

IN TREATY WITH HONOR. A Romance of Old Quebec.

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CHAPTER VI. THROUGH THE FOREST.

Madame St. Germain had come to stay with Jaquette at the doctor's house, to assist her in the care of the wounded, and at the same time play the part of chaperon.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day after the fight, and we were gathered in the living-room, Dr. Nelson sitting at a table engaged in drawing a small map of the surrounding country, Ramon talking with Mademoiselle de Rouville in the chimney-corner, and I by the window chatting with madame.

"Ha, ha, a good story, is it not monsieur?" laughed the widow, nodding at me vivaciously. "Jean Baptiste, showing an old French coin to Brown, the Yankee medicine-vendor, said proudly, 'My ancestor was made a chevalier by the king whose picture you see here. And the trickster would-be leaver of our people replied, 'What a coincidence! My ancestor was also on the Indian whose portrait you see on this American cent.' Ha, ha!"

Madame's black eyes shone like the gleam of the will-o'-the-wisp in the dusk of a summer's night. Truly, the buxom widow of thirty might still turn the head of many a man.

Though I professed to be amused at the jest, as in duty bound, I made but a poor listener, for my thoughts were with the pair by the fire.

Ramon stood looking down at Jaquette, who sat on the chimney-bench, and the two youthful figures seemed to stand out like a picture against the bright background of the chimney's glow.

He spoke in a tone so low that his words were evidently intended for her alone, his manner was eloquent, his smile brought an answering smile to the lips of the girl as she looked up at him. Not only his features, but her sweet face seemed illumined. Was it but by the light of the fire? "Ramon loves her, and she is, at least, interested in him," I said to myself.

"I love her too, God knows. But I have sworn to be a friend to try to win her heart, when from the first he has laid siege to it? His chaff as to my having found favor in her eyes was but a blind. In honor I will leave him a fair field. But I shall never cease to love her, even though that love must be hidden in my own breast."

As my eyes dwelt upon them and my thoughts ran on thus, Jaquette's mood suddenly changed. "Ah, Monsieur Ramon," she cried aloud, "you ask for a chanson? How, then, does this please you?"

"Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier. Du joli moi de mai. Gai le rozier. Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier."

Like a spell upon me was the lilting tune, the refrain, the merry abandon of her voice.

"Bien cherie, give us the rest of the song," said the doctor, laying down his pen as she paused.

We added our entreaties, and with a shrug of her pretty shoulders she continued:

"Par derrier chez ma tante. Lu y a-tan bon jole. Le rossignol chante. Et le jour et la nuit. Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier. Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier."

"Du joli moi de mai," joined Madame St. Germain in a rich alto.

Patting her little white hands together to mark the rhythm and smiling as she sang, Jaquette appeared the very embodiment of the spirit of the music, a river sprite or a nymph of the Richelieu forests.

Singing and motion are allied. She rose to her feet, and, slowly swaying to and fro at first like a young white birch wooed by the breeze, began to dance to the music of her song.

"Le rossignol y chante. Et le jour et la nuit. Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier. Gai ton lai. Gai le rozier."

The freighth shone upon her gray frock, upon her charming face and the dark curls that stirred as she danced; it made a gleaming path on the oaken floor for her dainty feet.

For the moment, there in that pleasant room as we watched her, the warlike happenings of three days earlier were forgotten.

But dancing is contagious. Presently Ramon was treading a measure with her in lively fashion. Anon, lured by her witchery, I found myself bowing to mademoiselle in courtly fashion, while the dance slackened to the tempo of the minuet, and again, as I clasped her delicate fingers, raising my arm above her head in order that, wheeling gracefully, she might pass under the arch made by our clasped hands.

Of a sudden, however, our mirth was interrupted by the call of a habitant outside. Pausing, we all looked toward the window.

Every day the silver current of the river had grown narrower, for the ice forming along the strand daily reached out farther into the stream, like the relentless grasp of Old Winter himself.

Now on the opposite shore the rays of sunshine touched the walls, the tincoiled and brought out into relief the dark pines of the Island of the Stags.

"My word!" I cried. "Here comes a man on a pony galloping down the road from St. Charles."

