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THE PEACE-KILLER; OR, THE MASSACRE OF LACHINE.

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CHAPTER VI.

MISCONCEPTIONS.

JULIE de Châtelet, after the abrupt departure of Isanta with Tambour, found herself in a state of deep perplexity. The tumult she had heard in the morning—the conversation she had held with her companion—the singular message brought by Tambour—the manifestation of the impulsive nature of the Huron maiden in the sudden resolve to see her brother—all these circumstances combined, led Julie into a labyrinth of unpleasant reflections, from which she could at present find no clue that might guide her to an outlet.

The more she pondered over the conversation she had held with Isanta, the more she felt herself drawn to the conclusion that the Huron maiden was about to fall, if she had not already fallen, in love with Lieut. de Belmont. It was true that Isanta had not made the admission in plain terms; but it was equally true that the interest she evinced in the young officer amounted to the same thing. Did not Julie recollect that Isanta had put to her the question:

"Do you love Lieut. de Belmont?"

She now blamed herself for answering the interrogatory in language so equivocal; for had she replied in a different strain, had she acknowledged that she did love de Belmont, in that case the Huron maiden, following the unselfish promptings of her nature, might have ceased to dream any further on an object impossible of accomplishment. Not that Julie de Châtelet believed she and her companion could ever stand in the light of rivals, but, like most other women of strong and ardent natures, she disliked even the bare probability of partnership in matters of affection; she wanted to be absolute possessor or nothing. But there was another reason why Julie was concerned for the Indian maiden. It had been the hope of M. de Callières, and also the hope of his ward, that the girl, placed as she had been at a tender age, amid the influences of civilized life, would have had her Indian nature completely transformed—would have forgotten that she was a child of the forest, and would regard herself in all respects as a daughter of France. But this hope, at least in the opinion of Julie de Châtelet, had received, that very morning, its doom and death-blow. For Julie could not but ponder over the conduct, so strange and impulsive, of her young companion when she received the mischievous conveyed by Tambour. And the vehement language of Isanta when implored to await the coming of M. de Callières, still rang in her ears—"I cannot wait another moment: ten years have I longed for this, and I cannot disobey the voice of my own people."

In the midst of these unpleasant reflections, Lieut. de Belmont entered the room. She received him coldly, and asked, with something like displeasure in her tone and manner:

"To what am I indebted for such an early visit from Lieut. de Belmont?"

The young man regarded her with a look of surprise as he replied:

"Did you not hear a disturbance amongst the Abenakis Indians this morning?"

"That is now some hours old," she answered, "Besides, I have heard all about it. I must, however, return thanks to Lieut. de Belmont for the sacrifice he has made in neglecting his military duties in order to acquaint me with the circumstance that the brother of my dearest friend was compelled this morning to run the gauntlet of the Abenakis."

The young man felt the force of the sneer, but replied in a tone of conciliation:

"I can assure you that it is but a very short time ago—not over half an hour—that I knew the prisoner to be the brother of Isanta."

"When Lieut. de Belmont enters upon his first campaign, and if he happens to take prisoners, I hope, for his own sake, that he will not allow two full days to elapse without discovering the difference between an Indian chief and an ordinary Indian warrior."

"I am deeply indebted to Mlle. de Châtelet for her good wishes," responded de Belmont, somewhat nettled. "I may inform her, however, that if it had not been for me, it is very probable the Huron chief would not be alive to-day. And further than this, if the man is a prisoner, he owes it first of all to his own obstinacy; for the Marquis de Denonville, on the day of the capture, offered to liberate him if he would disclose the object of his visit to the Fort, and tell his name and the nation to which he belonged. You will see, therefore, that when he refused to give to the Governor the personal explanation that would have set him at liberty, it is very unlikely that he should give it to me."

"Lieut. de Belmont would have made an

excellent lawyer," observed Julie, dryly; "he possesses, in a high degree, the faculty of setting a case unfavourable to himself in the best possible light."

