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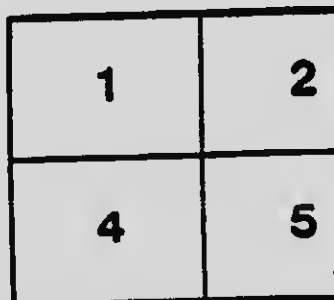
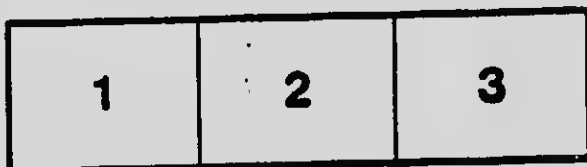
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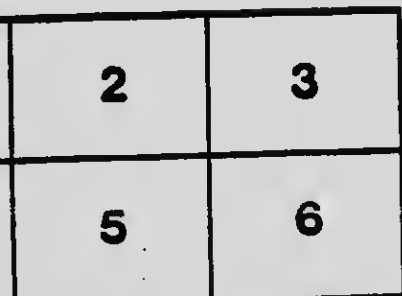
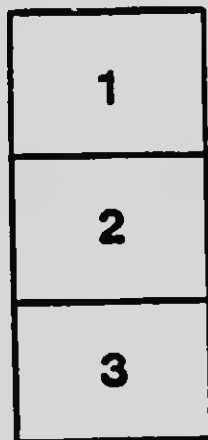
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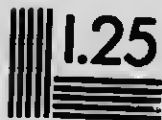
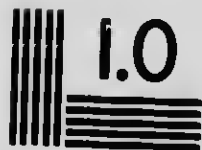
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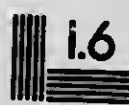
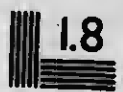
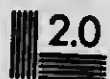
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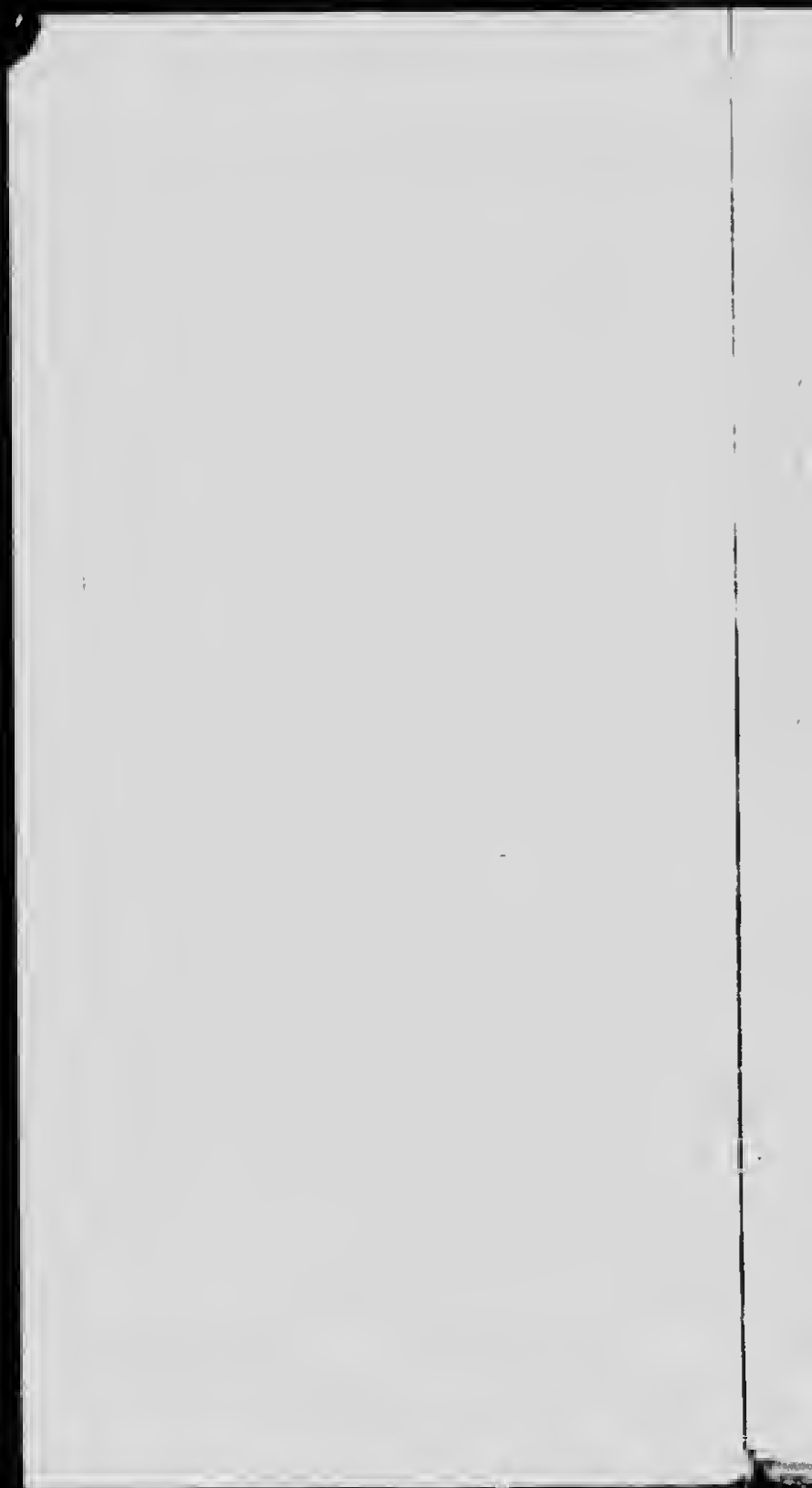
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To

