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THE EXILED LOVER

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The Exiled Lover

By

Theodore Goodridge Roberts



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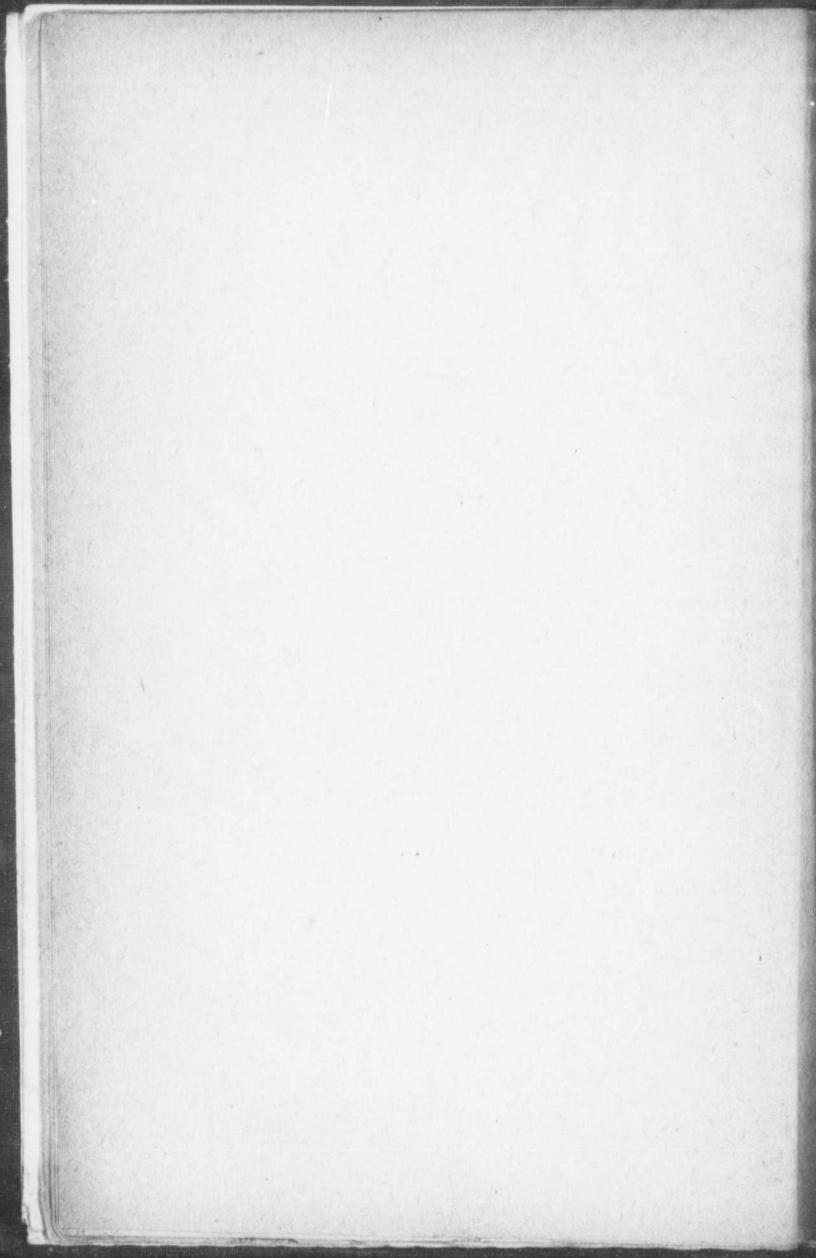
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The Exiled Lover

CHAPTER I

THE LIGHTS IN THE COCONUT TREES

YOUNG Roger de Belot sat by the open window of his big, unlighted room and gazed out into the gloom of the night. The mysteries of the magic isle and the tropic seas and of Charles de Montigny's daughter cried in his brain and heart. He was young; Martinique was new to him and such enchantments as the charms of Anne de Montigny were new to him.

The sweet excitement of mind and blood banished sleep; so he sat in the gloom of his chamber and faced the looming, swaying shadows of the Governor's gardens. The wind blew in from the sea. The soft booming of the surf on the invisible shore mingled with the sighing of the great trees about the house.

Vaguely, as one in a stupour of contentment, he questioned the mysteries of the night beyond his window—the mysteries of the scented shadows.

the sleeping blooms, the ageless surf and the eternal sea. Curiosity at the immensity of things pricked him gently. His thoughts played for a little with the surf and its endless, tireless advance and disappearance upon the sands. When had it first swelled to bring in the wide blue, to run in and vanish upon the land? And when would it cease to run and break and vanish? Before the glory of France had come to the New World, before the conquests of Spanish adventurers had enslaved these isles of beauty, this surf had rolled in upon Martinique, day and night, night and day. When this house of the Governor was in the hands of strangers, even when it was fallen, stone by crumbling stone, still the surf would sound through the perfumed night. When the bones of Roger de Belot were dust, when the beauty of Anne de Montigny was forgotten, men of a future age would listen here to the dull thud and soft burst of the surf on the sands.

These reflections on the immeasurable career of the surf and the brevity of human life failed utterly to put the young man out of countenance with himself or his place in the scheme of things. Better, he thought, to live one man's life as Roger

de Belot than unnumbered ages as senseless white water rolled in from the sea ; better to kiss Anne de Montigny once, with the prospect of kissing her again on the morrow, than to drum upon the shore for a million years.

A small sound in the night, that was neither of wind nor surf, caused him to advance his head beyond the sill of the window and look downward. He saw the glow of a small flame shaded by a hand, and again he heard whispering voices.

“ Off Palm Point, you say ? ” queried one voice, shaken as if with excitement or anxiety.

“ Yes, sir—and the lights are hung and burning bright,” came the answer.

The hand that shaded the flame moved and for an instant of time the circumscribed glow illumined the face of Charles de Montigny. Then the flame vanished in the wind.

“ The men are armed and assembled ? ”

“ They have waited, ready, since she was first sighted from the look-out.”

“ You have done well. Now we shall join their vigil, for the house sleeps soundly.”

The listener withdrew a pace from the window and stood for a full minute staring fixedly at the

outer darkness. What was the meaning of this talk of lights? He had never heard of lights on Palm Point. And what of this ship?—and of armed men waiting?

He turned from the window and felt about in the dark for his clothes. He found them and donned them with shaking, fumbling hands. He belted on his sword, then opened the door and went noiselessly from the room.

De Belot knew Palm Point to be a secluded, unkindly place beset by black reefs and torn waters. He had visited it once, in broad day, by the merest chance—and now it came back to him how, when he had mentioned his outing to the Governor, that gentleman had urged him to keep away from that place in future, as it had a bad name for quicksands. He had urged Roger never again to wander toward Palm Point unattended, with a liveliness of anxiety that had, even at the time, seemed unnecessary.

This incident came back to Roger's mind now with an unpleasant shock; for he had recognized the Governor's face in the glow of the candle-flame, and his voice in the whispered questions beneath his window. Here was another mystery of the perfumed night—but one so little suited to his taste that he would gladly have done without it.

Safely out of the sleeping house, the young man set his course as best he could for Palm Point. His knowledge of the ground was sketchy and he had never before been beyond the gardens after nightfall. He soon found himself involved in a jungle and, a little later, in a field of sugar-canes. From the cultivated land he stumbled into a waste place of rocks and hollows. The wind blew more heavily now ; coarse foliage clashed to right and left ; broken seas crashed in the darkness in front with high notes of menace and bellows of rage. He fumbled his way seaward until the tang of salt spray was on his face. Then he turned to the left. At last he saw swaying gleams of yellow light in the tossing gloom ahead, now flashing clear, now hidden for a few seconds, some swinging high and others crawling low. His ear caught the banging reports of fire-arms through the tumult of wind and sea and shaking foliage. He drew his sword and increased his pace. He stumbled and fell heavily several times. Once his sword was knocked from his hand by the violence of a tumble and he lost minutes in finding it.

