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OUR CENTENNIAL STORY.

THE BASTONNAIS:

A TALE OF THE AMERICAN INVASION OF CANADA IN 1775-76.

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

BOOK IV.

AFTER THE STORM.

XVI.

THE HOUR OF GLOOM.

The interview with Cary Singleton was not delayed a moment. Both he and Pauline desired that Zulma should be present, but she imagined a pressing pretext and glided out of the chamber. As she did so, her face was irradiated. Meeting Batoche in the passage, near the entrance to the house, she threw herself upon his neck, and burst into silent tears.

"Courage, mademoiselle," he said in a pathetic voice. "You have been magnificent, and shall have your reward. Courage."

"It is over, Batoche. A momentary weakness which I could not resist. I am happier now than I ever was in my life."

Batoche looked at her with admiration and whispered—

"There was only one way of saving her life."

"Yes, and we have adopted it."

"You have adopted it, mademoiselle, not I. Yours is all the merit and you shall be blessed for it."

The two then went into the room of M. Belmont to keep him company, while he awaited with resignation the result of the conference in the sick chamber.

We may not dwell upon the details of the conference. Suffice it to know that it was concluding in the extreme to the invalid and supremely painful to the young officer. At sight of the wasted figure before him, Cary lost all control over his feelings. He remembered only one thing—that this girl had saved his life. He saw but one duty—that he must save her's at whatever cost to himself and others. The long watches of those eight weeks at the Belmont house came back to him, the tireless attention, the gentle nursing, the sweet words of comfort. Her illness was the result of his. That was enough.

Pleased as Pauline was to hear his words of gratitude and protestations of devotion, she gave him no encouragement to believe that they would have the effect of restoring her either in body or mind. The poor girl shuddered at the alternative in which she was placed. Zulma was so near—only a step separating them. Roderick was so far—the ramparts of Quebec seeming to have receded beyond an infinite horizon. Death was at hand. Why recoil from it? Why not hail its deliverance as a benison?

Not in words did Pauline communicate these thoughts to Cary. With all her resolution she would have been utterly unable to do so. But he gathered her meaning only too well, the acuteness of his own suffering making him read on the suffering face of the patient the recon-dite thoughts which, in ordinary occasions, he should never have been able to fathom. But, in spite of all this, Pauline was happy in the simple presence of Cary. There were moments when she scarcely heeded what he said, so intent was she in the enjoyment of the assurance that he was really once more at her side. If she could have had this boon indefinitely, without the need of pledges or protestations, without the necessity of recalling the past, or facing the future, she would have been content, nor asked for anything beyond. This dream of a tranquil passivity was a fatal symptom of completely broken energies and proximate decay. But even this dream had to be dispelled. An hour had gone by and darkness had filled the room, an admonition to Cary that he must forthwith return to camp. When he informed the invalid of this she moaned piteously, and it was minutes before he could soothe her. Indeed she was not reconciled until he promised that he would be with her again so soon and as often as he could tear himself away from his military duties. Before leaving he leaned over her, and, while pressing her hand, imprinted a reverent kiss upon her forehead. He did it naturally, and as if by duty. She received the token without surprise, as if she expected it. It was the seal of love.

The calèche was waiting at the door, and Cary mounted it, after the exchange of only a few words with M. Belmont and Zulma. He was preoccupied and almost sullen. Batoche took a seat beside him and they drove away into the darkness. For nearly two-thirds of the route not a syllable passed between the two. The stars came out one by one like laughing nymphs, the moon sailed up jauntily, the low sounds of the night were heard on every side. Batoche was too shrewd to speak, but his eyes glared as he conducted the horse. His companion was buried in his thoughts. Finally the freshening breeze showed that they were approaching the broad St. Lawrence, a faint illumination floated over Quebec from its hundred lights, and the camp-

fires of the Continental army broke out here and there in the distance. They reached a rough part of the road where the horse was put on the walk.

"Batoche," said Cary hoarsely.

"Yes, Captain," was the calm reply.

"The end is at hand."