With the Season's Greetings  
From





RED·OXEN  
OF·BONVAL

BY  
*Charles G. D. Roberts*

  
*Dodd, Mead  
& Company  
New York*

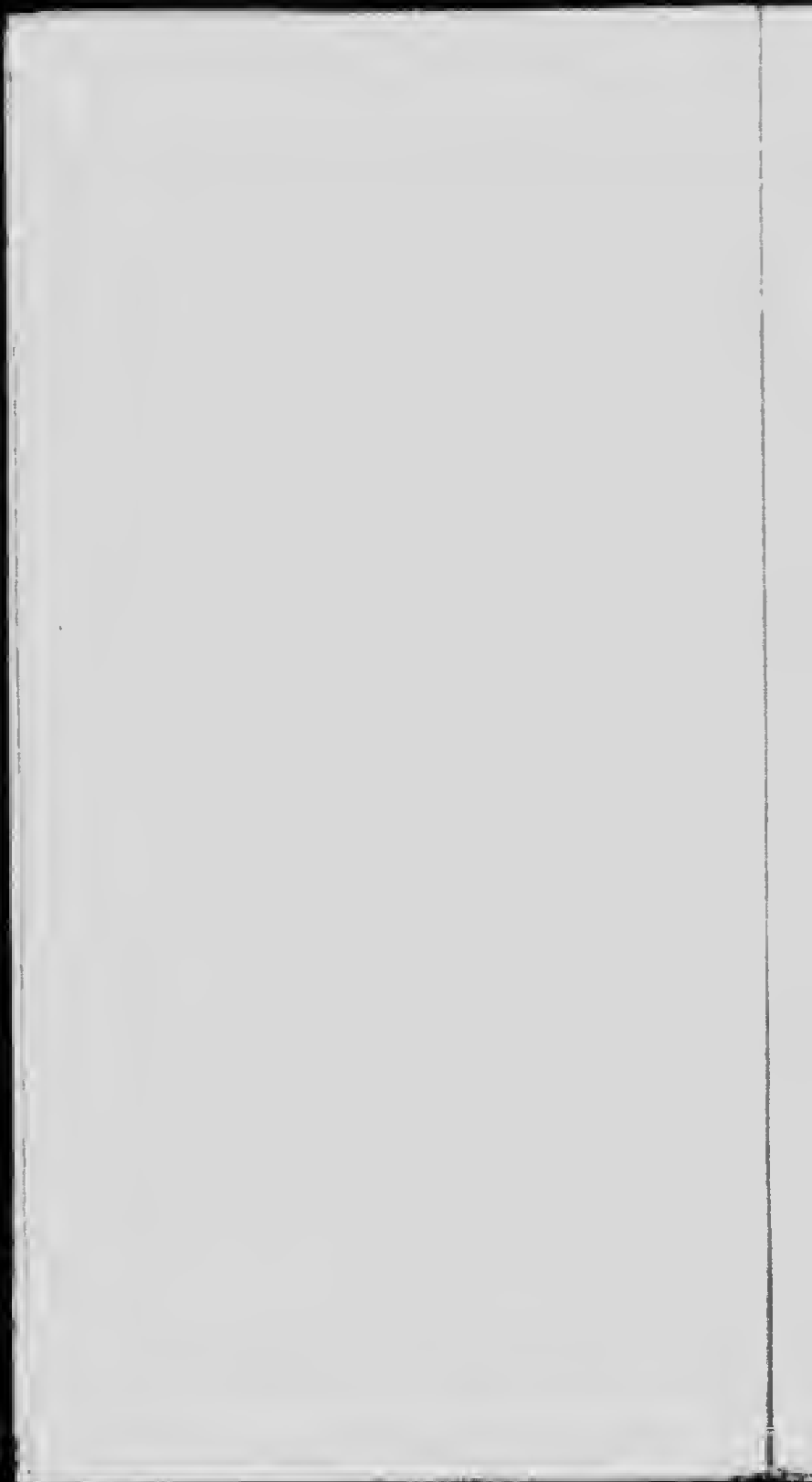
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PS8485 Published, October, 1908

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL



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## RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“O it is mereiy to these good beasts, then,” said Mademoiselle mockingly, “that I owe the honor of this visit from the much-occupied Captain Glenning! And I had been flattering myself! *Mais*—’tis ever so with us poor maids, Monsieur! We cannot be permitted to cherish our pretty delusions,—no, not even so long as that!” And she gave a daring little snip of her little brown thumb and slim forefinger. It was nothing so pronounced as a snap, of course; yet it was one of those things which only the right woman can

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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do in the right way, and which are all wrong if wrong by a hair's-breadth.

As she spoke, her small dark head to one side, she gazed at me straight in the eyes, laughingly, wickedly, in a manner that was both a challenge and an inhibition. It was indeed, a dare to all gallant protestation ; but, at the same time, there was something which forbade that one should ever dream of taking up the little glove so recklessly thrown down.

This had ever been Jeanne de Bonval's way, indeed, during those two brief weeks of the preceding winter which she had spent in Halifax, with half of the officers of the garrison sighing vainly at her small, disdainful feet. Not one of us but had

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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been held always at tantalizing distance, piqued by a sweet and dangerous raillery. If there were one for whom her wit assumed less keen an edge than was its wont, that one, I thought, was myself; and I was not alone in this suspicion. Yet never, even with the courage of this thought in my heart, had I dared put things to the test, lest raw haste should bungle my hopes. Of love or wooing, or of aught more intimate than the ceremonious compliment, I had suffered not my lips to say one word, waiting till that aloof and imperious spirit which I felt, rather than saw, lurking behind her challenging audacity, should have been lulled to sleep.