As Roger de Belot drew in upon the lights he caught snatches of human voices—wind-swept shouts, wind-swept screams. He crashed through a

thicket of tangled shrubs into a grove of coconut trees. Here were the lights which had led him ; but even as he gazed wildly up and around at them several of them were hauled down from the swaying tree-tops by invisible hands. Other lights moved and shone here and there along the ground. Roger dashed furiously at one of these and closed with the fellow who carried it. The lantern fell to the sand. A strong arm embraced Roger and strong fingers closed upon his windpipe. He shortened his sword and drove it home with precision and fury. He fell with the dead man.

Lights continued to move along the ground and slide down from the trees. Shouts continued to sound, but no more shots or screams rang in the clamour of the bursting seas and clashing palm-crests.

Roger recovered the fallen lantern and held it to the face of the man he had killed. It was the face of one of the Governor's black bodyguard. He cleaned his blade on the fellow's scanty garments and returned it to its scabbard. Then he extinguished the lantern and advanced cautiously toward the heart of the subsiding activities. He felt horror, bewilderment and rage—and enough of fear

to temper his rage with discretion. His cautious, exploring feet encountered a corpse. He knelt and felt the face and body with his hands. It was a white man, wet with salt water.

Sick at heart, he crouched in a clump of bushes and watched. By the dim light of lanterns he saw men whom he knew—men of the Governor's household and following—dig great holes in the sand. Into some of these holes dead men were flung, in others boxes and kegs and packages of various shapes and sizes were hidden. He saw strong parties move inland, heavily loaded. He glimpsed the Governor with one of these parties.

Roger kept to his hiding-place for a long time. When he crept out at last the grove was deserted by all save the clashing wind aloft and the dead men and the scurrying land-crabs below. A sudden panic of horror seized him. He sprang to his feet, turned his back upon the sea and ran. He won clear of the grove in less than a minute ; but fatigue soon reduced the speed of his flight. He struggled up a long, steep slope of out-thrust rocks and thin turf. All through the darkness he fought onward desperately and blindly, like one hag-ridden in his dreams. When dawn flared at last from the eastern sea he lay down and slept.

CHAPTER II

AN EXCITING BREAKFAST

CHARLES DE MONTIGNY, Governor of Martinique, and Captain Jean Richard of the brig *Rose*, sat on the seaward gallery of the Governor's country villa. The morning was well advanced, but the air had not yet become sultry. The wind, which had blown high all night, breathed gently now through the wide gallery.

On the table between the two were food and drink—a pepper pot, a red snapper in an oil dressing, a roasted pullet, baked yams, mangoes, a flask of brandy, a flask of rum and a clay jar of cool water.

The Governor's face suggested weariness, and his eyes loss of sleep. Though presumably but just out of bed, he ate like one whose appetite has been sharpened by hard exercise, and drank rum and water with a thirsty throat. He talked sparingly and seemed to make no effort to entertain his companion.

Captain Jean Richard also did justice to the breakfast, also talked sparingly. But he looked

fitter, fresher and more alert than his host. He was a cool hand, this Jean Richard—a daring seaman, a man of weight beyond his position, a privateer at times, at times a diligent trader and always a fighter. It was rumoured among the islanders that he had but recently refused the command of a King's ship. He cherished his independence, he said. Very good ; but his enemies wagged their heads. Some even went so far as to hint that he was something less honourable than a privateer upon occasion.

The Governor and the master of the *Rose* were not friends. On the other hand, they were not enemies. Each served the King and France in his own way and kept an eye on the other. They met no oftener than twice or thrice in a year and, so far, it had always been the policy of each to be polite to the other ; but when the haughty Charles de Montigny stooped so far as to extend hospitality to Jean Richard because the master of the armed brig had the reputation of being a dangerous man to slight, he made a point of keeping his daughter Anne in the background. He would not have his daughter hobnobbing with any common or uncommon trader.

The brig lay at anchor in a deep and sheltered cove

not far from the foot of the Governor's garden. There she had swung for two nights and two days, and it was with difficulty that the Governor refrained from questioning her commander concerning her mission.

The negro who served the breakfasters had removed the pepper pot, the bones of the fowl, and the wreck of the fish, and replenished the flask of native rum in front of the Governor, when the desultory conversation was interrupted by Monsieur Roger de Belot, the Governor's aide-de-camp and secretary. Young De Belot appeared suddenly to the men at the table, ascending the gallery steps from the garden. His face was haggard and atwilt with some violent emotion, his eyes glowed, and he breathed laboriously. His clothing was in disarray, and his shoes and stockings were wet and earth-stained.

The Governor stared at Roger de Belot with an expression of wonder and alarm on his big face. Jean Richard glanced at the intruder with a brightening of his dark eyes.

De Belot pointed a trembling finger at the Governor. His lips moved in an effort to speak, but his breath failed him, and he made no sound. The stress

of his emotions had him by the wind-pipe. The negro servant turned in the doorway of the house and gaped at the scene in bewilderment.

"What is the trouble, sir?" asked Jean Richard quietly.

"Speak!" cried the Governor.

"Murderer!" exclaimed the secretary, in a ragged voice.

De Montigny's big, purple-veined face went grey as old sailcloth. He gripped the edge of the table with both hands and made a futile effort to rise from his chair. Terror and rage convulsed the muscles of his jaws and cheeks and darkened his eyes.

"I saw you last night!" cried Roger. "I followed you down to Palm Point. I saw your lights in the coconut trees—and the dead men—the sailors you had lured to the rocks and murdered in the grove. Aye, and I ran my sword through the heart of one of your murdering niggers."

"Fool!" roared the Governor. "You are sun-struck! You are mad!"

"I am sane, God help you! I saw you there in the grove. I heard the shots of muskets and pistols and the screams of your victims. I hid in a

bush and watched your bloodthirsty followers bury the dead men and the booty in the sand. Do you want me to take you down to that place and show you what I saw ? ”

The Governor overturned the table upon Jean Richard and threw himself furiously upon Roger de Belot. The weight and speed of the assault carried the young man backward to the floor.

The shipmaster leaped nimbly to his feet from beneath the edge of the heavy table and the shower of crockery and liquor. He heard the servant bellowing for help in the interior of the house. He whistled shrilly three times. In answer to the sound, he saw one of his own men leap into view from the shrubbery at the foot of the garden, stare for a moment at the front of the house, then turn and run toward the shore. Satisfied with this, the shipmaster turned his attention to the two men struggling on the floor of the gallery. He realized the peril of his own position and that of the honest Monsieur de Belot, and saw that their only course lay in immediate flight. He believed that the Governor would set his negroes to murder both of them rather than permit the disclosure of his crimes. So he sprang upon the Governor,

whose fat fingers were already gripped upon the younger man's throat. He wrenched De Montigny to his feet.

"To the shore!" he cried to De Belot.

The Governor closed with him at that moment, and the secretary scrambled to his feet and laid hold of the Governor. The three staggered and swayed—and suddenly Anne de Montigny appeared in the doorway. Both the secretary and the ship-master saw her—saw the terror in her eyes and the great pistol in her hand. They saw her raise the weapon—and under the very eye of death they continued, despite themselves, to struggle and stumble with the Governor. They saw the hammer fall and the red spark leap from the flint.

At the explosion Roger de Belot fell with a groan. The girl screamed

Jean Richard hurled the Governor from him, lifted the unconscious secretary in his arms and leaped over the railing of the gallery into the garden. He stumbled to his knees; but he regained his feet in a flash and ran at top speed, in spite of the limp weight in his arms. As he ran he heard Anne de Montigny scream again, heard the curses of the Governor and the yells of the negroes. A musket

belched and bellowed behind him. At the foot of the garden he was met by four of his men, who had evidently been waiting for a considerable time in the shade of the wall. They showed no surprise at his haste nor at the wounded man in his arms. Two of them relieved him of Roger de Belot, turned without a word and ran for the boat which lay at the lip of the tide. All leapt aboard and pulled for the brig amid a scattered and harmless shower of musket balls.