"Alas! sir."

"You see those fires yonder? They will soon be extinguished. The English fleet is coming with reinforcements, and we cannot withstand them. We shall have to flee. But before we go, I trust we shall fight, and if we fight, I hope I shall be killed. I am sick of disappointment and defeat. I want to die."

These words were spoken in such a harrowing way, that for once, Batoche was thrown off his guard, and could answer nothing—not a word of argument, not an expression of comfort. Whipping his horse to his utmost speed, he muttered grudgingly—

"Then we shall die together."

XVII.

THE GREAT RETREAT.

A few days passed and the month of May was ushered in. Cary Singleton was right in foretelling that stirring events were at hand. A crisis intervened in the siege of Quebec. Since the disappearance of the snow the Americans had given some symptoms of activity. There was more frequent firing upon the town, and feints were made with ladders and ropes for escalades at different points. An armed schooner, named the *Gaspé*, captured during the autumn, was prepared as a fire-ship to drift down and destroy the craft that was moored in the Cul-de-Sac, at the eastern extremity of Lower Town. Other vessels destined for a similar service were also made ready. At nine o'clock on the night of the 3rd May, the attempt was actually made. One of the fire-ships turned out from Levis, and advanced near to the Quebec shore without molestation, the garrison imagining that it was a friend. Success seemed almost within reach, when on being hailed, and not answering, guns were fired at her from the Grand Battery over the Cape. At this signal that they were discovered, the crew at once set a match to the combustible material on board, and sent the vessel drifting directly for the Cul-de-Sac. A moment more and she would have reached that coveted spot, and the shipping, with the greater part of Lower Town, would have been consumed. But the tide having ebbed about an hour, the current drove her back, notwithstanding that the north-east wind was in her favor. This failure was a terrible disappointment to the Americans. It was their last stroke against Quebec. Had the attempt succeeded, the army intended to attack the town during the confusion which the conflagration would necessarily have created, and the onslaught would have been a terrible one, because they were goaded to despair by their continuous ill-success, at the same time that they knew it was their final chance prior to the arrival of the British fleet which was every day expected.

That fleet did not long delay its appearance. At six o'clock, on the morning of the 6th May, a frigate hove in sight turning Point Levis. The whole American army witnessed her triumphant entrance. The ramparts of the town were lined with spectators to hail the welcome sight. Drums beat to arms, the church bells changed, and an immense shout arose that was re-echoed from the Plains of Abraham across the river to the Isle of Orleans. It was the acclamation of deliverance for the besieged, the knell of doom for the besiegers. The frigate was well named the *Surprise*, and she carried on board two companies of the 29th regiment with some marines, the whole amounting to two hundred men who were immediately landed. She was speedily followed by other war vessels containing more abundant reinforcements.

At noon of the same memorable day, the garrison, supported by the new arrivals, formed in different divisions, issued through the gates, and moved slowly as far as the battle field of St. Foye, where Chevalier Levis won his brilliant, but barren victory over Murray, on the 28th April, 1760. Carleton, now that he was backed by a power from the sea, shook off his inaction, and determined to deliver combat to the Continentals. But beyond a few pickets who fired as they fell back, the latter were nowhere to be seen. They had begun a precipitate retreat, leaving all their provisions, artillery, ammunition and baggage behind them. Their great campaign was over, ending in disastrous defeat. They endeavored to make a stand at Sorel, being slightly reinforced, but the English troops which pressed on under Carleton and Burgoyne, the commander of the fresh arrivals, forced them

to continue their flight. They were obliged to abandon their conquests at Montreal, Chambly, St. Johns and Isle-aux-Noix, and did not deem themselves safe, till they reached the head of Lake Champlain. Then they paused and rallied, forming a strong army under Gates, and one year later, wreaked a terrible revenge upon this same Burgoyne, who had superseded Carleton, by capturing his whole army at Saratoga, thus gaining the first real step towards securing the independence of the Colonies. Arnold fought like a hero at that battle, giving proof of qualities which must have insured his success at Quebec, if the fates had not been against him.