Now, therefore, when she made sport of the business

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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which had brought me to her home on the St. Croix, where she lived a remote yet busy life with her widowed and ailing mother, she had me, as of old, at her mercy. My unready wits and my most unready French held me silent, as of old; but I took heart to let my eyes speak with a plainness that could need no interpreter. For just an instant her own eyes softened and dropped, while a faint rose tinged the clear brown of her cheek. The one tiny foot, in its moccasin of whitened deerskin and dyed quill-work, tapped the floor nervously, and she met my gaze again with a look that carried the old inhibition with full force. Evidently she thought I was going to speak too boldly,—going to

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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take the dare, and tell the truth which she knew was burning on my tongue,—for she spoke again hastily, yet in the same mocking, provocative vein.

“Oh, no truly,” she cried, shaking her head, and flashing her white teeth between her scarlet lips, “I would not that one of you so honest English should do violence to his honesty by flattering a poor country maid. Yet our Frenchmen say nice things to us, and we know they do not mean them, and we are pleased all the same. They would say that they came to lay their devoted services at my feet and that the Governor’s business was but an incident. Is it not so, Monsieur? But you would not so flatter me. Oh, no; though you must know that I

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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have no one here to make me compliments, except my dear, dear mother, who is nigh blind and cannot see me, and old Tamin, my overseer, who is equally blind because he loves me so. But, never mind,"— she went on, suddenly changing her tone, and speaking with reminiscence in her voice, "it is pleasant to have a visitor from Halifax even if it be but the Governor's business that brings him. Let us then talk of the Governor's business, and the cattle."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle," I began, having had time to fashion my phrases in the unfamiliar tongue, "duty has but opened for me the door of desire, and now ——"

"That is very nice!" she cried, clapping her hands and

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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wickedly interrupting. "Now do I begin to believe that there still are kings and courts in the wide, far world, and stately dames, and minuets, and patches. I had begun to fear that I was, perhaps, after all, the peasant girl you seemed to think me, (she, with the blood of the de la Tours and the de Razillys in her veins!) or an Indian maid, in these moccasins." And she half thrust out the little foot, and quickly drew it back beneath the white homespun petticoat. "What if all that gay life, the lights, and the glitter, and the music, and the dancing, and the courtly compliments that sound so pretty and mean so little, were just a dream, Monsieur! Sometimes I think it so, here alone on the farm, with just

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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mother who forgets things now, and Tamin, and old Annette in the kitchen, and the chickens and the cows to talk to."

"The place which is blessed by your presence, Mademoiselle,—the life which has you to adorn it,—that place and that life, in court or in country, are the best," I answered fervently, emboldened by the seriousness of her concluding words. Then with hasty return of prudence I changed my tone. "The fact is I only reached Fort Piziquid this very noon. Scanting to the utmost such time as was needful for my toilet, I took a fresh horse and rode straight hither. I am sure that the Governor, though an impatient man himself, would have thought my haste much keener than any

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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urgency in my business might seem to call for ! ”

“ Ah, Monsieur, ” said she, with affected seriousness, “ believe me, you do not know what need there may be of haste in this matter of the cattle which your Governor is so solicitous to possess. You do not know what peril may threaten these good beasts, to which I am so indebted for the pleasure of this visit from Captain Glenning ! But, Monsieur must excuse me if I leave him for a few moments, while I go to tell my mother of his coming, and learn if she feels strong enough this afternoon to see him. Then, if it please you, we will consider more minutely this business of the Governor’s ! ”

As she moved across the

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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broad, dusky room, a gaunt white cat which I had not before observed dropped from a shelf and trotted after her like a dog. She herself went noiselessly and smoothly, like a creature of the woods, with a motion singularly different from the formal and stately grace which had belonged to her in the ball-rooms of Halifax. She flashed upon me one radiant yet half-flouting glance, and disappeared through a curtained door, while I stood staring after her, eyes and heart alike filled with the delectable vision.

If I had been in love with Jeanne de Bonval in Halifax, where she was altogether the *grande dame*, to every scrupulously calculated requirement of patch and powder and precision

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**RED OXEN OF BONVAL**

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of ceremony, I was tenfold more in love with her now. Beautiful indeed had she seemed to me then, above all other women; but she was tenfold more beautiful now, from the dainty white-moccasined feet and slender ankles to the black, rebellious waves of her thick hair, whose strange iridescences of bronze and purple should never have been desecrated by powder, unless as a merciful provision that other women might not die of envy. One curl, not over long, came down beside her small, half-hidden ear, with an air of having escaped the pins that should have held it. Her face, tanned to the clearest and most velvet brown, had that subtle modelling which only generations of fine breeding can con-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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fer,—and the like seal of her ancestors was to be discerned in her slim fingers with their rosy oval nails. But the resistless enchantment of her face appeared to dwell in her eyes and in her mouth,—eyes of alternate light and shadow, mystery and revelation,—mouth upon whose scarlet curves mirth and sadness came and went, childishness and womanliness replaced each other at a thought. She wore the short skirt of homespun linen most in use among the country girls of Acadia, but undyed, and bleached to a creamy whiteness, with white sleeves puffed at the shoulders, and a bodice of some soft blue stuff marvelously becoming. And my whole soul went out to her, kissing the places on the floor where the



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**RED OXEN OF BONVA'**

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little moccasined feet had stepped. It is permitted, indeed, for the soul to do what in the body,—and especially a body six feet tall and broad in proportion,—might look ridiculous. But was it not, forsooth, almost ridiculous that I should stand in this way with my eyes glued to the door through which My Lady had disappeared? “Would this fetch her?” I asked myself, with a half laugh under my breath; and I turned to speed the moments by gazing out upon the fair prospect under the window.