While I spoke he drew rein at the gate. The doctor hastened to the house door, and returned directly with Jean Baptiste, the scout.

"You may tell your story here," said Nelson, grimly.

Pale as death Jaquette went over to her uncle, and linking her arm in his stood waiting to hear the news. Ramon and I drew near the messenger, and Madame St. Germain rose from her chair.

"The soldiers from Chambly marched down the cote two nights ago," began Jean Baptiste, dejectedly. "Yesterday morning they reached St. Charles, where two of three hundred patriots were gathered. Knowing the redcoats would promptly fire upon them, they opened fire themselves, but their powder and bullet soon gave out. The soldiers charged upon them with the bayonet, killing many; they set fire to a barn in which others had taken refuge, and drove the remainder into the river, where they were drowned like rats in a trap."

"And Brown, the Yankee quack, who posed as their leader and insisted that the villagers should decline our offer of assistance?" inquired the doctor, who had heard the tale with working features and clenched hands.

Jacquette fled, sobbing, from the room, and madame hastened after her.

When the scout had withdrawn to repeat his tragic story in the kitchen, our host, after some minutes, said, turning to Ramon and me:

"Gentlemen, two days ago I felt we had taken the first step in the path that was to give freedom to Canada; but this rout has opened my eyes. Until we are better prepared, we must avoid another meeting of the troops. I will send a messenger to our American friends at St. Albans. An express must also ride post haste to the Two Mountains, where the people are preparing to resist. They have heard of our success. They must also be warned of the defeat at St. Charles."

"I ask the privilege of going to St. Albans," cried Ramon impetuously. Surprise kept me dumb. He had made haste to choose the better mission. The journey would indeed be long and wearisome, but the messenger to the States would go as the representative of the patriots, would address Jaquette, of the people there, even as Jaquette, a spirited daughter of the chevaliers as she was, had advised us to do. If successful, he would not only serve the cause but, as at one stroke, win prominence and distinction.

This opportunity my companion with a selfishness new to him, demanded for himself.

Disappointed for the first time in his friendship, and fluding voice at last, I hotly contested his claim.

"No, I will go," I declared.

We were on the verge of a dispute, when Dr. Nelson interposed.

"Gentlemen, we must not waste time in idle arguments," he protested. "Count Ryecerski, since you were the first to speak, you shall have your choice. Mr. Adair, you will not refuse to carry a letter from me to Dr. Chenier at St. Eustache?"

"Sir, I have joined you, and I will decline no service you require of me in the name of the cause," I answered sullenly enough.

When my comrade and I retired to the room we shared, Ramon did not explain his motive in standing by his claim but strove by all other means in his power to break down the barrier of coldness I had erected between us.

At last it yielded, as a snow fort yields to the sun. How could I be angry with him when I realized that the next day we were to separate, perhaps I never could I shut my heart against him who, in the weeks we had shared, had never failed me except in this one instance?

"After all," I said to myself, "had he not a right to choose this mission? Was I not selfish in turn to desire it?" Thus reproaching myself, I gladly accepted his advance toward reconciliation, and we talked far into the night.

The name of Jaquette was, however, not mentioned between us.

The next afternoon, after a long consultation with Dr. Nelson and a parting tête-à-tête with Jaquette, Ramon set off on his journey. I rode out with him a few miles, and most unwillingly took leave of him when we were about halfway to St. Charles.

An revoir, my dear friend. Always think kindly of me, he said, reaching out to me across the rough mane of the sturdy pony with which the doctor had provided him.

"Au revoir," I repeated, clasping his hand, "and may good fortune lead your horse by the bridle."

Neither of us dared trust ourselves to utter the word "good-by," and yet we felt only too keenly that we might never meet again.

"God keep you, for I love you more than I have ever loved any woman," I broke out passionately.

His smile was singularly sweet as he answered me. "And I you."

Then, after pressing my hand again, he withdrew his own, spoke a word to the pony, and rode away, while I, reining in my mount, followed him with my eyes.

When he had gone a short distance he turned in his saddle, waved a last adieu, and cantered across the unenclosed fields, avoiding the river road lest he might be intercepted by one of the bands of soldiers now marching up and down the country.