The Governor's blacks gathered in force along the edge of the sand; but a discharge of slugs and scrap-iron from one of the brig's culverins sent them scampering and screaming to cover.

Sails were swiftly set, the anchor was walked up and the brig slipped away for the open sea.

Back on the Governor's gallery, Mademoiselle de Montigny lay stricken with horror and despair. She had heard nothing of Roger's astounding accusation. She had thought her father assaulted by men from the brig, had fired at Jean Richard and had been aware of Roger's presence for the first time at the moment of seeing him fall wounded by her own hand.

CHAPTER III

ALL AT SEA

THE clamour of shouts and shots astern faded and ceased. The lilac sand of the anchorage, the varied greens and flaming blooms of the garden and the wide façade of the Governor's house dwindled and merged in the general pearly gleam of sea and island.

Roger de Belot opened one eye and looked straight up at a roof of dingy grey sailcloth. There were patches in the cloth of newer and less dingy material. Never before had the young man awakened to behold so unlovely a canopy above his head. While he continued to regard this phenomenon with astonishment, he became conscious of a gentle swaying and tilting of his body and of the unmistakable touch of a cool breeze on his hands and breast. He closed his eye, then opened it again very slowly. The roof of weather-worn canvas was still above him, bulging and flattening in the breeze.

Now he became conscious of a forlorn sensation at the pit of his stomach, of an ache in the right side

of his head and of a dizziness in his brain. Again he closed that only available eye—which was the left one—and forced his thoughts to probe painfully about for a meaning or a cause of these things.

A hand touched his shoulder. He opened his eye and beheld the brown and ruddy face of Jean Richard smiling down at him.

“That was touch and go, my friend,” said the mariner. “We were in a tight corner even before the young lady appeared on the scene, as if conjured up by the devil himself; and when I saw her present and discharge that great pistol, ’pon my soul I didn’t know for a second if it was you or me she had killed. Then I thought it was you; but I picked you up, dead or alive, and ran for the shore with a pack of the Governor’s hell-spawn at my heels. They burned their powder behind us without stint. The gig was ready, however, and we came aboard none the worse for the fright. That all happened seven hours ago. We are clear of Martinique now and sailing northward.”

“It comes back to me,” said Roger, weakly. “Yes, I remember it all now. The Governor attacked me. He was for throttling me with his fingers first and then with a rope. And Mademoiselle

fired a pistol in my face. She tried—she wanted to—kill me. Am I likely to die ? ”

“ You can’t escape it, my friend,” replied the captain ; “ but the fair hand of Mademoiselle de Montigny has not dealt you your death, I think. If I know anything about such things, you will live until the next time ; but you will carry a scar. How do you feel now ? ”

Roger did not like to admit that he felt sick unto death in both mind and body—that his heart was broken even as his head—so he ignored the question and sighed profoundly.

“ I understand,” said the shipmaster, as if he had read the other’s brain through the bandages. “ You have suffered more than the burn of powder and the scrape of a bullet across the side of your skull. You have known the young lady for six months. You have sat at table with her and held her basket while she culled flowers from the garden. Ah, my friend, I do not wonder that you do not now feel pain in your head only. She is entrancing, even when discharging a pistol with intent to kill ; but her eyes are her deadliest weapons. And you fear that your unpleasantness with the Governor has put an end to all hopes of a great career, and—and

so on. Courage, my friend ! I, too, have had my finest moments misunderstood by the ladies. I, too, have felt the displeasure of such petty great men as Charles de Montigny ; but I have survived—even I, Jean Richard. Then how much more easily will you survive the accidents of this morning—you, Roger, the son of Pierre de Belot, Count of Onzain ? And you are of an amazing youthfulness. Your heart will mend as readily as your head ; and in time your fortune will mend. Which name is the greater to-day at the court, Pierre de Belot or Charles de Montigny ? Tell me that.”

“ The Duke of Blois is Montigny’s cousin and firm friend,” replied Roger.

“ So ? Then we shall efface ourselves from the attention of the court for a few years,” said Richard ; “ but when I next meet my friend the Crooked Admiral I will tell him the truth of this morning’s affair.”

“ I do not wish any harm to the house of Montigny,” said Roger.

“ You need a glass of light wine and a bowl of broth,” said Richard.

Young De Belot felt a decided relief in the region of his waist after he had disposed of a light repast,

but his heart was heavy with the thoughts of Charles de Montigny's ignoble and cowardly deeds, and of the sudden disruption of his romantic relations with the Governor's charming and spirited daughter. And what of his fine career? His honesty had outlawed him, had dashed him, in an hour, from the security of a government mansion, and an official appointment under the crown, to the narrow deck of the brig *Rose* and the companionship of Captain Jean Richard. And from stories that he had heard of Jean Richard he had formed an impression that the vivacious sailor was not a safe man to become intimate with. This Richard sometimes called himself a privateer and sometimes an honest trader; but a sudden shift of wind any day was likely to find him swinging by his neck as a pirate.

It is not to be wondered at that Roger de Belot considered his career as a gentleman of France and a servant of the King to be at an end.

"Would my father have taught me to place honour and honesty before all other human virtues and policies had he known that they should so soon prove my undoing?" he wondered.

He was without money, even; and he felt quite certain that none would come to him in the future

from the paternal purse. He tried to comfort himself with the reflection that, whatever the world might think of him after hearing Charles de Montigny's story of the affair, he had behaved like a man of honour. He found it but cold comfort. His poor head ached and his poor heart ached. He brought up a hand furtively and wiped a tear from the corner of his unbandaged eye.

Roger de Belot was very young, and only eight months out from his father's grey chateau on the bank of the silver Loire. He had completed the eighteenth year of his life only five days before his quarrel with the Governor of Martinique; and now he remembered that day and its celebration in the Governor's official residence in the gay little town of St. Pierre, and the misery of his grief was almost more than he could suffer in silence. The world had looked a fair place that day, and life a thing to hold against the heart with both hands. He had not known Monsieur de Montigny for a monster then, but for a merry and kindly friend; and Anne, who since then had fired a pistol in his face, had permitted him to kiss her lips that day. There had been a feast, and his health had been pledged to the tune of clinking glasses and pretty compliments

and manly expressions of regard and affection. They had wished him a long and distinguished life. And now! Ye gods!

Captain Jean Richard returned to the hammock in the shade of the spare sail that had been rigged for an awning between the mainmast and the break of the high poop. He looked down at Roger and smiled cheerily.

"I want to tell you, lad, that when you made an enemy of Montigny you made an everlasting friend of Jean Richard," he said. "When I saw you throw his iniquity in his teeth my heart went out to you. It was grandly done, by my soul! It set my blood dancing; for if there is one virtue under God's blue roof that Jean Richard sets on a level with courage, it is honesty. Courage and honesty—they go hand in hand, those two. Honesty! The sound of it in my ears is sweet as the singing of the nightingales of Pont Levoy."

Roger opened his unbandaged eye very suddenly. The flicker of astonishment and incredulity in its grey depths did not escape the shipmaster.

"Honesty," repeated Richard concisely, and with dignity. "I have said it. I am what I am—an adventurer, a soldier of fortune, a poet—but, first of

all, I am an honest man. It is nothing to the point that one man's conception of honesty differs from another's. Would I hang lanterns in the tops of trees, and so lure harmless traders ashore to their destruction? Never! I have my code—and it is not the code of Monsieur de Montigny, praise the saints! I keep my honour as bright as my knife, in spite of all to the contrary that may be whispered about me ashore.”

“I am glad of it, my friend,” said the youth in the hammock, “for to-day it has seemed to me that there is very little honesty in the world.”

