

IN TREATY WITH HONOR.
A Romance of Old Quebec.

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CHAPTER IV.

A HOSTAGE OF FORTUNE.
"The eyes of a wolf! And I dropped my dagger on the floor of the cellar and forgot to pick it up," muttered Ramon. "Possibly a lynx has chosen the cave for his lair; a wolf loves the woods better than a hole in the ground," I responded. "I have my knife, and if we cannot drive the creature away, we together can grapple with it."

We kept on, therefore, since to turn about and retrace our path would not only evince a lack of courage but give the wild creature an opportunity to fasten its fangs upon us. Always face your enemy, say I. To do so shows a wise as well as a brave spirit. A bold front has cowed many an adversary. Opening my knife, I held it between my teeth and crept forward. Still those terrible eyes glowed through the darkness, growing more menacing the nearer we approached. Now there seemed but the distance of a few rods between us and them.

Fortunately, as we proceeded, the space above us grew gradually higher again. We were able to get upon our feet.

"The passage is only a fissure in the rock," announced my comrade, looking up. "The roof here is but a tangle of boughs, and through the foliage I see a star."

But I dared not turn my gaze even for a second from the burning eyes. All at once there was a stir, a low rumbling sound, and it seemed to me that I felt the creature's breath upon my face.

"Have a care, the beast is making ready to spring upon us," I cried, and with my knife in my hand I dashed forward. Ramon followed close; but when we reached the spot where the intruder had been a moment earlier, there was still an intervening space between ourselves and its fierce gaze. Yet we had not put it to flight, for it continued to glare at us with unblinking steadfastness. As I ran, the walls of the cave appeared suddenly to fall away on every side.

Instead of being shut in by the rock, I found myself surrounded by bushes. Before my feet was a pebbly beach, beyond which flowed the surging flood of the Richelieu, and over my head was only the starlit sky.

"Where is the wild beast that confronted us in the cave?" cried my friend beside me. "Ha, ha! Those terrible eyes were nothing more nor less than two lights in a farmhouse on the opposite side of the river."

"Yes," I said, "and the sounds we heard were the rippling of the current and the voice of the wind through the trees. The breath of the beast was the breeze blowing back the warm air of the cave."

We would have laughed aloud had we dared. But to be apprehended by the redecoats now would suit us less than ever, and now in addition brand us as cowards in the estimation of Mademoiselle Jaquette. For were we taken, how would she ever be brought to believe otherwise than that we were trying to escape, in spite of our protestations that we would stay to guard her, muskets shot out the air; it was followed by another; horse and rider were stopped.

I discharged my own weapon, as a signal that at the house we knew what was taking place, and eagerly awaited developments. In a few minutes Ryerski appeared, accompanied by two of our men, between whose leveled muskets walked a redecoat who bore himself gallantly.

The misfortunes of a brave man and a gentleman always appeal to one's sympathies, so as he stepped on the gallery, I saluted him. It was just light enough for me to see that his face brightened at this unexpected consideration. He was young, a handsome fellow, and self-possessed as if he were going to a wedding.

As the party reached the house door it was thrown open, and there in the hall stood Dr. Nelson, fully dressed and armed.

Ramon touched his cap in military fashion and reported, "Sir, I have the honor to inform you that the sentries have just arrested this gentleman, who refuses to account for his presence in the neighborhood at this hour."

The doctor bent his keen eye upon the prisoner, the eye of the physician accustomed to the study of human character as well as of human ailments. "I regret, sir, that I am compelled to intercept your journey," he said.

As an officer of her Majesty's service, I protest against my unwarrantable apprehension and demand to be immediately released," exclaimed the young man laughingly.

was the only lady in the house, though there were several woman servants. Dr. Nelson had some time before sent for his wife and children to "the States" for their security. Not knowing of their departure, Jaquette, the orphan chateleine of a seigneurie down the river, had come to visit them, and her return home was now cut off.

Even at this eleventh hour the doctor tried to shake our resolution. "Gentlemen," he said, "to-morrow you shall conduct mademoiselle and her maid across the border."

Fortunately the girl helped us out of the dilemma by sturdily refusing to be sent away.

"Uncle," she said, "if I cannot, like these gentlemen, fight to defend your house, I can encourage the women and children who have taken refuge on the estate. Besides, you have not yet appointed a quarter-master. You will need some one to look after the supplies and give rations to your volunteers."

"Bien, bien," have your way, cherie," yielded the doctor at last. "It is easier to rout an army than to contend against a woman. From this moment, my lass, you may consider yourself commissary-general of our forces."