A fair prospect indeed! The old manor house of the de Bonvals was on the sunward slope of the uplands, overlooking the rich dyke-meadows of the St. Croix stream. On either

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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side were apple-orchards, hiding the barns and outbuildings ; and one tall lombardy poplar, straight and stiff as a church steeple, stood guard at each side of the open space which led up to the front door. This open space was a garden, given over to currant bushes,—beds of pinks and marigolds, scarlet-lychnis and love-lies-bleeding, tangles of red and yellow roses, and thickets of tall blue larkspur. Along the foot of the garden a hedge of lilac shrubs ; then the road ; then the wide dyke-lands, level, golden green, and dotted with small red cattle pasturing on the aftermath. Beyond the winding lines of the dyke wound the river, now placid and golden at full tide, and then, at the other side of

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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the tawny flood, more meadows, bordered by dark green hills of spruce and fir. A strong and sweet landscape this, I thought; tranquil, yet not tame, and visited by change twice daily, when the huge tides emptying themselves down past Piziquid and forth under the black front of Plomidon, left bare the gaping channels of copper red. So lovely a scene, and one set so deep in her love,—was there any hope that I should prevail with her to leave it for a home in the raw little city of Halifax, yet noisy with the hammers of the builders? Well, I was resolved,—and here I renewed my resolution,—that upon this visit I would put my fate to the test, if Mademoiselle's eyes would but for an instant refrain from

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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routing my courage; and I blessed the small red cattle there at their pasturing, that they had been the means of procuring to me this long craved opportunity. For all her raillery, Mademoiselle Jeanne must have well known how tied to my post I was at Halifax, how sorely I had been chafing at my fetters, and how only the urgent need of provisions for the garrison could induce the Governor to send me on so long a journey at a time when he had daily need of my services.

Noiseless, as I have said, were her feet, like a moth's wing in the twilight of the honeysuckles; but I felt her coming, and turned with leaping heart to find her at my shoulder.

“My mother,” said she,

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“begs that you will stay and sup with us, Monsieur.”

I bowed my glad assent, but before I could speak she went on in her quick way——

“And we have now just time to talk of this business of the Governor’s upon which you are so zealous. He desires, you say, to purchase these good beasts of mine yonder, for the garrison?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle!” It was better I thought to get the business done with, and clean set aside, that she might have one weapon the less wherewith to put me off from weightier matters. “He bids me convey to you his profoundest consideration, and to express the hope that you will again honor Halifax with your presence this coming winter. He bids me

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say, also, that he knows how to value the friendliness of a de Bonval, and begs that you will ask him a price something higher than the best that you could hope to obtain elsewhere !”

“ But you, Monsieur,” she answered, looking at me gravely, “ you must surely know that it is not possible for me to sell provision to your garrison !”

Here it was again, the barrier that confronted us at every turn when dealing with the Acadians ; and it moved me deeply to find that even Mademoiselle de Bonval was not an exception. At once I became the eager advocate of our cause, identifying it with my own private interest. Her refusal seemed to put her farther off, out of my reach, behind ambi-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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tions, sympathies, purposes which were alien and remote. In arguing the Governor's case I was indeed pleading my own.

"But, Mademoiselle, we have hoped so much from your friendship," I urged, too fervently for a mere matter of fat cattle. "Everywhere, the Acadians refuse to sell us the food which we have a right to purchase, offering the best prices for what we might take at our own price; and we have reason to know that all the time, in spite of the law against it and the risk of severe punishment, they are selling these same things which we so much need to our enemies at Louisbourg, and for a paltry price. But you, Mademoiselle,—we have hoped and believed that you were one of

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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ourselves, and would set these poor *habitants* an example. Oh, surely you *are* one of us, are you not, Mademoiselle ?”

She had listened with gravity in her great eyes, but now the old mockery leaped into them, and she laughed, with her head on one side.

“ How eloquent you can be, Monsieur, on a matter of business,—you who are wont to be so silent when I would hear pretty speeches ! ”

My face fell, as I realized how much in earnest I had been,—and seemingly on a mere question of fat cattle ! My heart {grew hot, and my face grew red at the thought. Then, of a sudden I understood my own fervor. Looking deep into her eyes I said :



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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“It was because I was jealous,—I am mad with jealousy, if you have interests and dreams which I cannot share, if you have any part in life that separates you from my love!” And forgetting all about Kings and, Governors, and garrisons, I seized her hand and pressed it fiercely to my lips.

On the instant, however, and before my lips could half realize their own ecstasy, the little hand was dexterously extricated. A slight flush crept into Mademoiselle's face, and her eyes fell. She didn't seem offended; but there was the faintest tinge of austerity in her voice—the old effective inhibition,—as she said:

“I can honestly commend your zeal to the Governor, Mon-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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sieur. And as for this friendship of mine, which you would make so important that the Governor should give heed to it, indeed, Monsieur, insignificant as it is, it is loyal. I am English at heart. When we de Bonvals swore allegiance to the English Throne we did it with our hearts as well as with our lips. And most gladly, now, would I meet the demand of your Governor. But surely you must understand that I cannot—*because I dare not!*”

“Dare not?” I cried, with amazed indignation that any one should have power to coerce or make her afraid.

“Can you keep a garrison here at Bonval?” she asked. “Shall I show my loyalty by letting this house of my father’s

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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be burned down, over the head of my sick mother?"

I was thunderstruck. I could not have believed that any peril was imminent to her from our enemies; here on the St. Croix within five miles of the Piziquid fort. Yet I knew well enough that these were no idle words of hers. Her sincerity was above question; and she was not the stuff of which hysterical alarmists are fashioned. But before I could make question of the danger I was favored by fortune with a most unexpected enlightening. "But, Mademoiselle"—I was beginning to stammer, when old Tamin, her factor, came in hastily, following upon his knock before she had time to bid him enter.

"Your pardon," he cried, hat

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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in hand and bowing low, "but Father La Garne and some of his red flock are close at hand. It were well that Monsieur the Englishman were hidden at once. I have buried his saddle in the hay and turned his horse out to pasture!"