It was the last day of November, and I was thankful that the plain was rough and brown, since, had it been covered with snow, the tracks of his horse's hoofs might have aroused inquiry and led to his arrest.

Thus I watched him ride on toward St. Charles and St. Hilaire, whence I knew he would pass around behind the great solitary mountain Beloit, which in its armor of steel-blue mist seemed to be a figure of the genius of the Richelieu arisen in its might.

When I in turn set about making my adieux to Mademoiselle Jaquette, she was in so contrary a mood, I dared not tell her what I wished to say, which was simply that, since she had unwittingly taken possession of my heart, I would find her accept the devotion of my life as well.

"Be my wife," I meant to plead. "So soon as there is again peace on the Richelieu I will make a home for you, perhaps in the abandoned seigneurial house across the river at St. Antoine, which I hear can be bought."

Instead of appearing downcast over the prospect of my speedy departure, she chose to be, I thought, unbecomingly gay.

"We shall be grave enough to-morrow, let us be merry while we may," her manner said.

As we sat together on the settle in the living room, she would not meet my eyes, but persisted in looking out upon the river, which for once I did not care to do, for I found more interest in studying her sweet face and trim figure.

Was it that her plain homespun gown made her look still sligher than had the white frock in which I first saw her? Or had the anxiety of the last few weeks caused her young form to lose something of its roundness? At least she appeared thinner than on that October day at the huskings.

"Ma foi, monsieur," she exclaimed, shaking her pretty curls in a way to turn the head of any hapless lover. "What shall we do for a protector while you are absent? But no, when all the men are gone, we shall, of course, have peace. It is not the women who stir up wars. Why must men be forever fighting?"

"That women may live in quiet and contentment," I answered, not in hope to change it.

"Still it is a great pity Monsieur Papineau and Monsieur Brown, who are so much better as talkers than fighters, cannot arouse the sympathy of the people of the States for us," she went on. "Since they were in such haste to cross the border, why must Count Ryecerski be sent upon this errand?"

"Because he can better tell what happened at St. Denis and St. Charles than those who did not wait to see it," I replied dryly.

"Ah, yes," she laughed. "I have noticed that some of those who would sacrifice their last drop of blood have been very sparing of the first. But why cannot the inhabitants of St. Eustache manage their own resistance, as our people did here?"

"They are only too ready to do so," said I; and forthwith I explained to her why Dr. Nelson wished me to go.

"Oh, if you go to spare any one anguish or suffering, then go without delay, in the name of God," she exclaimed, serious at once; "he who risks his life to save others is a greater hero than he who faces the enemy's fire."

"Pascal is saddling my horse. I delay only for it and to take leave of you," I said.

My mare Feu Follet had been mysteriously returned to me at St. Denis by a habitant, who at the same time brought us news that Desmarais and Davignon had safely crossed the border.

A silence now fell between Jaquette and myself. The girl watched the church spire of St. Antoine as if she feared it would suddenly take wings and fly away, while I fortively continued my study of her face. Despite her bantering tone of a few moments before, she was piqued at something, I could see; and presently a solution of the enigma flashed upon me. It was because Ramon had gone so willingly upon his distant mission, had so carelessly ridden away out of her life. Here she was, urging me to hasten upon my errand, but she would fain have had him stay at St. Denis. What an idiot I was to venture a hope that I might have awakened an emotion warmer than friendship in her heart, that she would give a second thought to me, when a man so handsome, so altogether lovable as Ramon had been with her daily!

"You madhonn," I said to myself, "isn't it as plain as the nose on your face that the girl loves him? Don't show what a fool you are by pouring the story of your love into her pretty but unwilling ears."

At this moment the voice of Dr. Nelson called me from the hall. Jaquette followed me to the door-stone, where Pascal waited with my horse.

"Since you must leave us, may you go under the guard of God," exclaimed my kind host.

"Alas that in life one must so often travel toward sorrow," said Jaquette, as I held her hand in mine a few seconds longer than was necessary.

"Mademoiselle, whatever road of life you take, may you travel only toward joy," I said, raising the little hand to my lips.