Since this evening might be the last opportunity to rest that our host would have for some time, we prevailed upon him to retire. But I took up my position on the gallery, and Ramon posted sentries in the village. The night was overcast, portending a storm.

The whitewashed cottages of the hamlet seemed like a company of ghosts in misty windings-sheets, and beyond their thatched roofs the woods were masses of mysterious shadows. A half score of men were on the watch like myself, yet the neighborhood was so quiet it might have been a wilderness. Only the occasional hoot of an owl broke the silence.

My occupation was monotonous enough but I had one subject for meditation that kept my mind interested and wakeful, the thought of Mademoiselle Jaquette. As the hours passed, I performed prodigies of valor while defending her not only from peril, but from the slightest annoyance at the hands of the military. I amused myself by conjuring up more than one scene in her beautiful eyes for the services I had rendered her.

"Mademoiselle," I answered, "the greatest privilege of my life is to be permitted to do anything for you."

"Ah, how glad I am she is here at St. Denis," I mentally ejaculated, as I paced beneath the window of the chamber where she was perhaps dreaming sweet maiden dreams.

Again, as I thought of what might come to us, I heartily wished she were with her friends in safety.

A line of leaden-colored light, the first sign of dawn, appeared in the eastern sky. The river changed from black to gray.

I was aroused from my reverie by a far off sound like the beating of a horse's hoofs upon the highway from St. Ours.

"Is the rider French or British, a friend bringing warning, or a soldier upon some secret errand?" I asked myself as I listened intently. He came nearer.

"Halt!" The cry rang out crisp and sharp. It was the challenge of the sentry at the outpost. But the hoof-beats kept on.

"Drat the stupid habitant-sentinel! Is he going to let the stranger get away without giving the watch-word?" I muttered, starting forward. No! a musket shot out the air; it was followed by another; horse and rider were stopped.

I discharged my own weapon, as a signal that at the house we knew what was taking place, and eagerly awaited developments. In a few minutes Ryerski appeared, accompanied by two of our men, between whose leveled muskets walked a redecoat who bore himself gallantly.

The misfortunes of a brave man and a gentleman always appeal to one's sympathies, so as he stepped on the gallery, I saluted him. It was just light enough for me to see that his face brightened at this unexpected consideration. He was young, a handsome fellow, and self-possessed as if he were going to a wedding.

The lieutenant with a sigh resigned himself to the existing state of affairs. I recognized him as the younger of the two officers whom I had met on my way to St. Charles.

"Sir, though I am heartily sorry you are my gaoler, I congratulate myself upon having so considerate a host," he returned, in a milder tone. "I hoped to breakfast with my fellow-officers; but since fate has decreed otherwise, I thank you for your hospitality."

He bowed to the doctor, who beckoned an old man from among the group of servants that, by this time, stood gaping in the passage.

"Pascal," he said, "show the gentleman to the south chamber, and furnish him with every comfort the house can supply."

Pascal, shuffling forward, led away the prisoner-guest.

"Now, my friends, you too must take a short repose," said Dr. Nelson, turning to Ramon and myself. "Since it is daylight I can both keep watch over the house and perform the duties of officer of the guard." Nothing loth, my comrade and I sought the room that had been given us. Throwing ourselves on the broad feather-bed that with difficulty was restrained within the limits of the high four post-bedstead, we were soon sleeping the sleep of those who have kept a long and anxious watch.

At 8 o'clock we were punctual in the breakfast-parlor. During mealtime only could we be sure of seeing Mademoiselle Jaquette, although I had noticed the day before, with a pang of jealousy, that she afforded Ramon several opportunities for a few moments' conversation with her.

On this morning, as she sat behind the burnished coffee-urn, she looked as fresh and fair as the bouquet of holly with which she had adorned the centre of the table. Glossy as its leaves was her abundant hair, that curled so prettily over her graceful head; and scarlet like the holly berries was her trim blouse tied with a silken cord at the throat and waist.

Good morning, monsieur le capitaine," she called to me with rallying coquetry.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," I answered, following her humor.

Then I fell to wondering whether the bit of red silk or a blue ribbon looked better against her creamy neck—who until recently had seldom noticed a woman's dress!

Perhaps Ramon was deciding in favor of the ribbon, for when he greeted her his gaze lingered overlong upon her face beneath the picture she made. Or was it that, like me, each day he found her more charming, and every gegaw she wore seemed the more perfectly to set off her beauty? The latter had its effect upon the lieutenant, too. As he came into the room his face clouded, but when his glance fell on the young hostess his brow cleared and his eyes lit up with interest.

"Mademoiselle de Gontiville, I present Lieutenant Weston," said Dr. Nelson, from the foot of the table.

Jaquette without rising, held out her little hand.