So this was the notorious partisan priest, La Garne, condemned by his church, feared by the Acadians, hated by us English with a fiery hate, who came now so inopportunately to spoil my wooing! Hide from him and his crew? My blood boiled, as I laid hands on the pistols in my belt.

"Hide from those vermin?" I exclaimed. Then I saw that Mademoiselle's face had gone white to the lips; and I hesitated. "You must, indeed you

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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must," she cried, seizing me by the arm and trying to lead me toward a small door in a corner of the room. "They will be too many. You will be killed—and—scalped."

I felt her trembling. But I refused to obey her.

"I have my weapons!" I protested obstinately. "Would you have me leave you unprotected?"

She stopped and became suddenly calm.

"I am in no danger,—unless from your presence!" she said firmly. "Will you do as I wish? Or will you force me to see you murdered before my eyes?" Then her calm forsook her again — "Oh, madness! *Are you mad?*" she cried

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wildly. "Don't you love me?  
Come! Come!"

"I love you," said I quietly, following her to the door. She opened it. I stepped into the scented darkness of a closet, where soft, feminine stuffs hung on pegs. She closed the door, and I heard her turn the key. What did I care whether hiding was dignified or not? She had shown her heart in that swift and desperate moment, and I was drunk with happiness. Yes, indeed, I would hide as stealthily as a wood-mouse, if she wished it. That there might be no risk of noise from my heavy boots, I lay down on a heap of furs, close to the door,—and found that I could see out into the room through a crack in the paneling just on a level with my eyes.

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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Barely had I disposed myself so as best to use this advantage, when I heard a man's voice, strong and hoarse, at the other side of the room, and then the low music of Mademoiselle Jeanne's welcome. But they were too far off for me to catch anything that was said. Presently, however, they drew nearer to my hiding-place, and their words reached my ear with a distinctness almost startling. I understood this to be a piece of My Lady's strategy, that I might be entertained, and informed, in my prison; and I blessed her for it.

"I am advised, my Daughter," La Garne's harsh voice was saying, "that your husbandry has greatly prospered this year."

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“The saints, have, indeed, favored me far beyond my poor deserts,” answered Mademoiselle in deferential tones.

“You have grain in garner, beyond your necessities, I am told; and fatted oxen, ready for market, is it not so?”

“My barley is not yet threshed, Father,” was the respectful reply. (Scarce did I recognize my imperious mistress in this attitude of strange humility.) “And I have ten arpents of buckwheat on the uplands, not yet ripe for the sickle. As for my oxen, they are what you see yonder on the aftermath,—not large, but well nourished.”

“It is touching them that I would speak with you, my Daughter. Beyond admonish-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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ing you that you hold faithful to the cause of France, who will yet return to her own, and rule once more over all this land of Acadia now groaning under the English usurper,—beyond admonishing you thus, which is doubtless unnecessary, I have no time for the civilities of my more fortunate and more courtly brethren. Yet, it is perhaps given me to serve the cause of France in no common manner !” (Here there came into his voice a note of fanatical zeal, and I felt that the fellow, however bloody, was sincere.) “ Verily, my Daughter, these weak and self-seeking people, these Acadians, had long ago yielded their heavy necks to the English yoke, but for me !”

“ I have observed, indeed,

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Father," answered Mademoiselle, sweetly humoring this outburst, "that your power is very great among our people."

"Not my power, my Daughter, not mine," he protested, in a tone somewhat perfunctory, "but the power of the Cause I serve. But enough of myself, and more of my business here! These cattle are much needed by our garrison at Louisbourg. I will buy them of you, at a fair price, and bring or send you the money in full payment within one month from to-day."

He paused for a reply, but Mademoiselle was silent.

"You will have the beasts driven up to the ford to-morrow, about this hour," he continued, "and there I will give your man a written acknowledgment

of receipt. Why do you not reply, my Daughter?"

I noticed that a sharpness was creeping into his voice.

"It is not altogether easy to reply, Father," answered Mademoiselle very gently. "You see, there are several points that have to be considered."

"For instance!" His words were curt and hard.

"Well, Father, for one thing the English are very anxious to purchase these same ——"

But she was cut short. "Let me tell you, Jeanne de Bonval," he interrupted, a sudden cold fury in his voice, "though the English were to give you their weight in silver for the beasts, you would find it a costly bargain. I warn you, you are under suspicion of leaning to

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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these usurpers. I know of your merrymakings last winter, your dancings and your mummeries with the enemies of your church and your king. You are watched, girl. If you let the flatteries of vain fools mislead you, and the greed of gold tempt you to sell support to the foes of France and God, then—your fate be upon your own head !”

I ground my teeth with rage, having to lie silent and let his insolence go unchastised. But My Lady was no longer meek.

“ You presume too far upon your cloth, Monsieur La Garne,” she said, and I could see that she drew up her small figure right haughtily. “ And I must beg you to remember that I have not expressed any intention of

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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trafficking with the English. As for my private affairs in Halifax, they are a matter between myself and my own Father Confessor, the Curé of Piziquid, who has, I believe, the respect of his brother priests and the confidence of his bishop."

This was a sharp thrust, and I rubbed my hands over it. It was well known through all Acadia that the Bishop of Quebec tolerated La Garne only under urgent persuasion of the Governor of New France.

"I am not here to bandy words with a woman," said La Garne. "Nor do I care to resent an insolence toward myself. I serve France; and treason toward her I will punish. Do you send these cattle to the upper ford to-morrow?"

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Or do you sell them to the English?"

"I was going on to say," replied Mademoiselle coldly, "that you ask what would mean our ruin. You know the law, and to what I render myself liable if I am detected in selling supplies to the French at Louisbourg?"

Now La Garne was a true partisan. He promptly forgot all personal consideration in his zeal to secure an advantage to his cause.