XVIII.

CONSUMMATUM EST.

The flight of the Continentals caused the utmost excitement, not only in Quebec, but throughout the surrounding country. They had so long occupied the ground, that their sudden departure created a great void. Those who were opposed to them broke out into exclamations, while the large number who sympathized with them were thrown into consternation. Bad news always travels fast. Long before sunset of that day, the event was known at Valcartier, and on the little cottage occupied by M. Belmont, the intelligence fell like a thunderbolt. It was useless for Zulma to attempt mastering her feelings. She rushed out into the garden, and there delivered herself to her agony. She had not foreseen this catastrophe, had never deemed anything like it possible. Now he was gone, gone in headlong flight, without a word of a warning, without a farewell. After what had been happening within the preceding few days, a single final interview would have helped to seal her resignation and reconcile her to her fate. But now even this boon was denied her.

It need not be said that M. Belmont's grief was also extreme, as we know the many reasons—personal and political, on account of himself, his countrymen and his daughter—which he had to desire the success of the American cause. It was vain for him to attempt concealing his emotion in the presence of Pauline. She immediately divined that something extraordinary had happened. Cary's behavior during his last visit had been so peculiar as to leave the impression that he was under the shadow of impending calamity. Only the evening previous, as he bade her farewell, his manner was strange, almost wild. He was tender and yet abrupt. If she had not known that he was dominated by a terrible sorrow, she would have feared that he was yielding to anger. He protested his eternal gratitude. He poured out his love in glorious words. He stood beautiful in the grandeur of his passion. And yet there was an indefinite something which made his departure painfully impressive to Pauline. His last words were—

"If you will not consent to live, Pauline, there is only thing for me to do. You understand!"

She understood perfectly well. The words had been ringing in her ears ever since, and now from her father's appearance, the suspicion flashed upon her that perhaps they were fulfilled. Was Cary dead? Had he thrown away his life in battle? The doubt could brook no delay, and, gathering all her strength, she abruptly interrogated M. Belmont.

"No, not dead, my child, but—"

"But what, father? I beg you to tell me all."

"They are gone. The siege is raised. It was unforeseen, and done in the utmost precipitancy."

"And he too is gone?"

"Alas! my dear."

"That is as bad as death."

And uttering a piercing shriek, Pauline fell back in a swoon upon her pillow. The cry was heard by Zulma, in the garden, and she rushed back into the room. The alternation in the face of the patient was so terrible that Zulma was horror-stricken. Pauline lay absolutely as if dead. No breathing was audible, and her pulse had apparently ceased to beat. Restoratives were applied, but failed to act. Although they did not exchange a word together, both Zulma and M. Belmont felt that it was the end. With the setting sun, and the coming of darkness, an awful silence fell upon the house, through which alone, by the terrified listeners, was faintly heard the rustling of the wings of doom.

Then the tempest arose, fit accompaniment for such a scene. Thunder and lightning filled the sky. A hurricane swept the landscape, with a voice of dirge, while the rain poured down in torrents. For long hours Zulma knelt beside the inanimate form. M. Belmont sat at head of the bed with the rigidity of a corpse. But for the ever Watchful Eye over that stricken house, who knows what ghastly scene the morning sun might witness?

Through the storm, the sound of hoofs were heard, followed soon after by a noise at the door. Zulma turned to M. Belmont with a sweet smile, while he awoke from his stupor with indications of fear.

"Heaven! are our enemies so soon upon us?" he exclaimed, rising.

"Never fear," said Zulma, rising also. "It is our friends."

