stairs and out to the wharf, on which the other lodgers of the house and the few neighbors also gathered. Few of them were armed. A party of redcoats were going to land after an attempt to deceive the sentinel, but as we heard, rather than saw them, our shots had little effect, I fear, except to drive them back momentarily.

Before we had time to reload they leaped upon us, being more than three times our number, and forced us back at the point of their swords.

Upon the steamer the crew made a gallant fight. They were finally overpowered, however, and forced ashore.

"My God! What are the enemy going to do next?" exclaimed the man who had fought next to me, as we were driven against a wall, where short work might have been made of us but for the darkness.

"They are casting off the steamer's moorings," I said.

Other villagers, aroused by the firing, came running to the spot. Already the redcoats had cast off the Caroline, and presently she began to float down the stream.

A few minutes more and a lurid light shot from her lower deck and began to climb up her sides.

"They have set her on fire, and there are wounded volunteers on board," cried my companion, in horror.

Now she was enveloped in a sheet of flames and drifting rapidly down the current.

It was an awful scene—the shore a handful of men who had plunged into a fight before they were more than half awake and been worsted by the force of numbers; the blackness of night, which lay like a pall upon the water rendered the sky invisible and aided the escape of the invaders, who had at once taken again to their boats; and the doomed vessel, at first a spectral shape of smoke and now a blazing meteor, drifting onward with its already dead and dying men.

Presently, by the light which now shone from her, we saw that she had stranded in a bed of rushes. Before long she drifted loose again and forged down the river, a ship of flame which became like the reflection of a star upon the water in the dazed eyes of those who watched her in dazed horror, all at once her burning bulk disappeared as suddenly as though the spirits of the deep stretched up and dragged her down beneath the swirling rapids.

Something as terrible did indeed happen. Borne onward by the mad waters, which every moment gathered strength and passion, she had leaped with them over the brink of the Great Falls of the Niagara into the abyss of mist and rock and spray, like the Indian goddess Papou, whose lightning, leaping into the arms of her lover the Storm Cloud.

It was a grand spectacle for the volunteers whose funeral pyre the burning craft had been, a tomb in the sublime chasm with the stupendous ice-bridge formed by the frost and mists for their monument.

The next day I got over in a rowboat to Navy Island and had my interview with Mr. Mackenzie. I was surprised to find the lion of the Patriot Cause, as he was called, a small man with reddish hair and beard. From his reputation for boldness and activity I had fancied him a giant.

"Major Adair," he said, giving me the title by which I soon became known, "the violation of the neutrality laws in this burning of the Caroline will start a conflagration throughout the United States. Adair you have told the story in this vicinity, I want you to repeat it farther up the Lakes."

A week later, accordingly, I set out for the city of Detroit, which was settled by French chevaliers from Montreal more than a hundred years ago.

Again the journey was to be by sledge, but this time the horses had neither bells nor trappings, and our train departed as quietly as possible.

We had not gone many miles before I discovered the reason for this absence of ostentation. Under the robes and blankets of every sledge were secreted so many muskets and as large a share of powder and bullets as could be thus carried. During the days when we proceeded along the shore of Lake Erie and thence up the American bank of the Detroit River, we left a supply of these war-like presents at many farm-houses, and the farmers hid them in the cellars or garrets.

It was late in the afternoon of a January day when the conductor of our party awoke the echoes of the leafless woods with the notes of his horn, as a signal that we were approaching the frontier town of the old seigniors.

"The sledges, the sledges, from Sandusky," vociferated a rabble of urchins, bandying their news in French and English, as they swarmed around our cavalcade.

Several blanket-coated, fur capped idlers, who lounged by the tavern wall in the last rays of the sunshine, woke up and ran toward us.

Our drivers flourished their whips. "Whoa!" they cried to their horses.

The snow crunched under the runners of the sledges, and the train drew up before a peaked roof in large letters, over which was the sign of a black letter, "Woodworth's Steamboat Hotel."

A small wiry man, whose swart skin and shock of black hair proclaimed him a French Canadian, rushed out to receive the other two passengers and myself.

"Ha, ha, it is a hard journey up the Strait," he said with bustling politeness. "Maintenant, les m'sieurs, will find a fire and a mug of cidre au charbon or a petit verre good, after the wind has cut like a whip all the way from Sandusky. The dinner will be served in one quarter of an hour."

Glad enough we were to alight and stretch our limbs.

I was, however, in no hurry to enter the house, but lingered to the last. When the smiling waiter who had welcomed us turned toward me I called out to him.

"Toussaint!"

The little Frenchman started as though shot, and stared at me with widely dilated eyes.

I nodded to him, reassuringly, and he broke out into a volley of delighted exclamations in his native tongue.

"M'sieur Adair! Do I see him in the flesh? We have heard he was killed at St. Eustache."

"Happily, I am still very much alive, Toussaint," I said, laughing to conceal my emotion, as the waiter, who had actually embraced me. "But how comes it if you are so far from Chamby?"

"Ah, m'sieur, Louisonne is bien sage," he explained with a sigh, which might be taken as an expression of content or dissatisfaction, as one chose. "After the redcoats raided the village hoping to capture m'sieur and M'sieur Rycerski, who were known to have rescued the two patriots, she said, 'Toussaint, you are so brave you will be going off to fight unless I take care of you and 'fit Louisonne. I have cousins at Le Detroit. We will go there.' It was a long voyage, but Louisonne is not to be daunted, m'sieur. We got across the country to the St. Lawrence without going to Montreal, and once on a bateau we were safe. So now I am a waiter as well as a barber. Says Louisonne, 'Let the patriots serve the cause and you serve the patriots. Is it not the same, mon ami? What thinks m'sieur?'"

"I think Louisonne is a wise woman, and it is certainly pleasanter to be in Le Detroit than under the snows at St. Denis or St. Eustache."

"Ugh! Will m'sieur come in where it is warm?" stammered Toussaint, with a shudder.

Laughing again I followed him into the bar.

Here the great hearthfire, the sanded floor, the small tables, and the row of gleaming decanters and glasses attractively arrayed, presented a picture of comfort a traveller could hardly fail to appreciate after having been long on the road.

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