"There need be no difficulty," he cried. "You will never be suspected. At this distance from the fort there is no danger of your being seen, none whatever. You are too timorous,—or your heart as I have said, is with the English. But I wish

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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you no harm, if you obey. I will judge you by your works, and leave your motives to your own conscience. Send the cattle after nightfall, if you think that safer. I will wait till one hour after moonrise."

"I will not so compromise myself, Monsieur La Garne," she answered. "If it is so safe, as you say, then send your own men for the cattle, at the first dark and take them. And I will send my man Tamin into Piziquid in the afternoon, that no blame or suspicion may rest on him. The English are very bitter on this business of supplies going to Louisbourg, and they wait to make a conspicuous example of some one!"

"Well," assented La Garne, somewhat impatiently, "so that

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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I get the beasts, I am content. As well here as at the ford, if it suits you the better so. I shall come myself. Good-night !”

I could see him from the girdled waist to the feet. He turned on his heel and strode toward the door.

But, boor though he was, Mademoiselle did not forget her courtesy toward his calling.

“I pray you, Father, stay and rest, and sup with us !” she said, as gently as if this interview had been all sunshine.

“No,” he snapped. “I have a duty to perform this night at the Forks of Piziquid.”

“Is it, then, as urgent ?” she asked, knowing she might safely press, he being obstinate.

“I have to give these *habitants* a conspicuous example,” he an-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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swered grimly. "There is one fellow over there who holds that the English are the true lords of Acadia, and entitled to his allegiance. He has been selling barley and flax to the Governor at Halifax!"

"Oh!" cried Mademoiselle, with a nicely modulated reprobation in her voice. I could imagine the subtle play of eyes and mouth that accompanied it. "And what will you do to the poor wretch?"

"Before the rising of tomorrow's sun, my Daughter," answered the priest, with slow significance, "his house will be ashes, and his children homeless,—but not fatherless, I trust, though my wild red flock are sometimes over impetuous in their zeal, and apt to go beyond

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my exact instructions. Farewell, Jeanne de Bonval; and that you may fare well, remember!"

The door closed smartly behind him, and Mademoiselle stood silent for a long time, watching from the window to be sure of his departure. At last she gave a little exclamation of relief. She came to the closet; I heard the key turn; the door opened. I caught the hem of her skirt and pressed it to my lips.

She drew back instantly beyond my reach. There was that in her small, determined face which forbade my wooing.

"You heard what he said, Monsieur?" she asked.

"Every word, I think," said I.

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“ And, of course, that is sufficient answer to the request of your Governor! You will acquit me of disloyalty, I think, if my good beasts find their way to Louisbourg instead of Halifax!”

“ I will answer for your loyalty with my life, whatever happens,” I cried fervently. Then, with a violent effort, I remembered my duty to the Governor. “ But—oh, this business!—why cannot I come to-morrow and take the cattle by force, paying you afterward?”

She laughed as if she really enjoyed my predicament.

“ That would be oppression, sheer tyrannyl” she retorted. “ You know you dare not do it,—because you dare not ex-

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plain to the Acadians! It would undo the forbearance of all these years, and drive them by thousands back into the arms of France! Think what the amiable La Garne would make of it!"

"But if you sell them to Louisbourg, I have the right to confiscate them, have I not? None could complain of that," I persisted.

"And how are you supposed to know? And after, how escape confiscating all my possessions? It seems, I am between the upper and the nether millstone, Monsieur," she answered mockingly.

"Stay, I have a plan,—one that will fully protect you," said I, thinking as swiftly and lucidly as I could with those bewildering

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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ing eyes searching my face.  
“And I can make it all right  
with the Governor.”

Her face grew grave ; and I realized with a very inward storm of love and wonder, the weight of the responsibilities which this lonely girl was carrying under so brave and gay a guise.

“You appreciate the ruin that hangs over us, Monsieur?” she asked. “You are sure, beyond a doubt, that it will not lay us open to the fate you know of?”

“It is perfectly safe,” I answered triumphantly. “Not a soul can even suspect except the Governor, and he will know all about it! Just at dark tomorrow night, was it not, that scoundrel said he would come and get the cattle?”

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“Just at dark. And he is a man of his word,” she added, significantly.

“It is the simplest thing in the world,” I exclaimed. “But—perhaps I had better not tell it to you!”

“The priest must not be harmed, Monsieur,” she said in a low voice. “And he must not be captured. You must not touch me with any taint of treachery!”

“You can trust me surely for that!” said I. “Your honor is more dear to me than life.” And then it came over me, just how deeply and fully she *was* trusting me,—trusting me blindly, when everything she had, and her mother’s life, and her own, were at stake. She must have seen in my eyes the

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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irresistible flood of love and longing that surged up in my heart, for she took two or three steps toward the door.

"Oh, Jeanne," I cried out, "beloved one, you know how long I have loved you. You know how I worship you. Let me protect you. Give me the right to protect you, to protect and care for your mother, to shelter you from all these fears and perils."

But she was merciless! She was rightly sure of me, so, womanlike, she could not but play with me! There was no severity, but the old mockery, in her eyes, as she withdrew to a yet safer distance.

"But why should I need protection, Monsieur," she asked, wilfully. "Have you not as-

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sured me that your plan is perfect,—and have I not believed you?”

I was at her side before she could reach the door. But——

“Here is Annette coming,” she exclaimed, with timely strategy, “to tell us that supper is served and that my mother awaits you!” And she laughed into my eyes, with daring little face upturned. It was, indeed, an inauspicious moment for my wooing,—for the door opened. I could have killed Annette,—yet as I followed My Lady to the supper room I was not really vexed at any one in the whole wide world, not even at La Garne.

