

John Gyles, Captive

How a Mere Boy Met a Great Responsibility

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THE yellow light of an October sunset shone over the hills and water about the fort up the Jemseg, brightening into glorious green the great reach of pines bordering the lower bend of the river, burnishing the russet ochre of elm and walnut, and freshening the full grey of the low, hewn-stone buildings.

The Jemseg was a channel-like stream, three miles in length, connecting the River Saint John with Grand Lake, a great sheet of water to the north. The Fort, built here by the French, had been one of their chief strongholds. From it, under Villebon, had gone forth many an expedition against the English settlements. But as frequent washings of the river, in flood, made the defences unsafe, Villebon had moved up River St. John, to Nashwaak, and the fortress at Jemseg with its gardens and its broad extent of marsh, was now the peaceful habitation of Louis d'Amours de Chauffour, a French Seigneur.

The small silver bell in the turret of the little chapel was pealing its call for evening prayers. Not a sound, besides, broke the stillness of the lonely scene. Leading the way to the chapel walked the wife of Louis d'Amours, the lovely Margaret Guion, of Quebec. Following her were her two children, an old man, physician and servitor to the family, the maidservants, and a youth whose fair hair easily bespoke his English blood. The Sieur d'Amours, himself, was not of the number. He had been for some months in France on important interests.

At the gateway of the sentry court the lady paused, and spoke a kindly word to the English youth, then entered the chapel, followed by her train, and the old Servitor, who in the absence of the priest and the Sieur, read the prayers for the household of Louis d'Amours.

The youth did not join the company, but paced the small court within the enclosure, his eyes fixed intently at every forward beat out upon the lower bend of the river. Plain on the sunlit water at the river's mouth could be seen a single canoe. An hour before, when he had been making ready the chapel for service, it had been but a black speck; now it was making swift course up the Jemseg, and heading for the Fort. Anxiously he watched its approach, gazing out often over the low wall, fronting the river, then hurriedly resuming his patrol when the chanting voices ceased; and while the little procession passed out, kept his gaze away from the channel and facing the courtyard buildings.

As the children crossed the square they ran toward him, and each seizing a hand, continued with him his pacing across the little court. "We have you a prisoner!" exclaimed the girl.

"Hush!" cried her brother. "You know our mother told us not to say that to our good Gyles!"

"I do not see how it is wrong," said the girl.

"Because I am in truth a prisoner, little one," replied the youth, "and the lady would not hurt my feelings."

"You were once, and many years, I know that," she said. "But you are not now, for my father bought you away from the savages and you belong to us."

"And don't you think that is being a prisoner, still?" he asked. "Would you like to be bought, and sold, and belong to people?"

"It is all the same as we are," replied the child, gravely. "We belong to someone, and when you are loved it makes no difference. And we all belong to God, everybody on the river, Gyles."

"Not the Maliseet Indians, I hope," said the lad, grimly, stretching out his hands and arms, scarred with thongs and burns, his flesh recoiling in cold pricks at even the memory of his tortures. "See what they did for me, little ones; do you think they belong to God?"

"Well, anyway, it must be better to be prisoner here where we love you, and are good to you," replied the child. "And my father said, when he left us, that he put us in your care, Gyles. I heard him say that to our mother."

And the while he was talking the youth had led the children away from the ramparts, and toward the gardens, and now calling their attention to some late fruit inside, he passed quickly on alone toward the house, at the outer door of which stood Margaret Guion and the old Servitor.

"There is a canoe coming up river," he said, with respectful but eager tone. "Would it be word from the Seigneur?"

"It cannot be he," replied the lady. "He would

not reach home for a two weeks yet. Where is it?" and both she and the old man followed the Sentry as he led the way to the little court, in full view of the river. The approaching canoe could now be plainly distinguished. Two men plied the paddles, a third sat between, and swiftly over the yellow water they were urging the bark boat.

"Some news from the Grants below," said the lady, with forced calmness. "Are they strangers, Gyles?"

"Two are Indians, Madame, the third face I cannot see."

"I hardly think they come to harm us, dear lady," said the old Servitor; "if they be Indians they are our friends."

And now the canoe made straight for the little cove on the shore, directly under the wall, where stood the waiting group, and Madame d'Amours gave a glad cry as she saw the face of the centre Indian. "'Tis old Franceway," she exclaimed. "He is always to be trusted. Gyles, will you speak with him for me?"

"I will do as I am bid," he replied, "but I hate and fear every copper face of them, friend or foe."

MARGARET GUION and the Servitor accompanied him to the little stone flagging up to which the strange canoe was drawn. She saw the lad's face pale and flush as he spoke with the Indians. "What is it?" she cried. "Tell me, quick." "Madame, the English are revenging the raids of the French and Indians, and are out on an expedition to capture the French occupations. They are on their way up here, and then on to Villebon at Nashwaak."

"And my husband absent!" She wrung her hands. "What else does he say? Is it Colonel Church, of Pemaquid? He knows no mercy. He will kill, or take us all prisoners, Gyles!"

"Not us all, Madame. He could not take captive one of his own countrymen, and I may be able to plead for your safety."