"I cannot see," retorted the young man, with warmth, "how the case is unfavourable to me. Mlle. de Châtelet is somewhat unreasonable, and seems inclined, this time, at least, to form erroneous conclusions with respect to matters of which she must have been very imperfectly informed. All I can say is, that I am sorry, exceedingly sorry, for the prisoner. He is a brave man, and if it lay in my power, I would set him at liberty instantly."

"Solely for his merits as a brave man?" inquired Julie, seemingly bent on irritating her lover.

"I cannot understand your questions, Mlle. de Châtelet," he replied, looking both vexed and puzzled.

"The thoughts of the approaching campaign have occupied M. de Belmont's mind, to the exclusion of his usual faculty of clearness of perception," said Julie. "But be this as it may, I have asked a question which a man, infinitely below M. de Belmont in mental acuteness, might answer without a moment's hesitation."

"I tell Mlle. de Châtelet plainly, that if she speaks in riddles, I cannot be expected to answer them," said de Belmont, striving valiantly to keep down the irritation caused by the provoking speech and manner of Julie.

"Well, M. de Belmont, I will take the trouble, since you choose purposely to be dull of comprehension, to repeat my question at more length," said Julie, bending a searching look upon the young man. "You said if it were in your power you would set the Huron chief at liberty instantly. I ask you whether you would do this solely for his merits as a brave man, or on account of his sister, Isanta? Now, M. de Belmont, do you understand me this time?"

"With no difficulty at all," replied de Belmont, laughing outright. "Mlle. de Châtelet is afflicted with jealousy."

"Sir, take care how you trifle with me," said Julie in a tone of indignation. "You must remember that I am not one on whom you may try the jibes and ridicule of the mess-room."

"Mlle. Julie de Châtelet," retorted de Belmont, "the phrase 'jibes and ridicule of the mess-room' cannot apply to anything I have addressed to you at the present, or at any other time. I simply laughed at what I conceived to be an absurd fancy; and I think still that you could not have meant your question to be answered seriously."

"It is no matter what Lieut. de Belmont may please to think with respect to that question. I have grounds, unknown to him, for regarding it in a serious light. He may answer it if he choose; but if he refuse to answer it, I must form my own conclusions, and act on them immediately."

"Has Mlle. de Châtelet been listening to any slanders about me lately? For on no other supposition can I understand her present mood."

"I have never been in the habit of listening to any slanders concerning Lieut. de Belmont. His conduct is simply matter of concern for himself."

"No doubt, and he is able both to answer for it and to justify it. His own conscience is his judge, and it acquits him of having ever even imagined, much less carried into effect, anything which might bring him into discredit in his relations with Mlle. de Châtelet."

"I was not far wrong when I told Lieut. de Belmont that he would make an excellent lawyer."

"If Mlle. de Châtelet means to insinuate that I am guilty of equivocation," said de Belmont, unable any longer to bear up against her taunts, "then I shall be compelled to bid her good-day, and take my leave."

Julie cast at him a rapid glance of inquiry, and perceived by his looks that she had been carrying her sarcasm too far. After remaining silent for a moment, she said, carelessly,

"Lieut. de Belmont, I am happy to be able to congratulate you on your conquest—Isanta has fallen in love with you."

The young man, unable to perceive at the moment whether Julie was desirous of covering her retreat by turning the conversation into a humorous channel, as was her wont, or whether she was really serious, answered in a half-puzzled sort of manner.

"Who told you so?"

"I have it on good authority," said Julie.

"Then, if she has been pleased to fall in love with me, I am sorry for it. The fault, however, is none of mine."

"You hold the affections of a woman in little estimation, I perceive," replied Julie. "You have said enough to show that if you were told that any other woman were unfortunate enough to fall in love with you, your vanity would cause you to regard her conduct as a matter of course."

"All I can say is, that you judge me wrongfully," replied de Belmont, deeply mortified.

"Come now," said Mlle. de Châtelet, with a peremptory tone, "confess that you have been playing a double game."

"I will confess nothing of the kind," said de Belmont, decisively.