At supper and after, I had no word more alone with Mademoiselle. I devoted myself

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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to the not uncongenial duty of making myself *persona grata* to Madame de Bonval, a wizened little invalid who leaned like a child upon her daughter's judgment in all things. The old lady was very gracious to me,—but she was present, and obviously for the evening; and though half blind, she was very far from deaf. When I could not in decency prolong my stay by so much as another minute, I made my adieux,—and My Lady met my adoring look with laughter in the green deeps of her eyes. Her lips,—very subtly both allured and denied, by the smile on their distracting curves; and I went away in a madness that made that ride back to Piziquid in the moonlight, beside the gleaming cur-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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rent of the St. Croix, seem swifter and more elusive than music heard in dreams.

Being arrived at the fort, on its fair green hill overlooking the junction of the Piziquid and the St. Croix, I pulled myself out of my dreams and sought an interview with the Commandant. Armed as I was with the Governor's authority to levy upon the garrison for such help as I should need, it was not incumbent upon me to lay bare the whole matter; but I told the Commandant enough to satisfy him, and he entered into the business with right good will. Of Mademoiselle's very delicate and dangerous part in it I told him not at all. Being a coarse-grained fellow, his attempted civilities had met with a some-

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL.

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what chilly reception at the de Bonval manor ; and I fancied that he was not ill-pleased to think that the matter promised some danger to the haughty little lady who had so effectually discouraged him.

Early the following morning, when the tide was at flood, I took twenty men, and had some fishermen of the village row us over to the east shore of the St. Croix. This made it tolerably safe that none should guess our destination. I marched them up the river, but far back from the valley, out of sight and ear-shot ; and we lay some hours about midday in the thick woods surrounding the Upper Ford. In the afternoon we crossed the stream, and moved cautiously down till we were within view

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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of the manor-house, taking advantage of every grove and thicket, and crawling on our bellies through the grass whenever obliged to cross the open. This method of travel was most exceeding irksome to my men, a fact which I noted with satisfaction. I had, indeed, been at pains to choose men but lately out from England, men not yet experienced in the subtleties of border warfare, who would not think the matter had been bungled if there chanced to be no shooting. I was resolved that Mademoiseile should have nothing on her conscience through any heedlessness of mine; but had I brought with me certain border veterans whom I had noted at the fort,—Indian fighters, Indian haters,—

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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I should have been hard put to it to keep the de Bonval threshold clean of blood.

A little back from the road, and commanding a clear view of all approaches to the manor-house, there was a thicket of blackberry canes and tangled clematis in the centre of a sloping buckwheat field. Into the heart of this thicket, slowly, stealthily as lizards, we wormed our way, and, at length, lay hidden beyond suspicion of friend or foe.

It was pleasant waiting in the blackberry thicket, the golden sun of late summer sifting through the leaves, sweet with wholesome country smells. A few late-flowering weeds amid the tangle drew about us the music of foraging bees. The

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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men were highly content, some dozing, some smoking, some dreaming of far-off sweethearts. I lay and peered through the stems, looking down upon the house that held my love. I saw old Tamin go and gather all the red cattle, from end to end of the meadows. Some half score,—cows and young heifers I guessed,—he drove to another pasture, back of the barns. The rest he herded into a small enclosure near the house, handy for purchase or for pillage. Then he bent his steps toward Piziquid, and disappeared beyond the furthest winding of the way. At last, just before sundown, my eyes were greatly favored. I saw My Lady,—so slight and precious a figure in her little cream-white gown and

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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blue bodice,—come forth into the barnyard with a basket on her arm and the white cat following at her skirt. With noisy cacklings the fowls scurried from every side to throng about her. The sounds came to us very clearly. Four white doves, also flew down from a gable, circled, and alighted on her shoulders. She threw grain in handfuls among the fowls, and gave some special dainty from her pocket to the doves, who crowded each other for the privilege of getting close against her face. At length she shook out the last grains from the basket, and moved slowly back to the house. As she neared the door the doves suddenly flew away, and dropped among the fowls to secure their portion of the grain.

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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As the dusk began to gather,—first rosy golden, then lilac, then brown-purple,—I set watches at each corner of our thicket. When it was as dark as it was like to be,—the sky clear, moonrise not far off, and no mist obscuring the crisp air,—the suspense began to grow keen.

Presently I saw a line of skulking shadows stealing down the road, a tall straight figure marching fearlessly at their head. As they neared the house their leader,—La Garne, plain enough,—left them and went up to the door, while his followers glided toward the enclosure holding the cattle. Soon there was a commotion in the herd. Then some bars were let down, clattering sharply. Then the door of the manor-house closed



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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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with a bang, and lights appeared in the windows of the big reception-room. The time for action had come.

“Remember, men,” said I, “there’s to be no shooting. In the dusk some innocent folk of the household might be hit. The cold steel’s the medicine for these red rascals. Now, silence.”

The men were delighted. They knew right well that marksmanship especially when the target was a drifting shadow among shadows, was not their forte. But the steel they could handle,—and in their innocence they expected to get close enough to an Indian to try its effect upon him!

Noiselessly I led them down to the road, that it might seem

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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to La Garne we had been following on his trail. As we gained it, the cattle came pushing out of the enclosure. Still crouching low, and stepping softly, we ran along the soft grass by the roadside, and I began to fear lest we should actually come hand to hand with the savages, so busy and so careless did they seem. But just as I was thinking how best to give the alarm there was a flash from the lilac hedge, a musket shot rang out, and a ball sang low over my head. That was all right, but it would not do to wait for more such messages. "Charge!" I shouted, and we bore down upon them at full run.

But the gliding figures melted away before us. No more shots were fired. No one stood to

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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test my men's cold steel. The men were amazed. Then a pale light began to spread over the landscape. The moon was rising.

"Post sentries, Cunliffe," I said to my sergeant, "and keep a sharp lookout. You never know what these devils are up to!" Then with an orderly at my heels, I went up to the door of the manor-house and knocked imperatively. The door was opened promptly by Annette, who was doubtless much astonished when I pushed past her and presented myself unannounced in the reception-room.