Not marble could have grown whiter than her own face as she looked into the pallid, eager one of her young servant, and read the import of his answer. These invaders were his own people, and from them, and through their raid he could get his release. But what of her and her children, and the fortress, containing all their possessions in this new land!

Whatever of dread her heart might hold, Margaret of Guion knew nought of fear, expressed. "Gyles," she said, "when the Sieur d'Amours left home he gave me instruction to oversee all that I could, with my own eyes and wit; when I came to a hard place to trust to yours, and he left us in your charge, though you are but a lad of seventeen, and a servant in name, and a foreigner in race. I have not told you this before because I had no need, but I have told it you in my trust and confidence reposed, and I meant in good time, when peril came, to let you know his very words."

"Your children told me of it, Madame," he answered. "I had not thought of so great an honour being put upon me." And he turned again to the Indians and talked for some moments. "It is true that it is Colonel Church, Madame," he said. "Franceway tells me that he has already been to Minas and Chignecto, and is on his way to Villebon at Nashwaak."

"We know him well!" she exclaimed. "He and his men in their flat-bottomed, black boats, are worse than pirates. He will think this place still a fortress, and will burn and sack."

"Unless you do what the Sieur bade," said Gyles.

"What did he bid?" she asked.

"MADAME, he told me if any trouble came we were not to try to save the place, because we had not a large enough household to defend any attack, but we were to flee up to Grand Lake and get you and the children in safe keeping at the Big Grant. This is what I suppose he meant when he told you to trust to me if peril threatened."

"You lie!" cried the Lady Margaret. "Why should I flee like a frightened child! I can stand by my own! The Lady L'Tour stood by her fortress. Margaret of Guion can do as well!"

"She did not do well, Madame, if I heard the story aright. The Sieur said I was to see that you

were safe away from the place."

"And then you can be free yourself!" she said. "How do I know that this is not a pretext to get all our stores besides! This Colonel Church would take you away to your home again, in Pemaquid."

"Yes, Madame, I know that."

"And yet you ask me to trust you!" she cried.

"No, Madame, your husband, the Sieur d'Amours, he asked you to trust me, and bade me care for you."

Her face flushed at the quiet, grave words, and she moved to him, offering her hand. "I did not mean to be so hard," she said, "but it is not easy to believe you could do this thing for us when freedom and home are in your grasp. My husband bade you, and gave you the trust, and he would expect you to be true to it, because he is that sort of a man. He does right for right's sake, not for any one's command. And he would think you were our servant and must obey orders. But because I am a woman I can see your chance, and I know how you long for your own home and your own people, and how verily a prisoner you are here even though you have freedom of foot. But, Gyles, the Sieur d'Amours, he would believe that you would do your duty now, so do I. I would like well to stay here and face the grizzly old Briton and save my treasures, but I dare not disobey my husband's commands, and I will do as you have said he bade me. Must we leave this very night?"

"We dare not wait," said the youth. "Franceway is going down the portage with his brothers. They are strangers here and on their way to their home in Norridgewick. But they can make their way to one of the villages on foot, and he will come back here by midnight. With his large canoe for the maids and the luggage, and your own for your children, you can all be in safety by dawn."

"And when you have made ready the place, as the Sieur commanded, there is the little pirogue in which you can follow."

"Yes, Madame, there is the little pirogue in which I can follow."

Her quick ear caught the repetition of her words, and her own young heart, her mother heart, responded to the lad's hopeless tone.

"GYLES," she said, "I know the struggle is hard, and will be harder still when we are gone, but I believe you will be faithful to us. I wish I could promise you your freedom, but I cannot. The Sieur is not the stamp of man to be turned by a sentiment. He does ever what he himself deems just. He bought you from the savages out of kindness of heart, but I know he thinks he owns you and that you are to do his will implicitly, so I can make no promise. But, Gyles, I have no one else on whom I can depend in this strait. Old Salvadore is too feeble to do more than hold his strength for the journey, and my children and I must look to you for protection."

"There is not a moment to lose, Madame," said the Servitor, who had been having a further conference with the Indians. "The British burned every house at Beaubassin. The soldiers are rough men and cruel. You, Madame, must be out of this in safety."

Hastily the lady explained to him her husband's wishes and commands, and soon she and her household were making ready for the departure. The unexpected return of the Indian in an hour made their haste even more imperative. Down river he had learned that an additional force had joined Church, that they were waiting at the bend all night and at early morn would probably make their attack.

All silently the little procession left the house and descended the pathway to the flagging, where lay the canoes. In the Indian's large one were placed the maid servants, and their few necessary stores, and leading the way the Indian started off. Close behind was the light, strong craft of Madame Guion's, paddled by her own hand. With her were her children and the old Servitor. And drawn up on the shore was the stout little pirogue which was to be left for the youth. The hunting moon, yellow and full of glory, shone over the wild, lonely land.

Madame Guion drew back a few paces and out of the others' hearing.

"Gyles," she said, "in the little room over your own is a strong box, locked and strapped. It holds my silver and jewels, and a few treasures besides. Written on it are plain directions how, and where, to hide it in the garden behind the chapel. You will