"That is to say you are afraid to admit, now that you are brought to task for it, that, while you were trying to make me believe I was the object of your addresses, you were at the same time endeavouring to make a dupe of Isanta—pouring into her ear vows which you never intended to perform."

"I deny that I ever acted, in regard to Isanta, in the manner you have just stated," said de Belmont, the blood mounting to his face with the vehemence of his assertion. "I deny, furthermore, that I ever made love to her; or that I ever spoke to her in such a manner as might even suggest such a subject to her imagination. You have my denial. Now, I request you to give me your authority."

"You cannot have my authority."

"Then I ask you to say if you accept my denial."

"I shall answer that question at some future period; at the present time it is not convenient that I should do so."

"In plain terms, then, you do not choose to accept my most emphatic denial of the tenth of the insinuations you have just made?" said de Belmont, in a voice trembling with excitement.

"I am not to be threatened, or coerced, sir," retorted Julie de Châtelet, drawing herself up to her full height, and speaking in a tone of pride and defiance. "Lieut. de Belmont may find other women credulous; but he will not persuade me to accept the statement of him or of any one else against the convictions forced upon me by the evidences of my own senses."

"Enough," said de Belmont, unable to restrain himself any longer, "I shall not waste words to combat the imaginings of jealousy. And now I shall bid Mlle. de Châtelet good-day."

With these words the young man, in a state of high excitement, took his leave.

The moment after he departed, Julie de Châtelet, whom a temporary and wayward spirit of opposition had forced to fight against her own heart, and the nobler impulses of her nature, felt all her firmness instantly desert her, and pass away in a flood of passionate tears.

CHAPTER VII.

REFUSAL OF THE SACRIFICE—BATTLE FOR LIBERTY.

A short time after parting from Tambour, Isanta made her appearance at the door of the guard-room of the Fort, and asked to see the prisoner who had run the gauntlet that morning. As Julie and she were in the habit of visiting the prisoners on errands of mercy, she at once obtained admission. She was shown into a small square chamber, lighted only by a grating about ten feet from the ground. There was no furniture in the cell—nothing save the bare, rough logs which composed the walls; and nothing whereon to sleep, but a clay floor. Owing to a sudden change from the sunshine without, to the gloom within, the maiden was unable, for a few moments, to distinguish any object whatever. But before she had time to accustom her vision to the obscurity of the cell, to such a degree as to be able to discern in what part its occupant was concealed, an eye quicker than hers had discovered who she was—and scarcely had the name "Isanta" fallen upon her ears, than she found herself held fast in the arms of her brother. The separation of ten years was forgotten in the meeting of a moment; and the prisoner and his sister yielded themselves up passively to the sweet sovereignty of memory. Isanta was the first to speak.

"Brother," she said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, "I have come to set you at liberty."

"Is my sister mad?" replied the captive. "She ought to know the nature of the Serpent."

"I am not mad. The Serpent promised me an hour ago, that he would give up his claim to your life."

"Do not trust him; when he spoke it was to lie."

"But this time he may tell the truth."

"Does the wolf change his heart as his teeth grow old? Does the Serpent learn truth as age comes upon him?"

"Could the wolf not be tempted to give up one prey for another?"

"He might; but when hunger came he would eat that other; or when anger came he would kill it. Thus it is with the Serpent."

"But some one must believe him; I will be that one. Let the future danger come; but let the present danger pass."

"What means Isanta? Has she bargained with him who stole in like a coward, when her brother and his warriors were away, and slew her kindred? Does she also forget that he carried herself away from her own people, and flung her amongst strangers?"

"I remembered all these things when I made the bargain. It was hard to make; it would not have been so hard to die. But I thought of you, and therefore I made it."

"Let me hear it."

"That you should go free; and that I should be his wife."

"Never!" shouted the Huron chief, in a voice hoarse with passion. "Sister of Kondiarak, it was mainly for your sake I came hither; but I would rather suffer a hundred

deaths than see you mated with the Serpent. Let him do his best. He will draw not even a sigh from Kondiarak, if my sister promise never to be his wife. The life I hold, the lives of a hundred of my warriors, were not worth that sacrifice."