She went to the door and admitted Cary Singleton and Batoche. They were both hag-

gard and travel-stained. It required but a glance to reveal the situation to them. The young officer, after pressing the hand of Zulma and M. Belmont, stood for several minutes gazing at the insensible Pauline. The old man did the same at a little distance behind. Then the latter gently touched the former upon the shoulder. He turned and the four held a whispered conference for a few moments, the speakers being Cary and Zulma, both earnest and decided, especially Zulma. A conclusion was soon reached, for M. Belmont hurriedly quitted the room. During his brief absence, while the two men resumed their watches near the couch, Zulma carried a little table near the head, covered it with a white cloth, set upon it two lighted silver candlesticks, and a little vessel of holy water in which rested a twig of cedar. She did this calmly, methodically, with mechanical dexterity, as if it had been an ordinary household duty. Never once did she raise her eyes from her work, but, from the increased light in the room, one might have noticed that there was a spot of fiery red upon either cheek. Cary, however absorbed in his meditations, could not help casting a look upon her as she moved about, while Batoche, although he never raised his head, did not lose a single one of her actions. Who can tell what passed in the bosoms of the three, or how much of their lives they lived during these moments?

Zulma's ministrations had scarcely been concluded, when M. Belmont returned with the parish priest of Valcartier, a venerable man whose smile, as he bowed to all the members of the group, and took in the belongings of the room, was as inspiring as a spoken blessing. Its influence too must have extended to the entranced Pauline for, as he approached her side, and sprinkled her with hyssop, breathing a prayer, she slowly opened her eyes and gazed at him. Then turning to the lighted tapers, and the snow cloth, she smiled, saying:

"It is the extreme unction, Monsieur Le Curé! I thank you."

The old priest, with that consummate knowledge of the world and the human heart, which his long pastorate had given him, approached nearer, and addressed her in a few earnest words, explaining everything. Then he stepped aside, and revealed the presence of Cary. The two lovers folded each other in a close embrace and thus, heart against heart, they communed together for a few moments. At the close, Pauline called for Zulma who was on her knees, at the foot of the bed and in shadow. The meeting was short, but passionate. Finally, one word which Zulma spoke had a magical effect, and the three turned their faces towards the assistants, smiling through their tears.

The ceremony was brief. There in that presence, at that solemn hour, the hands were joined, the benediction pronounced and Cary and Pauline were man and wife. The priest producing the parish register, the names of the principals and witnesses were signed. Zulma wrote hers in a large steady hand, but a tear, which she could not restrain, fell upon the letters and blurred them.

"Rest now, my child," said the priest, as he took his departure.

Pauline, exhausted by fatigue and emotion, immediately relapsed into slumber, but every trace of pain was gone and her regular breathing showed that she was enjoying a normal repose. Then Batoche, approaching Cary, silently pointed to the clock.

"Alas! yes," said the latter, turning to M. Belmont and Zulma, "it is now midnight, and the last act of this drama must be performed. Our camp is thirty miles away, and the night is terrible. I rode here to accomplish one duty. I must ride back to fulfil another. It is a blessing she sleeps. You will tell her all when she wakes."

He continued in fervid words recommending Pauline to both Zulma and M. Belmont. He protested that nothing short of his loyalty to his country could induce him to go away. Had his army been victorious, he might have resigned service and remained with Pauline and her friends. But now, especially, that it was routed, he could not abandon his colors and he knew that Pauline would despise him if he did. To-morrow they would resume their flight. In a few days they would be out of Canada.

When he had finished speaking, he threw his arms around the neck of Zulma, thanking her for her devotion, declaring that he would never forget her, and that he would always be at her service.

"I confide Pauline to you," he said. "To no other could I so well entrust her. She saved my life. Let us both be united in saving hers. She has promised me that she will now try to live. With your help, I am certain that she will do so. It is my only comfort on my departure, together with the assurance that you will always be her friend and mine."

Batoche, too, had a word with Zulma. He predicted the blessing of Heaven upon her abnegation, sent remembrances to his friends and, in most touching language, begged her to assume the care of little Blanche. When this was promised him, he told M. Belmont that Blanche knew the secret of his casket and would reveal it to him. Then the final separation took place. Cary and Batoche left the house together. The next morning the former had joined his companions on their retreat, while the latter lay prone on the wet grass, at the foot of the Montmorency Falls—dead. The lion-like heart was broken. It could not survive the ruin of its hopes.