Then I turned away, sprang to my saddle, and rode off.

But I carried in my mind a picture of a girl whose dark curls hung down upon the shoulders of her russet-colored frock, over the dainty capelle white collar I had recently watched her comb, a girl whose eyes glistened with tears as they at last met mine.

CHAPTER VII. THE TOWERS OF ST. EUSTACHE.

Three days later, as the sun was setting and from the twin towers of the old Norman church the bells were ringing the Angelus, I rode into St. Eustache, one of the most picturesque and important of the rural settlements westward of the early French colonies adorned the banks of the broad Canadian rivers.

As I entered the Square which was then, as now, sentinelled by the beautiful elms that in summer inclose the place in a cordon of shade, I beheld a group of gray stone buildings that in the middle season must have been overgrown with vines. Here were the manor of the seigneur, the newly completed convent and beyond, on the bank of the Ottawa, called here Rivière des Cheneaux, the river of the Thousand Islands, the church and the rectory.

"Baptiste, can you direct me to the house of Dr. Chenier?" I called out to a passing habitant.

"My name is Jacques," retorted the man with less of urbanity than is usually found among this people, who, in spite of their humble station and isolated lives, retain something of the courtliness of ancestors of higher position who, in the long ago, sought to retrieve their fortunes in the wilderness.

His curtness made me realize at once that the village was seething with unrest.

"Conte qui conte, my friend," I said tersely.

Jacques' surliness vanished. "Ah, m'sieur, you are one of us," he blurted out with an attempt at apology.

"M'aieur le docteur's house is just over the bridge, but you will not find him there, for a reward of £500 has been offered to any one who will deliver him up to the law."

"And does no one know where he is?" I asked, debating how I was to accomplish my errand.

The man misunderstood me. "M'sieur Chenier can lay his head upon his pillow and sleep securely among the patriots of Two Mountains," he replied; "there is no one who would be so base as to surrender him to his enemies. Many would die for him. His wife is still in their home; friends keep guard over it for her."

"Ah! then, madame will send him the letter I bring," said I.

Nodding my thanks—I would not offend the man by offering him a coin—I crossed the bridge, turned down a path to the left, and halted before the cottage on the river bank.

It must have been a pleasant place in summer with its overshadowing tree, its trolleed gallery, and the bit of sward that lay between it and the rectory, scarce more than a stone's throw distant. And it commanded a charming view both of the Square and the little islets of the river.

The latter was now a gleaming road of ice, so that from where I dismounted I might have crossed over to the church spire in two or three minutes. I mention this because of what happened later.

My knoeck brought to the door a sturdy French Canadian who wore a knife in his belt.

"My name is Adair and I am come with a message from Dr. Nelson of St. Denis to Dr. Chenier," I said.

"Dr. Chenier is not to be found here," he answered gloweringly.

"Then perhaps some one will carry the message to him," I persisted. "It is of the utmost importance."

While he still hesitated to admit me, I caught sight of the room beyond. Before the fire stood another habitant cleaning a musket, and by the opposite side of the hearth a comely young woman sat rocking a cradle.

At the sound of voices the man who was burnishing his weapon wheeled around and came to the door.

"What is this?" he inquired. The grace of his manner cost asted oddly with the homeliness of his clothes. At once my mind leaped to the conclusion that these were a disguise. I repeated my name and errand, adding, "So, perhaps, monsieur, you will see that Dr. Chenier gets the letter."

As he took it from my hand and drew me into the room I noted that he was about thirty years of age, with an erect carriage, a handsome head crowned with brown, wavy locks, a smooth-shaven, intelligent face, and flashing gray eyes.

"Monsieur Adair, you are welcome," he said, embracing me with Gallie ardor. I am Jean Olivier Chenier, and, as you see, I am forced to remain in hiding, since they have already searched this house, it is as safe a place as any. This lady is my wife."

He turned to the woman beside the hearth. She smiled at me and spoke a few words of greeting, but did not cease the rhythmic swaying to and fro of the little basket nest in which a rosy baby lay asleep.

"You bring us news of many victories on the banks of the Richelieu?" said Dr. Chenier, confidently, as he unfolded the letter.