"Remember the pangs of such a death as the Serpent knows how to inflict; remember the welfare of your tribe; think of the battles you have won; think on the honours you have yet to win, but do not think of me. I am but a woman. My life is worthless to our people; but if yours be lost, theirs will follow. Live, and be even greater than you are. Amongst the Hurons there are more squaws than warriors. I am not missed living, nor will I be missed when I am dead. What if the Serpent kill me? I shall be the sooner out of his power. If you grieve for me, remember that you have had greater sorrow, and that if tears could call back the dead, the dead would not think kindly of those who shed them. You will marry; your wife will be more to you than your sister; she will fill up my place in your heart; she will be like the moon chasing away a black cloud. She will make you the father of great warriors like their father and like our father. But, if she have a daughter, let her be called 'Isanta.' Then, when her brothers ask her about her name, you can tell them of me. This is all I ask for becoming the wife of one whom I dislike above everything else that has life. Will you promise me this for my reward?"

"Isanta, you talk to the winds when you talk thus to me," replied the Huron, touched in heart, but not shaken in resolution. "You must not be the wife of the Abenakis dog. Sooner than this should happen, both of us must die here, in this prison. So promise me, no matter how I may fare, that you will not be his wife."

The girl felt, as her brother was speaking, that some dark resolve was forming itself in his mind. And she was the more convinced of it, when seizing both her hands in his, as in the grasp of a vice, he said with terrible emphasis, "Promise me before I let your hands fall."

She was compelled to promise, for she knew she dare not refuse.

"Tell me, Kondiarak, why you came here, and how it was you were captured," said Isanta, wishing, by change of the subject of her bargain with the Serpent, to divert the mood of her brother.

"I came here two nights ago to find you out," he replied. "I had five canoes and sixty warriors. I came on shore alone, and in the darkness went round the fort. I visited the camp of the Abenakis, and found out its weak points. I meant to attack it an hour before day-break. When I returned to my warriors, there was one said he had seen signs of beaver about half-an-hour's sail upwards of where our canoes were at rest. My warriors asked me to let them go after the beaver. They said they would return in time for the attack. I told them to go. I waited the whole of the night, and watched for them coming back. The hour before sunrise had come; but my warriors were still absent. When the sun appeared, I saw upon the lake, a mile away, a canoe, bottom downwards. I swam out to see if it were mine; but it was no canoe of our people. I swam again to the shore; and tired with watching and swimming, I fell asleep. I was attacked by twelve of the Abenakis. I killed one and wounded two. I would have fought on, but that the handle of my tomahawk broke; my knife, too, was gone; it was while stealing it that I was awoken by the Abenakis."

"The Abenakis are the allies of the French, my brother," said Isanta; "and if you had attacked and beaten them, you would have made enemies of the French."

"I care not for that," replied the chief. "If the French had said I was their enemy I would have joined the Iroquois."

"Did you think I was with the French, or with the Abenakis," asked Isanta.

"With the French, for so their hunters told me a month ago in our town on the lake."

"But if you had slain the Abenakis, and angered their white friends, how could you have got me out of the hands of the French?"

"I would have asked you from the Governor; if I had been refused, I would have taken you while the French were away fighting against the Iroquois."

"I wish, my brother, I had been dead before the hunters of the French left here for our town on the lake," said Isanta mournfully.

"Why do you wish to be dead? You are too young to die," replied Kondiarak.

"Because, if I had been dead, you would not have been here under the power of the Serpent," said Isanta.

"If you assist me I shall baffle the Serpent. Have you, Isanta, the courage of our people?"

"If I had courage to offer to wed our enemy," said the girl proudly, "I have courage to save my brother in any other way. I have been many years amongst strangers, but still I am a sister of Kondiarak."

The Chief, delighted with the spirit of the girl, took her in his arms and kissed her.

To be continued.