

"When I picture to myself the perils through which I have passed, aye, I myself, with damsels of every description to choose from, brown and blonde, fat and lean, tall and short, all awaiting but a look. One, indeed, with a barrel of bacon entirely her own, was offered me. I could also have accepted the King's gift."

Bras de Fer was taking his supper in the same room. In general the brave *voyageur* had an inordinate capacity for devouring eels in sailor guise, pigeons with cabbages, partridges stewed with onions, soup with plums, eggs served with tripe, brown bread and cheese, but the Frenchman's facility of utterance quite reduced the Canadian's appetite. Were he but master of such captivating eloquence he might long ago have won the desire of his eyes.

"Was it not the damsels who escaped? To me it is equal. Husbands and wives quarrel and spit at each other like cats and where is the gain, my heart? Brown and lean as a weasel is Mam'zelle Anne, yet even she could marry if she would."

Baptiste felt that to sit silently listening was the hardest task he had ever endured. Bras de Fer had served as guide in nine expeditions against the Five Cantons; had killed with his own hand more than sixty Iroquois; had twice been tied to the stake waiting to be burned alive; had bravely sung the death-song while the joints of two of his fingers were broken, after being smoked in an Indian pipe; had, in genuine savage fashion, mocked at his own torments, when a necklace of hatchets, heated red hot, had been suspended around his neck, causing wounds of which he still retained the scars, yet his valour failed him when he had most need of it. He could have demolished his paltry rival at a blow, yet if Nanon should turn upon him with scorn and anger, he dared not contemplate that possibility.

"Nanon." By a tremendous effort he concentrated his will and left his untasted supper with a determined effort to plead his suit or perish in the attempt. However, when he felt the sharp, bright glance of his beloved resting upon him, the giant's courage oozed away, and he sank back on his chair disconsolately.

"If you please, Bras de Fer?" Nanon inquired politely.

Baptiste shook his head with the most helpless and mournful resignation; both ideas and words had escaped him.

"Is it the week of the three Thursdays, that thou would'st make compliments? There would be no place in Paradise if thou wert there unless thou mend thy manners, my friend. Ta, ta, thine eloquence is overpowering." Nanon's brown face dimpled with coquettish smiles.

"It was constancy to thee, it was disinclination to marriage that prevented me from entering the forest, from engaging in warfare against the Iroquois, from making my fortune in the fur trade," insinuated Jean.

"Think, then, and is it truly so," with exasperating simplicity, "and I had really believed that it was thine own cowardice."

"Indeed, yes. An ox, a cow, a pair of swines, a pair of fowls, two barrels of salted meat and eleven crowns in money, has thine hard-heartedness and my constancy cost me. And during all these years have I been pursued by a nightmare, a dream of awakening some morning to find myself a husband against my will. Consider what a fate, my good Nanon, and once the ceremony is performed, no redress—when the Church binds she ties fast. And, Nanon, I have observation, me. I would tell a secret. It is the blonde English demoiselle that the Sieur Du Chêne adores, and not the most noble, the demoiselle de Monesthol."

The low-browed, ruddy, peasant face flamed into fiery wrath.

"And is it a good-for-nothing of thy species who will dare to compare my Demoiselle—the daughter of great nobles who fought and bled for the King—to any dirt of *bourgeois*. It's with such as the Comte de Frontenac—except that M. le Gouverneur has already had the ill-luck to make choice of a lady—that my Demoiselle should mate. Bête, cease then thy bellowing and mend thy manners, thou wouldst bite the hand that nourishes thee."

In terror, Jean fled from the storm he had evoked.

"I know not whether to weep like a watering pot or to scratch somebody's eyes out. Ah! if I could but reach that wolf with my nails. It is all true. And this English girl will pay him ravishingly in his own coin, loving herself always, best and last. And my noble, proud little mistress, who smiles and is happy, seeing nothing. The neuvena I made in honor of that worthless St. Joseph, the useless image, shall no longer delude believers."

Like a whirlwind, the serving woman swept to the altar where rested St. Joseph, serenely unconscious of the enormity of his own offences and the tempest that had been brewing; it was the work of an instant to drag him from his eminence, to belabour and shake him viciously, pouring out upon him a flood of abuse as eloquent and injurious as a fertile brain and fluent tongue could devise, to rush down the garden and with all the strength of fury, to hurl him over the stone wall. Then, and then only, did Nanon pause for breath, drawing a long sigh of relief.

"Now shall my eyes, even mine, have the consolation of seeing that valueless saint in a thousand pieces."

With a bang, she threw open wide a side gate, opening from the secluded greenery of the garden into the dusty street, lying beneath the dazzling glare of the summer sunshine. The Frenchwoman stopped suddenly, the gleam of triumphant satisfaction faded from her eyes, her ruddy colour changed to gray pallor. Looking down thoughtfully at the shattered fragments of the ill-used St. Joseph stood a priest, a large, powerfully knit old man, in a narrow collar, long, rusty black coat and three-cornered hat. As she met his kindly, piercing gaze Nanon's wrath faded. She bent her head while he raised his hands with a slight gesture of benediction before he blessed her. There were few in Ville Marie but had unqualified faith in the gigantic soldier priest, Father Dollier de Casson, Superior of the Seminary of St. Sulpice.