"Furche! I have ridden hard across the country to inform you of our defeat," His face clouded as he bent his eyes on the closely written sheet.

"We cannot withdraw now," he cried with reckless fervor when he finished reading it. "Take this back as an answer to St. Denis. For yourself, monsieur, my advice may seem inhospitable, but so soon as you have bread with us, you will better get away from St. Eustache."

"What, turn my back on a fight?" I cried, putting aside his earnestness with a laugh. "I am an Irishman, and have never deserted a friend. If you and the people here insist upon making a bold stand against the troops, I shall remain with you."

Dr. Chenier's voice shook with emotion as he accepted my adherence.

"The help of a brave man is like the aid of a sword of truest steel," he said, "it being thus settled that I should stay, I crossed the ice to the rectory."

Monsieur Papin, the cure, received me in his study. He was a stout man with a large, square face, thick black hair combed up high from a broad brow, and a strong mouth and chin. He presented a striking figure in his black cassock with its little tabbed collar edged with white, worn outside the high linen collar with points running up each side of the chin, in the fashion affected by the gentlemen of the period.

At first I thought him cold, for he was altogether opposed to the plan of resistance, but as we talked I discovered that his was a warm and generous heart torn with anxiety for his flock.

"Monsieur Adair, if you come to encourage my people in their folly, be off again without delay, I adjure you," he cried, striking his hands together.

"I would not deny liberty to the French! Who knows their grievances better than I? But because I love my people I wish to save them from the sufferings of a vain struggle."

"Yet in the States the courage of a few determined men built up a nation," I argued.

"Yes, yes, because your men were calm as well as brave; because they knew how to wait as well as to fight. Patience and time accomplish more than force and violence."

"Patience and time becomes fury, monsieur le cure," I said, "I shall stand by the patriots, come what will."

All that day habitants from far and near flocked to St. Eustache in response to Chenier's call, but the next morning—it was the 14th of December—when a runner of the woods brought news that a body of troops were marching against us from Montreal, many of these volunteers made excuse to return to their villages.

Only a small band was now left to the daring Chenier. As we gathered about him in the square, he cried:

"Friends, I, for one, prefer to sell my life dear rather than to be tamely struck down. Even if left alone, I shall still remain here."

His ardor stirred the hearts of all who heard.

"We will fight for liberty and to protect our families," shouted the patriots. The cry was cast.

"But some of us are without muskets, monsieur le docteur," called a young man at the edge of the little company.

"Then you must take them from the soldiers," replied the leader. "You have pikes and cudgels. Many had no more at St. Denis."

After garrisoning the manor, the cure's house, and the convent (which the nuns had not yet occupied), Chenier, with the rest of his men, less than a hundred, took up his position in the church.

The women and children of the village were hidden in the crypt below. Enthusiastic at being in action once more, I lent a hand in barricading the doors and removing the sashes of the windows that the openings might be used as portholes.

Before long the beating of a drum and the blare of brass musical instruments warned us of the approach of the soldiers. Presently the lookout in the church tower called down to us:

"They are coming, and they have several field-pieces."

Within a quarter of an hour we heard the clatter of the horses of the cavalry and the tramp of the infantry, and those of us who were so posted as to be able to watch, peering out, beheld a sea of crimson overspreading the snows of the common.

I will not describe the battle. Chenier had expected at least a demand for surrender, but there was none—no attempt at conciliation nor offer of any terms. That a handful of men dared resist a strong military force was marvellous enough. We even compelled our first assailants to retreat. But it was impossible to hold out against such numbers. Those among us who had ammunition kept up a sharp musketry, but before long we saw the manor and other buildings sacked and a burned.

Though the shots from the field-pieces battered the walls of our fortress it staunchly withstood the attack. Even the heroes must sometimes succumb to their wounds, however, and so at last a great rent was made in the side of the hoary old church, and through the breach the besiegers thrust flaming bales of hay while, as we were driven back by the smoke, others among them cast burning brands through the windows.

The women and children were still secure in the cellar.

"To the sacristy!" cried Chenier. Fighting still, he obeyed.