Mademoiselle stood in the middle of the floor, awaiting me. How beautiful she looked. Her eyes were like stars, and the old mocking smile curved

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her lips,—but her cheeks were flushed, and behind the play I felt a terrible anxiety. It was hard to remember my part. I longed to throw myself at her feet. But I held my head high, and eyed her austerely.

“You are welcome, Monsieur,” she said,—and at the same time she cast a meaning glance at the door of the closet which yesterday had been my hiding-place. Instantly I realized that La Garne was there. The situation was absolutely theatrical, and for one brief second my thought flashed back to London nights and the footlights of Drury Lane. Then I took my cue.

“I fear I must seem uncivil, Mademoiselle de Bonval,” said I, bowing low but ignoring her

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outstretched hand. "But *perhaps* you can explain!"

"What do you mean, Monsieur?" she asked in surprise. "Is it not rather I who need an explanation? I hear muskets at this quiet place,—and English cheers,—and a great trampling of feet. And then you rush in upon me, and look—so strange!"

"Mademoiselle," said I firmly, "believe me, nothing is further from my wish than that you should be found a trespasser against our very necessary laws. But the case looks bad. Yesterday you refused to sell me your cattle, which are much needed by our soldiers at Halifax, though I offered a handsome price for them. And I cannot say your reasons quite contented me. To-night, while following

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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the trail of some of those pestilent savages who, under that frocked scoundrel La Garne, make so much trouble for us in Acadia, I find that their destination is the manor-house of Bonval. I catch them in the act of driving off, openly, the very cattle which you so inexplicably refused to sell to me. Of course, I understand quite well that La Garne and his red minions are but the tools of Louisbourg. You know the penalty, Mademoiselle, for selling supplies to Louisbourg?"

Such words to her! I felt as if they blistered my mouth. But she gave me a swift commending glance, then drew herself up with fine scorn.

"And so, Monsieur," she exclaimed witheringly, "you

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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would impeach me for treason, because I am robbed of my goods. Because the Indians come by night and steal my cattle, you would confiscate my estate, and exile me from my native land. Is this English justice? If so, it will no doubt commend itself to the people of Acadia!"

"But yesterday," I replied, in the voice of a judge, "these cattle were roaming the marshes. To-night I find them shut up in a paddock by the house, most convenient for a purchaser."

"As for that, it is the business of my overseer," she answered carelessly. "How should I know why at times he leaves them loose, and at times drives them at night into the paddock. Perhaps he is going

to mark them, who knows. He is to-night at Piziquid; but when he returns he will be able to satisfy you."

"I am most glad, Mademoiselle, that you have a defense so plausible," said I gravely. "It is not for me, however, to say whether the Governor will hold it sufficient, or not. I earnestly hope he may. My own present duty is clear. I will take these cattle, which were about to go to our enemies. They are contraband of war, fairly. But I will give you a receipt for them; and if they are unlawfully taken, without doubt you will be more than compensated for the injury. The Acadians shall have no cause to complain of English justice; but they must not be allowed to think that English



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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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forbearance is mere childish credulity, to be imposed upon at every turn."

To my surprise, Mademoiselle's tone became suddenly quite gracious.

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, Monsieur," she cried gaily, "even though you have been so rude and suspicious. There are paper and pens. Please write out the receipt." And she motioned me to an open escritoire.

"Gratitude?" I asked. "And for what, pray?" Mindful of her anxiety, I kept my voice stern and unrelenting.

"You have saved my cattle from the thieving Indians," she exclaimed. "I know the Governor will compensate me, will pay me my full price for them,

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when I explain the circumstances to him."

"You are sanguine," said I, handing her the paper. "I trust you may not be disappointed. And now, I have the honor to wish you good-night, and to hope that I have not incommoded you by this abrupt incursion!"

As I bent low over her hand I turned her so that she stood exactly between me and the cupboard door, where I knew that a pair of lynx eyes watched us piercingly. Then I pressed my lips passionately to the fingers, and whispered, "Tomorrow, my love, my Heart, I shall come again, and implore an answer of thee."

But to my surprise she followed me to the door, and into

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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the hallway, beyond scope of the lynx eyes in the cupboard. I saw that her face was white now, the gaiety, the mockery, all gone. Her lips trembled like a child's. I would have snatched her to my heart,—but Annette stood there, watching me with disapproval, waiting to open the door.

“Till to-morrow, then,” I murmured, again lifting her hand to my lips. But this time her little fingers clung. My heart thrilled and leaped wildly.

“Don't go,” she panted, almost with a sob. “I am afraid. After you go, they will come back. He suspects. He sees through it all,—I know he does. He is so cunning. Oh—I think I do need your protection. You *may* protect—my mother!”

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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And she lifted her face to me suddenly, tears were in her eyes, but a smile upon her mouth.

“Beloved!” said I, and gathered her to my heart. “My Lady! My Beautiful Own!” And as I kissed her, I had a vision of Annette, silently and discreetly removing herself from the scene. A moment more and My Lady untwined my arms, and placed them firmly, decisively, at my sides. She put both her hands behind my neck, pulled down my head, and kissed me on both eyes. Then she sprang back beyond my reach, and laughed as if she had not a care in the world. How bright, indeed, did this same old worn world look! I laughed too, in sheer joy. Then I thought of the prisoner in the closet.

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RED OXEN OF BONVAL

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“What wilt thou do with him, My Lady?” I whispered.

She came back, into my arms, that she might the more conveniently reply.

“I will get him away safe in the night,” she whispered, “if you will remove the sentry from the kitchen entrance.” I nodded my head. “But first, as the price of his freedom, I will make him swear that de Bonval shall not be harmed. He lays so many traps for others, it is time he felt a little pinch himself. And he will keep his oath.”