“You do not know the world,” replied the other. “Until now you have thought that it consisted entirely of aristocrats like yourself; and so, when you discovered Montigny's knavery, you felt that the whole world lacked honesty. There are knaves and cowards and false hearts in the chateau as in the hut, in the court as in the gutter, in the cabins of tall ships as in their forecastles; and also in all these places are to be found men of honesty and courage. You will see the truth of what I tell you with your own eyes. I will teach you life and the world as you would never have learned them in fifty years in the house of the Governor of Martinique. You have

lost nothing by losing the good will of Charles de Montigny. I, Jean Richard, will show you how to carve out a career for yourself."

"I have been dashed from the world into which I was born," said Roger gloomily.

"What?" cried the sailor. "Is Roger de Belot of poorer stuff than Jean Richard, the baker's son? Not so, by my soul! Do you think you cannot face the world without the crown and the laws at your back and your pockets full of money, simply because you are a gentleman? Was the first De Belot the son of a gentleman, think you, five hundred, or maybe a thousand years ago? Not so. I swear it! He made his own way, sword in hand, even as Jean Richard is doing now. You are descended from a self-made man, from many common and hard-fighting fellows; and so is the King, and likewise Charles de Montigny, and all the great folk who think they must find their places in life ready made and gilded for them.

"Father Adam was a peasant. And who was the lord of the manor in Father Adam's day? God Almighty was the only gentleman then, my friend. Do you get me? You and I are descended from Adam; but since his time an ancestor of

yours, many ancestors of yours, have taken and held high places in the world by the strength of their hands and their wits. But the ancestors of Jean Richard have been peasants since the days of Father Adam. Then which is the better equipped to carve a career with his own hand, Roger de Belot or Jean Richard? You, the gentleman, I say; for the knowledge of how to do it is in your blood."

"You are very entertaining and very kind," replied Roger weakly, "but I must confess that I feel in a sorry plight just now, and entertain but slender hope of carving out a career for myself."

"You will feel better when your head and your heart have begun to heal," said the captain. "I have suffered wounds of the same nature myself, and have always found a cracked skull more difficult to mend than a broken heart. But I am a poet. That is where I have the advantage of you, my friend, when it comes to injuries of the heart."

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT

WHEN Roger de Belot next awoke, the vague, thin wash of starshine was about him, the awning of sailcloth was like a black shadow above him, and the scent of burning tobacco came to him on the breeze that held steadily across the deck. The motion of his hammock was less lively than it had been when he was last awake, his head felt clearer and less painful, and his stomach more secure. He listened to the stir of the canvas overhead, the creaking of yards, the dry rattle of reef points, and the liquid slap and slop and run of the little seas along the brig's weather side. He thought of the Governor of Martinique, and his gorge rose with righteous indignation. He thought of the Governor's daughter, and his heart sank. He sighed mournfully, for Jean Richard's words of wisdom had brought him no comfort. Life had been snatched from his hands. A year of high-flown babbling about Father Adam and self-carved careers would not give back his love, his friends, and his worldly place to him.

His cheerless reflections were disturbed by a voice raised in song close at hand. It was the voice of Captain Richard. Thus the Captain sang, leaning against the weather bulwarks of the brig's waist, with reeking tobacco pipe between his fingers, and his eyes turned to heaven :

Do you hear that sound, love ?
The capstan bars are manned.
Do you hear that sound, love ?
The boat has touched the land.
The boat has come ashore, my love,
To take your love away,
And they're shaking out the mains'il
Of the schooner in the bay.

One kiss—and we must part, love.
One more—and I must go.
Adieu, dear, shaken lips of love ;
Adieu, dear hands of snow !
The boat is at the water stairs
To take your love away,
And they're hauling up the heads'ls
Of the schooner in the bay.

I leave my gold with you, love ;
My rubies in your hair ;
My gems upon your fingers,
And my poor heart in your care.
Adieu ! The boatswain whistles shrill
To call your love away,
And the shore breeze fills the heads'ls
Of the schooner in the bay.

Roger heard the patter of naked feet along the deck, a muffled and hurried volley of words, and Richard's voice suddenly fallen, and roughened from music to a tone of eager inquiry. He tried to raise his head to see what the matter was that had reduced the shipmaster so suddenly from his flight of song ; but a stab of pain went through his brain like a white-hot blade, and the muscles of his neck relaxed. He groaned, and for a few minutes sank into a state verging on unconsciousness. He was aroused by a sudden change and increase in the motion of his hammock. The brig was pitching ; and he was sailor enough to suspect from this that her course had been shifted, and that she was now running before the wind. He heard the shouting of commands, the rough, barking chant of men squaring the yards, the thump of something hard and heavy on the deck within a few paces of him.

"There's the pills, mate, an' I hopes they chokes 'im," said a husky English voice, in the English tongue.

Roger had known an English prisoner of war in Martinique, and so was familiar enough with the language to recognise it. It did not surprise him to find an Englishman in the brig's crew, for he had

heard that Richard cared nothing about a seaman's nationality so long as he was handy, courageous, and loyal to his ship.

"What is the trouble?" he cried.

The fellow who had spoken of pills came to the larboard side of the hammock. Roger could see nothing of his face, and only the outline of his head and square shoulders against the starshine.

"We have sighted a craft down the wind, sir," said the Englishman, in easy sailor French. "We can see the light in her after-ports—and that's all we can see of her; but Captain Richard swears he can make out enough of her rig and shape to know her for Black Da Costa's tops'il schooner *Olinda*. So we are after her, sir; and it's not the first time. She has the heels of us on anything but a fair wind."

"I have heard of Black Da Costa," said Roger. "I have heard that he is more than half a pirate."

"I'll not say you nay to that; but he calls himself an honest trader," replied the Englishman. "However that may be, Captain Richard has sworn that he'll hang him by the neck when he overhauls him. They were friends when I first joined this brig, were the captain and Da Costa; but they fell out in Castries, three years ago this month."

"You may step along and attend to your business, my boy," said the voice of Jean Richard pleasantly.

The head and shoulders of the Englishman vanished instantly from Roger de Belot's line of vision. Jean Richard bent over the hammock.

"How do you feel now, my dear friend?" asked the captain.

"Better, so long as I continue to lie perfectly still," replied Roger. "But can you tell me what all this excitement is about?"

"We are chasing a vessel which I believe to be the schooner of a half-breed hog named Da Costa, as Dick Smith has already told you," replied the shipmaster. "We are sailing westward, fair before the wind; and I do not think he is yet aware of us. Pray that we are permitted to overhaul him, my friend."

"I do it, with all my heart," replied Roger, "for I have heard that Black Da Costa is more than half a pirate."

"Pirate or honest mariner, devil or saint, it will be all one to Black Da Costa if we overhaul him," retorted Richard, with a snap in his voice that was new to the gentleman in the hammock. "The man who makes sport of the person, name, or accomplish-

ments of Jean Richard will die by the hand of Jean Richard, be he prince or peasant."

"A private affair, I see," remarked the other. "But are you strong enough in guns and men to risk an encounter now with Da Costa?"

"Now?" queried Richard. "Am I less strong to-day than I was yesterday, or last year, and than I will be to-morrow?"

"Yesterday you and I were safe wherever the flag of France was flying," replied Roger de Belot, "and to-day we are outcasts. We are fugitives from Charles de Montigny—and his arm is as long as the King's in these waters. You fought him in my quarrel, I know; but you fought him, threatened him with a knife, and hurled him backward across a table. His story of the affair will travel swiftly, and in a few weeks' time every French settlement in these islands will be a trap for us. The flag of France is a greater menace to us now than the flag of Spain or of England."

"Not so," replied the captain. "The arm of the Governor of Martinique does not reach to Acadia and Canada. I will seat you in the shade of our country's flag in that true and valorous north, where my friends are, and where you will be as safe as if you sat in your father's house."

"I am greatly obliged to you for the thought," replied Roger, "but will you not risk the success of your plan by forcing an engagement with Da Costa?"