"Monsieur le lieutenant, I hope you have rested well," she said.

"As well, mademoiselle, as a prisoner can rest," he replied cheerfully, having clasped her pretty fingers, with unnecessary warmth, I thought, when he seated himself in the place assigned him, "yet a prisoner is seldom so fortunate as I now find myself."

Where had the Englishman learned his manners? They showed nothing of the brusqueness of his nationality.

The meal was hurried; we had much to do during the morning. The storm had come, a downpour of hail and sleet. "Ma foi, Jaquette, are you wearing a scarlet coat in contempt to our guest?" inquired the doctor with a laugh, as he surveyed his niece's attire.

"Au revoir, lieutenant," I said at parting. But a moodiness had settled upon him.

"Good-bye," he replied gloomily. "I would rather die than be sent away, even though it be through the kindness of a foe."

"Cheer up, we shall see fighting enough," I cried with gay abandon. "I wish you an unadventurous ride up the cote."

He struck his forehead with his hand and murmured something I did not catch. The driver whipped up the shaggy horse, and the calèche, lumbering down the road, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER V.
ST. DENIS.

"The redecoats will be upon us within two hours," exclaimed the doctor, as I returned to the dining-room. "We will place a guard here, but it is the distillery and the stone house of the Widow St. Germain, near by, that we must fortify. I sent word to Madame by Jaquette last evening."

Another surprise was in store for us. Scarcely had our host uttered the last words when the door of the room was thrown open and there entered a stranger, of whose presence in the house both Ramon and I had been until the moment ignorant.

He was a large, broad-shouldered man with a handsome head, regular features, a proud mouth that drooped at the corners, and dark, fiery eyes. His long frock-coat was of black cloth with wide lapels, his vest and stock of black satin, and his shirt bosom was stiffly starched after the new fashion.

"Papineau!" I involuntarily ejaculated, under my breath while my comrade made a futile attempt to conceal his astonishment.

The guest was indeed Monsieur Papineau, and our spirits mounted as we realized all that his presence at this crisis might mean. The great spokesman of the patriots, he whose eloquence in the assembly had aroused the province to insurrection was here, ready to lead us in the coming engagement, ready to give his life, if need be, for the cause of his country, as he had repeatedly proclaimed his willingness to do.

"Monsieur Papineau," said our host. "Comte Lyonsseil and Mr. Adair are two gallant free lancers who have joined their fortunes with ours."

The guest acknowledged our salutation with an abrupt nod, bowed with a shade more of ceremony to Jaquette and seated himself at the table.

It seemed to me as if the barometer that hung near one of the windows must have suddenly fallen still lower, and the day grew darker outside.

For the great man was not calmly confident as we had seen him at St. Charles, and as he first the leader of a cause whose first faint glow he had fanned into a flame. On the contrary his manner was nervous and distraught, as of one who had lain awake long in the night striving to determine upon a plan of action. His dress was disordered, as if hastily donned, and when he spoke his voice was sharp and betrayed irritability.

Dr. Nelson, eager to be gone that he might make his position impregnable, was, I think, as astonished as ourselves at the imminent collapse of his friend, while Jaquette, as she poured coffee for the late-comer, stared at him in open amazement.

"Monsieur, you are not we, she hazarded, her timidity conquered by kindly solicitude.

"Truly I am not, child," he answered, mopping his face with his handkerchief. Having breakfasted hastily he rose from his place, tipping over his chair in the act, and turning to the doctor broke out impetuously, regardless of our presence:

"My God, Nelson, what shall I do?" "The only course for every man here is to fight," I was on the point of interposing indignantly, for this singular behavior had speedily overcome my awe of the leader.

The servant retreated, gaping in wonder. Ten minutes later the so-called liberator of Canada set off without formal leave-taking. The last we saw of him was the glimpse we had from the window as he urged his beast forward through the slough of mud where the road had been.

A sounding brass," I muttered angrily as we watched him; "yet the name of this man has been mentioned in the same breath as that of Washington."

Gentlemen, let us make haste," interposed Dr. Nelson. "This delay may cost us dear."

Arming ourselves, we followed him to the stone house, in whose cellar were hidden numbers of the women and children of the village.

The place was being garrisoned, but Madame St. Germain refused to relinquish her own room, and Jaquette took up her station with the lady, the same who had borne her company on the day of the husking festival at St. Charles.

All points of defence had been provisioned, and since the habitant is accustomed, and since the habitant is accustomed, and since the habitant is accustomed, were as cheerful a company of brave fellows as if they looked forward to a fete instead of a fight. The majority were clad in "étouffe du pays" and wore rude mocassins and home-plaited straw hats, but with many this was an affectation, the habitant costumes being recommended in the resolutions drawn up at St. Charles.