"All is lost!" he exclaimed. "We have fought like patriots, let us die, not like dogs smothered by fire, but like heroes, battling to the end."

He sprang upon the bench that extended along the wall, waved his sword, and after a glance into the churchyard through which the redcoats surged, leaped through the open window down in the midst of them, calling out to us to follow.

A few did so, I among the number. At once I was in the heart of the melee, slashing to right and left with my sabre. I saw Chenier fall and fought my way towards him. But before I reached the spot where he lay, a bayonet thrust from a redcoat struck me to the ground, the hoarse cry of "no quarter" re-echoed in a brutal chorus, and the enemy rushed over the field.

In my ears were the oaths of the victors and the shrieks of dying men. I myself was fast losing my hold on life.

The churchyard was quiet again; the soldiers were pursuing the fleeing habitant. As I opened my eyes to take a last glimpse of the world, I saw that I was in the shadow of the little bridge that spanned the river. If I could roll my body the distance of a few feet I might lie concealed beneath the timbers of the weatherworn structure and perhaps live to fight another day.

Slowly I turned upon my side, then paused, exhausted. Could I ever reach the bridge? I tried again. A dark object lay in my path. It was the body of a villager already stark and cold. I could not go around it, so I drew myself over it, scarce heeding the chill of repulsion at the contact with death.

Did the enemy believe they had left only dead men in the churchyard, or were any of the soldiers watching me, amused at my antics and ready to pin me to the earth with their bayonets in the moment when I should gain my haven?

I did not care. My strength was giving out. It would be so much easier to die than to live, to bivouac here on the snow rather than to make any further exertion.

As I was about to give up, a thought flashed upon me—Madame Chenier. The patriot had committed her to my care if he should fall and I survive.

"I must live to find and protect her," I moaned as I lay face downward on the snow.

The coldness upon my forehead revived me momentarily; by a final trial I gained the shelter of the bridge. Then, spent by the effort, I felt that I was dying. And presently—it seemed to me—I died.

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE HUMANE SOCIETY'S AGENT.

A TRUE STORY, WRITTEN FOR THE MIS-SIONARY BY REV. RICHARD ALEX-ANDER.

It was a sad call the Humane Society's Agent had that day. It was a call to an alley, in a poor, but quite respectable neighborhood. A woman, lonely, self-supporting, but reserved as to her own affairs, had died in a little room, high up in a tenement house.

There was unfinished, fine needle-work, on a table near by; every appearance of respectability and even taste, in the meagre furnishings of her poor little room, and the mark of gentle blood in the delicately cut features of the little orphaned boy who sat terrified in a corner.

The boy sat at a distance from the bed on which his dead mother lay, but his face was set, and his brown curly hair lay uncombed on his forehead. His eyes

were red with weeping, and his chin rested in his hands, as he leaned his elbows on his little knees and stared at everything with the terrified look of one who never before seen death.

"That's the boy," whispered a neighbor, "he doesn't understand. He is only six years old, you know; he's the only child."

"Come here, my boy," said the Humane Society's Agent.

The boy rose slowly, and with frightened face came over to the Agent, who reached out his hand. The small hand was laid in it, and the blue swimming eyes looked steadily into the man's kind face.

"Mother's dead," said the child, solemnly. "She had to leave me alone—I have nobody now." The sweet little voice, the neglected look of the little lad went strangely to the Agent's heart.

"What is your name, my little son?" said he.

"Arthur Maxwell, and I'm six years years old, and father is dead, too. I was added as if a fresh sorrow had made its way back to his memory."

The Humane Society's Agent was a kind man. His duty had not hardened him, and he was strangely drawn to the little fellow, who showed marks of gentle training and better days.

"Would you like to come with me to-night? It is lonely here for a little boy. I'll bring you back to see mother to-morrow."

"For answer the little fellow threw his arms around Mr. Benjamin Brown's neck, and the Humane Society's Agent felt a throb of genuine love stir his heart as he pressed him close, and thrilled with the joy of the little soft cheek laid against his own.

"Will you come, Arthur?"

"Sure!" said Arthur, smiling broadly into the blue eyes as he wiped the tears from his little sleeve, and took possession of his new friend's hand.