"That can't be helped," said Richard. "If I can draw into gun range of him I will fight him, whatever the consequences may be to myself or my friends."

With that he turned from the hammock and went about the business of the chase, leaving his passenger to meditate on the instability of life and the weaknesses of human nature.

An hour passed. Roger drifted into a light doze, and from that sank gradually into a deep sleep. Another hour passed, and then he was awakened sharply by a sudden heaving and humping of his hammock and a crash of sound in his ears. He found himself being lifted, hammock and all, by two sailors. The bitter smoke of exploded gunpowder and burning wads blew into his face.

"What now?" he cried.

"We are taking you below, sir, out of harm's way," replied one of the men. "Captain's orders. The fight is on."

Roger de Belot was lowered down the main hatch, and laid gently on the ballast of sand in the brig's

hold. Some old sails were placed beneath him, a clay bottle of water was stood, half buried in the ballast, within reach of his right hand, and a lantern was hung against the butt of the foremast. The sailors raced up the slender ladder and replaced the hatch over the square scuttle.

Roger lay alone in the brig's hold, his heart fluttering, his ears alert, his available eye very wide and bright. He raised himself cautiously on his left elbow ; and though his brain swam, he maintained the new position for fully a minute. He raised the water bottle to his lips, swallowed half a pint of the cool liquid, and spilled as much down his chin and breast. He studied his strange quarters by the dim and sullen light of the lantern, swinging and jumping against the pillar of the mast. It was a grim retreat, the brig's belly, darkly and massively ribbed overhead and on both sides, and floored with pale sand from some fiery beach. A hogshead and a dozen brown sacks lay upon the ballast between himself and the lantern.

Roger sank flat again. He realized his helplessness. He listened to the thumping report of a big gun on deck, knew it to be the bow gun by the direction of the sound, and so judged that the chase

was still a stern one. Between the reports of the gun he heard the padding of naked feet above him, muffled shouts, the drag and flap of coiled ropes upon the deck, the slop and run of the seas above the level of his face, and just outside those thin planks of oak. Here was a sweet death-bed for a son of Pierre de Belot, for the man who had kissed Anne de Montigny, he reflected, with a grim smile !

The breathless atmosphere of the hold was hot and heavy with many strange and daunting odours. The hogshead reeked of rum, the brown bags of their own material and their contents of ill-refined sugar, sour, and asweat with molasses. The deck sent down a reek of pitch, and the old grey sails beneath him emitted a musty scent of rotting hemp, dry salt, stale weather both fair and foul. The most disturbing odour of all, though the faintest, breathed all around him from the ballast of sand ; a scent nameless, but daunting, suggestive of weed and stranded shellfish, of wreckage, fever, and dead men's bones.

Roger wondered from what beach Richard had taken his ballast aboard. He knew that the brig had come to Martinique from the south, but from what island, or what port on the mainland, he did

not know. If this sand was from the mainland, then ten to one it was from somewhere within a short distance of the mouth of a river, for most of the ports were on the estuaries of rivers. In that case, the ballast was alive with the poison of fever. Here was food for discomfoting thought. He had escaped death from the hand of Anne de Montigny by the width of a hair ; he had been saved from the insane fury of the Governor ; Jean Richard's valour and skill might still save him, along with the brig, from the result of Jean Richard's recklessness and vanity—and then to die of some swift and horrid fever, black of face, black of tongue, mad of brain ! A sweat of apprehension broke out upon him at the thought.

Roger de Belot was not a coward. He possessed the courage of his nation, his breed, and his convictions ; but now, shut into the hold of the brig, his skull cracked, one eye shut, his heart torn by the loss of wonderful kisses and a fine career, he was in no condition to withstand the subtle menace of the ballast of sand.

The bang of a culverin directly over his head drove the threat of the sand out of his thoughts. Another culverin banged and jumped on the quiver-

ing deck within five seconds of the first. So Roger knew that the brig had drawn abreast of the quarry. Then the fire of muskets and pistols broke out in a clattering shower, telling Roger that the racing vessels were within thirty or forty yards of one another. The shock of contact would soon be felt, and the grappling irons would soon be thrown. Roger reasoned that the advantage would be with Jean Richard when once the vessels lay side to side, if the strength of the crews were nearly equal; for the brig, naturally high of hull, was now unusually high, owing to the fact of being in ballast. Her rail, amidships, might well be four or five feet above the rail of the schooner, he reflected, and her high houses forward and aft would tower above the other's forecastle and poop. He cursed his reeling head, which kept him helpless on the bed of old sails. But for that he would be up on deck, sword in hand, ready to fight, and, if need be, to die—but on his feet, breast to danger, like a Frenchman and a gentleman.

Overhead, the tumult continued—the big, crashing bangs of the guns, the lesser bangs of the muskets, the popping of the pistols. In that texture of uproarious sound, the shouts and yelps and curses of

men were woven confusedly through the flatter, heavier outcry of exploding powder. The deck quivered with the recoil of the heavy pieces.

A shock rippled through the heavy air about him, and the sand beneath him, and tingled through his nerves from scalp to toes. A long splinter was ripped jaggedly from an oaken plank, and the lantern was smashed, and hurled from its hook against the butt of the foremast. The candle rolled out upon the ballast and expired in a blue glimmer. A round shot had entered the brig's hold, and Roger de Belot was left in darkness.

Another shock went through the walls of oak, the reeking air, and the ballast of sand. The brig seemed to halt and stagger. She quivered from stem to stern; and sounds of crushing, grinding, and clanging filled the ears of the wounded man on the ballast. Jean Richard had laid his brig alongside Da Costa's schooner. Of that there could be no doubt. But of the result of that manœuvre poor Roger de Belot entertained the gravest doubts imaginable. He cursed the fate that laid him, helpless and useless, in the dark. Against the blackness and tumult he screamed his challenge that he would not die down there upon the ballast, like a

rat in a trap. He raised his head and shoulders, scrambled to his feet, reeled, and fell, face downward, in a swoon.

Roger de Belot regained consciousness with the splash of cold water on his face and chest and the touch of a cup rim against his lips. His head was held high against a muscular shoulder. He sipped again of the contents of the cup, then opened his eye. The face of Jean Richard was smiling at him, with a flash of teeth and eyes more than usually dazzling; the shoulder of the captain supported his head, and the beringed right hand of the captain held the cup to his lips. This he saw by a faint, clear light of morning sifting down through the open hatchway. He saw blood on the ruddy, smiling face, and blood on the ministering hand. The tumult of the battle was dead. The peaceful sounds of the passage of the brig's hull through the water, and of an axe, lazily swung, striking upon wood, seemed to intensify the calm.

"It was the *Olinda*," said Richard. "We have sent her about her business, badly crippled, and with half of her crew dead or wounded. As for ourselves, we lost only nine men, and a day's work will set our top-hamper to rights and patch the hull."

"But I heard the brig run her aboard," said Roger. "I thought it would be a fight to the finish."

"And so it was; but after I had got my fingers on Da Costa I let the others go," replied the captain. "I had no quarrel with the crew and the schooner. But we must get you up on deck again, my friend, in the brisk air. It is time for me to doctor your head again."

Roger was hoisted through the hatchway by willing hands. The first thing he saw, upon gaining the level of the deck, was a limp human figure swaying slowly against the brightening sky, beneath the starboard arm of the fore to'ga'nts'il yard. A short rope attached it to the end of the yard-arm by its neck. The lazy motion of the brig and the draught of the breeze swung it listlessly against the face of heaven and fluttered its garments. An exclamation of astonishment escaped Roger at this unexpected sight.

Captain Jean Richard heard it, understood it, and chuckled grimly.

"Behold the late Captain José da Costa," he said. "Three years ago I promised him a swing from my yard-arm—and there he swings This way with

Monsieur de Belot, lads. Your awning was carried away in last night's little engagement, my friend, but we'll have another rigged in ten minutes."