Not all the men of the vicinity who had pledged themselves to the cause were present, however. At the call to arms many had fled up the river, across the plain, or to the woods. Of those who remained only a few had muskets, good or bad; the rest were armed with pickaxes, pitchforks, and cudgels. Of ammunition, I noted with concern, there was only a small supply.

Jaquette, warned by the doctor's remark at breakfast, had laid aside her red blouse and now wore a frock of gray homespun. With Madame St. Germain, she was engaged in distributing rations to the men.

"May I help you, mademoiselle?" I asked as she appeared, laden with a great basket.

"Alas, you must deal out powder and shot," she sighed, and passed on.

All the while the rain was pouring down as if the floodgates of heaven were open. Providence was apparently with us in the matter of weather.

Shortly after 10 o'clock Jean Baptiste, the scout, brought in word that the troops had disembarked at Sorel, their steamer being too large to ascend the Richelieu.

"As they marched up the cote, I crossed their path at St. Ours and hailed them to say that the bridge over the Ruisseau des Plantes was washed away," he continued. "They thought me a peaceful habitant who had gone to the village to sell a pig. The mud was up to their book-tops, and the wind cut like a thousand piercing arrows amid the sleet, but they kept on by the other road. Their rations must be nearly gone. They will fight to the end, for hunger makes wolves of men."

Quarter of an hour later we described them, pressing on up the river road, which then was a highway at the foot of the bluff.

"They are coming to arrest Dr. Nelson, our friend in sickness and trouble, but we will never let him be torn from us," shouted one of our habitants, and the others took up the cry.

The cavalry came first. Then the foot-soldiers, shoulder to shoulder, a long line of redecoats with formidable muskets and a howitzer.

In the stone house Dr. Nelson seemed everywhere at once.

"Remember, boys, not a shot is to be fired until I give the word," he directed. "We must hoard our powder and bullets until the moment when they will serve us best."

The men nodded and in silence waited at the barricaded windows.

With music of fife and drum the troops took possession of the abandoned buildings, from which presently came a rain of flame and the whizz of bullets through the sleet.

To it we promptly responded in kind, and we had the grim satisfaction of seeing some of the enemy fall back from their position. Among them was a flash of lightning, and almost at the same instant the stone house was struck as by a bolt from the skies.

It trembled like a living creature, and some of our habitants, unused to the horrors of war, poor fellows, dropped the weapons from their hands.

"Courage, boys," cried Ramon, to whom the sound was inspiring as martial music. "It was only a ball from the howitzer."

"But it has made a breach in the wall of the house," yelled Jean Baptiste, the scout. "We are lost."

"It recoiled like a hand-ball," I shouted in turn. "The walls are as thick as the bastions of Fort Chambly."

Finding that the missile had rebounded without injuring any one, our men took heart once more and fought with the stoicism of Indians. Before long a shell from the howitzer, penetrating the barricade of a window, exploded in the main room, killing five of the most gallant defenders of our position and wounding several.

For a few seconds consternation reigned. Thinking the enemy would effect an entrance to the house, I sprang toward the room where the ladies were, resolved to defend them with my last breath.

The door stood ajar and they had fallen upon their knees. As I approached, however, Jaquette, seeing that all danger from the shell was past, rose to her feet.

"Bring the wounded in here! Madame St. Germain and I will care for them," she cried, and the more quickly to give them aid, would have rushed out into the place where such dreadful destruction had been wrought.

"You must not go there," I said sternly, interposing myself in the doorway. "The wounded will be brought in, I fear you will have much to do during the remainder of the afternoon."

Closing the door after me, I went back to my post.

So the fight went on for an hour, when a party of redecoats led by their captain issuing from the buildings in which they had entrenched themselves, surrounded the stone house, charging and firing at intervals in a resolute attempt to carry our position by storm.

But our leader held it valiantly with a sharp return fire, and the English captain fell, so badly wounded that they were forced to drag him off the field. The assailants were thereupon recalled.

Toward 2 o'clock we, on our side, beheld a force of habitants marching down the river road from the direction of Beloeil. They were men from St. Hilaire come to our assistance.

"What a shout of joy went up from the stone house as we saw them attack the besiegers, hurling themselves upon a band of soldiers who had been harassing us from behind a barn!"

"Alas, Nial," said Dr. Nelson, coming over to where I stood peeping the enemy through a small window, "they can keep up the firing all night, while we have only enough powder to last about an hour longer. Jean Baptiste says there is more over at St. Antoine. If we had it, our victory would be assured."

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