"Did'st thou imagine, my good Nanon, that the passers-by were heathen Iroquois that thou shouldst assault them by means of the holy saints?"

Nanon, in the vehement excitement of the moment, had recovered her natural audacity. Her breast shook with great sobs, for a second the passion climbing in her throat could find no utterance.

"The worthless deceiving saint. Behold that kite of an Anne, stuck all over with feathers of spite and hypocrisy, her very look would turn milk sour, boasts that she receives of the saints ever favour she demands. My little, noble, gentle mistress, as pure and guileless as the holy saints themselves. Of all the great and noble ladies whom God has sent into this world, to beautify this creation, to glorify His name and for the relief and happiness of their fellow creatures, none ever fulfilled the object of their Creator more fully than Mademoiselle. And if the saints fail us, what is to become of us poor, common people?"

The priest listened with silent attention to the confused, vehement recital. He was far too thoroughly versed in the intricacies of human nature not to readily comprehend the faithful serving woman's meaning. He had himself a passion for duty and discipline, a genius for command and obedience, while his whole soul loathed dastards and renegades. A good Christian, labouring manfully at his calling, he had made the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of his flock his own. In the most cordial fashion, he worked for the people, dogmatized and stormed at them, and, however strict, he never lost patience with human frailty.

"Ah! the good-for-nothing saint. A neuvena—never a word omitted, though the poor bones ached and eyes were drowsy with sleep—four candles burning perpetually before his altar and of the best, my Father, nothing did I grudge if only the little demoiselle might have her heart's desire."

Nanon yielded to a new transport of exasperation.

The Sulpician cast a keen glance from under his white eye-brows, which contrasted with the hale, sun-burned face.

"Voyons, my daughter. You would desire high

place and favour in this world for Mademoiselle de Monesthol?"

"Oh, but yes, my Father. It's at the Court of our Lord the King that my demoiselle should shine among the great dames and brilliant demoiselles. Ah! that is what I would have for the little one. To see all the world look up at her, to walk behind and share her glory and hear it whispered but with reverence, 'There goes Nanon, serving woman to Her Grace Madame la Duchesse de —.'"

A smile of inexpressible humour curved De Casson's firm lips.

"Yet thou would'st grudge her high place in the Heavenly Kingdom. My brave and loyal Nanon, thou would'st generously sacrifice much to win happiness for thy mistress. I, also, would that it were God's will that the demoiselle might travel His way by a bright and sunny road, but if there is no smoother path to Heaven then bless her in taking that which is offered to her, my daughter. Thy loyal affection, good Nanon, is not so wise and far-seeing as that of thy Master; thine would deprive her of the crown and grace of suffering, His will uphold her amidst the fiery ordeal of tribulation. See to it, Nanon. Yield the little one up to the care of Him who is over all."

The clear, sonorous tones had a sort of inspiring ring about them; the composed, commanding benevolent countenance was illuminated by a cheering light of faith and courage. Nanon hung her head and wiped her eyes upon her long apron.

"It's all true, M. le Supérieur, but faith of Nanon Benest, the heavenly glory is too fine, too far off for such as I. I would rather the other, me, that I could touch with the hands and talk about and let all the world see. Let Mam'zelle Anne, who is ugly as a spider and cross as an enraged sheep, keep the first, I grudge it not. If M. le Supérieur will but give himself the trouble to consider, he will doubtless perceive that no one thinks of the little one's interest but her own poor servant, Nanon. Madame made the sacrifice of all when she left her own country. The Sieur Le Ber adores Mademoiselle and plans to ennoble his own family, and now this cuckoo, in her own nest, picks the feathers from her."

"Thou would undertake to play the rôle of Providence. Va, faithless one, it's well the good God should take the little one's destiny out of thy rash and reckless hands. What signifies the mode to him who goes to glory? the shorter cut from the battle-field or a little longer through a world of trouble. Thy loyalty and affection will be to thee a crown, but thy pride will prove a thorn to prick thee to the heart, my poor girl."

"Not that the most noble the Demoiselle de Monesthol could ever condescend to wed with the son of the bourgeois, Le Ber." Nanon hastened to qualify her rash admissions and vindicate her feminine right of having the last word. "But or right he should kneel humbly at her feet, thankful for a glance or a gracious word."

#### CHAPTER X.

"Le bonheur a toujours une forme fragile,  
Le malheur et de fer, la joie est de roseau."

—ANNAIS SÉGALAS.

The Comte de Frontenac entertained many of the dignities of the colony at one of those late suppers which had been so severely denounced by the clerical authorities.

The service of the table was arranged with elaborate magnificence. The lights flashed on gold plate and brilliant crystal. The banquet consisted of four courses. First chicken soup was served, this was followed by two legs of mutton, garnished with chops, and two large pies of choice venison, whose pale, gold-coloured crust was raised in fanciful shapes. Between the roasts were three dishes of plover, woodcock and partridges roasted on the spit, strings of larks served by the half dozen on little splinters of wood, upon which they had been cooked. The third course consisted of entrées, salads, either salted or sweetened, perfumed omelettes, blanc-manges, burnt creams, fritters and fruit pies. The fourth was dessert. Fruits piled in pyramids, cakes, macaroons, *march-pains* (a kind of cake) and preserves, the whole accompanied by the fashionable French wines of the day.

(To be continued.)