The condition of Roger de Belot's head and eye improved steadily. The hull and spars of the brig were repaired within twelve hours of the fight, and the northward voyage was continued. The body of Black Da Costa was cut down from its lofty place and heaved to the sharks.

Within five days of the engagement between brig and topsail schooner, Roger was able to walk the decks unaided and see clearly out of both eyes. He shared Jean Richard's opinion that this wound would not leave any permanent weakness; but of the injury dealt to his heart by that same slim hand he looked for no recovery. She had tried to kill him. Therefore she hated him. Had she bated him in the morning of the day before, when he had kissed her in the garden? Had she hated him in the evening, when he had kissed her behind the dining-room door? It must have been so; and yet he could not believe, even now, that the light he had then discovered in her eyes was of hate, that the pressure of her young breast against his eager arm was of hate.

But with that accursed pistol she had killed hope and faith in his heart. She had murdered love.

He ate well, however, and took a keen interest in the brig's voyage and company. He worried less and less about his ruined career with the passing of each day.

CHAPTER V

THE BRIG'S COMPANY

ROGER DE BELOT'S liking for Jean Richard grew steadily ; and with his affection his curiosity grew also.

He wondered why the captain had risked his brig and his flight to safety in the northern wilds and sacrificed the lives of nine of his picked and proven crew for the sole purpose of hanging Black Da Costa to his yard-arm. The result seemed so feeble to him, the risks taken and the price paid so great. What sin had Da Costa committed against Jean Richard to carry so bitter an enmity for three long years ? Wondering did not enlighten him ; so, being a straightforward youth, he put the question one day while he and the commander sat side by side on the break of the poop.

" Did he falsely rob you of a woman you loved ? " he asked.

Jean Richard stared for a moment, then laughed.

" That black, ill-conditioned swine ? " he cried.

" That vile and tawdry product of the gutter ? "

May the saints preserve your reason, my dear lad. You have seen him ! ”

“ You will remember that I saw him only once,” said Roger. “ I admit that he did not look like a lady-killer on that occasion. But as he did not cross you in love, may I ask what crime he committed to inspire such lasting and bitter hatred in you ? ”

“ He insulted me,” replied the captain, his eyes gleaming and narrowing at the thought. “ He was fool enough to think that he could insult me and escape. He made a laughing-stock of me along all the harbour-front of Castries. But who laughs now ?—Black Da Costa or Jean Richard ? I do not give you the particulars, my friend, for the simple reason that I think you are not capable of fully appreciating the extent of his offence or the poetic justice of my belated revenge. My doubt casts no reflection on your intelligence. It is a matter of temperament, not of mentality. Da Costa himself did not fully understand—and he was as clever as sin. But let us say no more about it. If this weather holds until we get north of the Bermudas we shall be in luck and soon in safety.”

“ One moment, if you please,” said Roger, with a staying hand on the captain’s elbow. “ As you are

so sensitive to insult, as this affair with Da Costa has led me to suppose, may I ask your intentions toward the person of Charles de Montigny ? ”

“ De Montigny ? That fat, blustering, murdering knave ! Let him keep out of my way and I am more than willing to keep out of his. I pray that I may never see his stupid face again.”

“ You mean that you do not plan to revenge yourself upon him ? ”

“ Revenge ? I am not a savage. I entertain neither respect nor friendship for that consequential lump of uninspired flesh, 'tis true—but we are quits now. I gave him as good as he gave—nay, better. I upset him across his own table, slapped his fat face and carried you off under his red nose. I have no quarrel with Charles de Montigny so long as he does not catch us in these waters. It is no affair of mine that he wrecks ships, so long as he does not wreck my brig. He may live a thousand years, or expire to-morrow, of overeating, as far as I am concerned. But I do not deny that he would be better dead than alive.”

Roger was relieved. In spite of Anne's cruelty, he did not want her to lose her father. Also, he was puzzled.

"I am glad you took no offence," he said. "It seemed to me, at the time, that his language was not entirely polite—not the language that is most frequently used by one gentleman to another."

Jean Richard smiled.

"We are not gentlemen, the Governor and I," he said. "His language was what I expected of him under the circumstances. My little play with him was entirely on your behalf. What did you hear him say to me that struck you as being particularly offensive?"

"He called you the son of a pickpocket."

"That is nothing—though he was wrong, of course," returned the captain. "My father was an honest baker. He should have said grandson—but, even so, I should not have held it against him. I am not a fool. I am not proud of my family. There is no food for pride there, that I have ever heard of. I am what I am, in spite of my ancestors. I have no honour to guard save that of Jean Richard—therefore I can afford to give it my undivided attention—and the man who belittles the character or parts of Jean Richard is no better than a suicide."

"Well said," replied Roger. "I admire your attitude toward men and the world greatly and, at

the same time and in the same spirit, I admit that I don't understand it. Your reasoning is too deep for me. I fear that my associates and masters never taught me to look beneath the surface of things. I seem to have gathered the impression, somehow and somewhere, that honour was a family rather than a personal matter. I am not sure of it, now. In fact, I doubt it. However that may be, I am glad to know that you and I have no personal quarrel with Charles de Montigny—for his daughter's sake."

Roger was soon on easy terms with Richard's officers and crew. He saw that the company was one for an adventurous commander to be proud of. It was a selected company, though it puzzled Roger to decide, at first, by what standards the selections had been made. For the most part, the men had been picked from the riff-raff of the seas and the sea beaches, and yet the selection had been made with such intelligence and clear purpose that every man possessed one or more admirable qualities. Roger soon learned that the first of the admirable qualities was courage, and that the second was trustworthiness—loyalty to ship or comrades, or some other aspect or offshoot of the great virtue of honesty.

A king's admiral might well have been proud of such a company ; and yet, by the letter of one law or another, almost every member of it was guilty of a crime against society. Many were deserters from kings' ships or merchant vessels, and a few were murderers ; but in those days of injustice, circumstances might make a murderer of an honest man, and a deserter of a loyal one.

Three of the brig's company were gentlemen. They did not deny the fact, nor try to hide it. They admitted it, and their companions acknowledged it. Thomas Harwood, Claude le Moyne, and Pedro Marianno Milanes da Santo were the three. Harwood was the youngest of the three, being only twenty-two years of age. He was an Englishman, a younger son of a gentleman of small estate in Berkshire, and had served from his fifteenth to his twentieth year as a midshipman and junior lieutenant in the English navy. An unfortunate and unavoidable quarrel with a senior officer, which had resulted in a duel, and the sudden and violent death of the said senior officer, had ended his career in the service of his king and country. He had escaped from the blind clutches of martial law with no more than his life, had spent several months in misery as a fugitive

and beggar on a tropic beach, and then had been fortunate enough to encounter Jean Richard. He was a small young man, with tow-coloured hair, a thin and bloodless face, and sorrowful grey eyes. Jean Richard maintained that the heart in that narrow chest was big enough for a giant.

Claude le Moyne, who was only a few years older than Harwood, was the son of a nobleman of New France, and a citizen in good standing. He had no crime against him. He sailed with Captain Richard for the love of adventure and in the hope of fortune.

Da Santo, the Spaniard, was of an age with Jean Richard—in his fortieth year. He had lived a harder life than his friend and commander, however, though no more adventurous. Grey threads showed in the black hair of his head, his long moustaches, and his pointed beard; and on the top of his head his hair was already thin to vanishing. He had possessed large estates in Spain and the New World before the unscrupulous and untiring efforts of a powerful enemy had beggared him. He had sailed westward, to make a fight for his overseas estates, only to find that the long arm of his enemy had out-reached him. In a blind fury he had defied Spain and the world, and set out in a stolen trading

vessel to recover by force the equivalent of that which he had lost by force and fraud. Fortunately for himself, he had run foul of Jean Richard at an early stage of his bungling career of piracy ; and Richard had captured him, listened to the outline of his story, read him like a book, and given him a berth aboard the *Rose*. But even Jean Richard did not know the particulars of Da Santo's misfortunes, for the Spaniard was politely but firmly reticent concerning names and details.

Few sails were sighted on the northward voyage, and those few were given a wide berth. The brig carried fair weather along with her until she was well to the north of the Bermudas, and there she ran into half a gale, and was driven far to the eastward of her course, under reefed sails and groaning spars. She weathered the blow sturdily, and was clear of it within forty-eight hours of the first buffet. As she proceeded on her way the seas lost their warmth and colour, the sky its glow and depth of azure, the sun its strength, the stars their clear radiance, and the wind its stability.

So several weeks passed without mishap or adventure. By the time the desolate coast and black outlying islands of New England were sighted,

Roger de Belot's wound was safely healed. A long and ragged scar ran from just above his right temple to a spot two inches above the tip of his ear, and several smaller scars were pitted close around his right eye, where burning grains of the slow, coarse powder had struck him. It was a marvel that the eyeball itself had escaped the charge.

That a girl has discharged the pistol at Roger's head was known only to himself and Jean Richard, of all the brig's company. Roger never mentioned Charles de Montigny's daughter to his new friend, and the captain always put the pistol shot to the discredit of one of the Governor's servants, when referring to the trouble on the gallery. Roger was greatly pleased with Jean Richard's delicacy, and not a little puzzled by it. He had not been taught to expect delicacy of feeling in men of peasant blood.

Roger's liking for Jean Richard, and his curiosity concerning him, continued to grow throughout the northward voyage, and he saw that his shipmates felt as he did toward the captain. Admiration, affection and wonder were the sentiments inspired by Jean Richard in the breasts of his command. He was frequently the subject of conversation aboard the brig.

“ Our captain is a noble man, whatever his father may have been,” said Mr. Harwood to Roger de Belot, one evening, during the Englishman’s watch on the high poop. “ He has only one failing, that I have ever detected—and that is his personal vanity. Prick his vanity, and he instantly becomes vengeful and ignoble. But cast a reflection on his deportment, his face, his figure, or his courage—or, worse yet, on his seamanship or his silly rhymes—and you arouse a devil. Aye, and a peculiarly hot and persistent devil, at that. He will accept a beating in a fair fight, and hold no shadow of ill-will toward his antagonist. Take his money from him, and he offers you more. Call him a thief, and he smiles. Call him a pirate, and he chuckles. Let him save you from death or dishonour, at the risk of his own life, and he is your friend. Strike one blow on his behalf, and he loves you ; but hint that he did not make the most of a certain slant of wind, or that his rhymes are not the finest that were ever penned, or that his figure is too short and square for perfection of manly beauty, and he’ll have your life, sooner or later, as he took the life of Black Da Costa.”

“ What was Black Da Costa’s offence ? ” asked Roger.

"That I have not been able to learn, for a certainty, but Dick Smith is of the opinion that Da Costa made game of the captain's rhymes or personal appearance in some way."

"Well, for my part, I like his appearance and what I know of his poetry. I'm no judge of poetry, but on the night of the engagement with the schooner I heard him singing a song that seemed to me very touching and beautiful. It was about a girl."

"I agree with you," replied Harwood. "But, like yourself, I'm no judge of poetry. Any rhyme about a girl, or about fighting, pleases me. The captain has made some splendid fighting-songs."

"I enjoy love songs best," murmured Roger, fingering the new-healed scar above his temple, and thinking of Anne de Montigny; and his poor heart melted so suddenly that he was forced to turn away from the Englishman and blink his eyes.

The brig encountered grey, chill fogs, and her look-outs were doubled. Jean Richard, Mr. Harwood, and the other navigators aboard studied the charts in consultation for hours on end, and every sailor who had ever been in those northern waters before set himself to sniffing the fog as though it contained some grim secret that he alone was able to read.

For two days the brig drifted blindly in the fog ; and when a wind from the west drove the blanket of mist away in trailing tatters, the navigators and knowing ones of the crew saw at a glance to either hand that she lay in Acadian waters, and fair before the entrance to the turbulent, heavy-tided Bay of Fundy. Sail was made, the yards were squared to the piping west wind, the navigators congratulated one another on their skill. Had the fog continued a few hours longer the brig would have gone upon the rocks to the eastward, despite the skill of Jean Richard and his lieutenants.

Early on the following morning the brig let go her anchors between an island or rock and a rocky land-wash. The shallow water of the anchorage was cold and opaque ; the outlook from the deck was cheerless and daunting, despite the clear gleaming of the August sun—a wilderness of grey rocks and black forests to the westward, of sullen waters, black rocks, and tide-combed weeds nearer at hand ; and Roger de Belot wondered what such a land as this could offer to a civilized man, except a place of retreat from the world.

Jean Richard came to Roger, where the young man stood in the brig's waist, and gazed at the

dreary shore with a shadow of awe in his eyes. The captain, who seemed to be in fine feather, smote the other playfully on the shoulder.

"This is but the gateway to the house," he cried. "Better still, this is but the porch, built for rough weather and blighting winds. The cheery and comfortable halls, bedchambers, kitchens, and larders lie beyond, as you will see. The truth is, a fine country lies behind those rocks and wind-beaten forests, my friend—a country rich in fur and flesh and grass and timber, with a mighty and friendly river leading deep into the comfortable heart of it. It is one of my ambitions to own a million acres of this land some day, and build myself a house of logs, with a hearth as wide as this deck, and there live and die, in blessed forgetfulness of kings and ships and civilized bickerings. But here come the Red Indians in their canoes of bark, from the island and the mainland. Simple and friendly people they are, those wild men and women, so long as you treat them with paternal kindness. I see white men in three of the canoes coming from the mainland. Good! Then the fort behind that mound of pines still stands; but whether or not my friend of four years ago still commands it is more than I can say."

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERIOUS NORTH

A NEW fort stood on the blackened foundations of the one that Jean Richard had known four years ago, and Jean's friend no longer commanded it. Jean's friend was dead, so the new commandant maintained.

The new commandant of Fort St. John was a grizzled mariner named Henri Reignault. He and two other Frenchmen and a dozen Indians hoisted themselves out of their canoes and over the brig's side. Henri Reignault and Jean Richard had met before, during Richard's last visit, when Reignault was Louis de Lacourt's lieutenant ; and now Lacourt was dead, and the grizzled mariner was not only in command of the fort, but was acting as Governor of a vast and vaguely defined territory.

Reignault told his story to Jean Richard, in the brig's cabin, with a bottle of wine on the table. It appeared that Monsieur de Lacourt and all his company—with the exception of three of his men, who had gone up river with the natives to spend the winter in hunting and trapping—had sailed for

France just a year ago. In Paris, Monsieur de Lacourt had found himself to be still in good standing with the Crown and the powers behind it. Delighted with his reception, he had hung about the Court until he had at last lost his heart to a young lady who was a ward of the King. The King had suddenly presented his shoulder to Louis de Lacourt and sent the young lady to the country, in disgrace.

Reignault did not know the particulars of this affair, for he had as little taste for the Court and fashionable life as the Court had for him. A chase, an escape from a desolate chateau, a midnight marriage, and a race for the coast, had followed the King's first evidences of displeasure ; and Louis had escaped from France with his bride, his ship, and his company, early in March. Fort St. John had been regained on the first day of April. All had gone well until the beginning of May, with no sign of the King's anger on the horizon, and with love and prosperity in and about the little fort ; and then Henri Reignault and fifteen of the company had been sent northward along the coast, in open boats, on some affair of trade and exploration. Reignault and his men had returned after fifteen days, to find the fort in ashes, the ship gone from her anchorage, the

Governor, Madame de Lacourt, and the garrison vanished utterly.

That was Reignault's story. He did not attempt to explain it. He was a simple soldier and sailor, and nothing of a courtier; but he ventured the remark that he saw the King's hand in it. He and his fifteen had made search and inquiry, but had neither seen nor heard sign or word of their friends, nor of the mysterious enemy. The natives knew nothing of the Governor's fate and had seen nothing more of the fight, if there had been a fight, than the flames of the burning fort. No strange vessel had been seen on the coast. No strangers had been seen on the river. So Henri Reignault and his fellows had rebuilt the fort of logs, with the help of their red friends, and then had sat down to await enlightenment. They were still waiting.

Jean Richard was deeply moved by the misfortune of his friend Louis.

"What was the maiden name of Madame de Lacourt?" he asked.

"I never heard it," said Captain Reignault. "It was never mentioned aboard ship nor in the fort, by high or low; but I have supposed that it was a great name, else why was the lady a ward of the King?"

"Is Monsieur D'Armour still on the river?" asked Richard.

"He was here but ten days ago, looking to obtain news and provisions from some ship, but he went back empty-handed, for there has been no ship in the harbour since the one that vanished and the one that was never seen. It would seem that France has forgotten this country."

"Or remembered it to its undoing. I am going up the river. Can you give me a pilot who knows the channel as far up as Fort Nashwaak?"

"Walking Moose is on deck. He knows the river as the palm of his hand. So you will take the brig up?"

Jean Richard nodded, staring with blank eyes at the wine in the bottle. His mind was busy with the tragedy and mystery of his friend, Louis de Lacourt. He did not doubt Henri Reignault's honesty nor Henri's faith in his own story; but he could not believe that the invaders who had done away with the fort and its garrison had entirely escaped observation by the natives. There was a permanent village of the red men within five miles of the fort, and on the island of rock was a large stockaded summer camp. That a ship could have

entered the harbour and put a strong party ashore, fired the fort, captured the garrison, and destroyed or sailed off a sloop of eighty tons, without being seen by some fisherman or villager was a supposition that he could not bring himself to entertain for a moment. So the natives had lied when they said they had seen nothing of the tragedy save the fort in flames. But why? De Lacourt had been on the most friendly terms with them four years ago, and was the sort of man to maintain the friendly relations indefinitely, without effort. It was a puzzle. Jean Richard could make nothing of it. But he did not give it up.

The brig *Rose* entered the river next morning, when the great tide from the bay was at half its height. The gateway to the River St. John is a narrow gorge between limestone walls. When the tide in the bay is at ebb the river pours out through this gorge in a short but swirling fall, pitted with eddies; and when the tide is full it forces the river water back, and tops it, and the eddies and clashing currents race through the gorge in the other direction. The fall is reversible, being now the outpouring of the river, and again the inrush of the tide; and the safest time to enter the river is when

the rising tide has but just won its victory over the bunched up current of the mighty stream. This was the moment chosen by Walking Moose, the Malisect, whom Jean Richard had taken aboard as pilot.

The brig crossed the swirling but submerged threshold with all her boats out, towing her, and with a dozen Indian canoes slipping along in front of her, following in her slow wake, and hanging to her flanks. The pilot's canoe had been hoisted aboard with the pilot, and the others dropped astern, and started back for salt water an hour after the fall had been passed. The pilot's brother, an undersized young man, named Black Duck, remained aboard the brig. The brig's sails were set to a slant of wind out of the south-east. As the sun climbed, the air grew warm and heavy, despite the breeze. The stream widened; the bluff, rocky shores sank to timbered slopes fringed with sandy beaches, or fringes of pale-green willows and water grasses; the deep current ran brown and black under the sheen of sunshine. So fifteen miles were made by sunset, when an anchor was let go.

Jean Richard talked to Walking Moose like a father and a brother, and at last led the conversation

around to the mysterious case of Louis Lacourt, his bride, and his garrison. But Walking Moose knew nothing. He seemed to be hard of hearing, and desperately stupid. He shook his head, muttered, and gazed out at the darkening river.

"Lacourt good man," he muttered, wagging his head heavily. "Don't know what happen to him. Like him very much."

"You must be all blind and deaf," said Richard. And then, laying a hand on the Maliseet's shoulder, "I am Lacourt's friend," he added significantly.

"I don't know," answered Walking Moose, with wandering glance.

"But you remember me. I was here four summers ago. You know me—me, Captain Jean Richard, Monsieur de Lacourt's friend from the wide sea. Look me in the eye, man. Do I tell the truth?"

"Yes, you talk truth now. Walking Moose does not forget. You good friend to Lacourt four summers back, yes; but he tell me to trust no white man now who name himself his good friend."

"He is alive!—and you know where he is? Tell me."

"I know one thing and I tell you that. You are honest, yes, and not dull in the brain and dim in

the eye like Reignault. Walking Moose—me—make a better French soldier than that poor Reignault. He sleep in his brain all the time like a bear in his den all winter. Before the fort burn I see one big ship come up from the sea and the flag of France fly over him. Then another ship come up, this one from the south, with a red flag over him. Soon red flames jump from his sides and black smoke crawl on the water. Lacourt, he see all that, too. Then the ship of France spit fire and smoke. But the fort, he does not fire a gun. He look on from the shore like an old man at the salmon-spearing. The big ships fight. They lie side to side. They drift south like that, still red with gun-flashes and veiled in smoke. I watch them adrift, for it is a great picture to the eye ; but at last I turn and look at the fort—and I see the fort all red and yellow in the sunshine and the sky above all black with smoke of burning timber. I tell you so much but no more. I tell no other white man half so much.”

“ That is very good. You saw the ships fight and the fort burn—and you saw boats come ashore from the French before the ships began to fight.”

“ I see nothing like that.”

“ What happened to Lacourt’s own little vessel ? ”

"He go out on the tide when the fort burn."

"Then Lacourt and his men sailed away in her."

"That may be so. How can a poor Maliseet know these things? But he don't sail, that little ship—he drift on the ebb tide."

"The devil!" exclaimed Jean Richard.

Question as he might, he failed to obtain any more information on the subject from Walking Moose; but he had already enough to think about. He questioned Black Duck. That stolid savage did nothing but grunt, stare blankly and wag his head.

"You are a fool!" cried the captain.

Black Duck grunted as if in agreement with him.

The brig rode to her anchor all night with her blunt bows against the run of the black current, swaying softly now and then to the soft thrust of the stream. The air was still, for the wind had fallen with the sinking of the sun. A veil of cloud obscured the high stars. No lights pricked the solid gloom of the shores or the black level of sliding water. Of all the strange sounds that came to the brig from that mysterious land, none was human.

Many of the brig's company spent the night on deck. They could not sleep. They were restless with the lure of the vast country surrounding them,

hidden from their eyes by the night, breathing and awake in the heavy dark. They listened to the unfamiliar voices of the wilderness, leaning on the bulwarks and whispering together. Roger de Belot was one of these.

Roger wondered if a safe retreat in this weird and depressing land might not prove a less desirable thing than the danger of Charles de Montigny's wrath among the southern islands.

"Hark! What is that sound of splashing over there?" he whispered to Dick Smith.

"Might be a horse, sir," replied the Englishman, with a tremor in his voice.

"It is not a horse," said Da Santo. "It is a moose taking to the river to swim across—or perhaps he is but feeding among the water-plants near the shore."

"And that? What an unearthly cry! It sounds like a derisive devil laughing at us."

"It is the loon, a great bird of the river that can swim beneath the surface of the water with the speed of a fish."

"You have been on this river before and are familiar with the country."

"No; but I have questioned the pilot. He tells

me that between this spot and the house of Monsieur D'Armour, which is more than fifty miles away, we shall see no human face or habitation, unless we chance upon a party of native salmon-spearers. And from D'Armour's clearings westward fifteen miles to the mouth of the Nashwaak stream all is desolation again, though the country is rich in grass and timber."

"And beyond that?"

"Wilderness and yet more wilderness; forests, swamps and solitude; lakes that no human voice has broken the stillness of since the making of the world; great islands that, year after year, ripen their wild harvests of grass and fruit for the birds and the beasts. Here is a new France greater and richer and fairer than the old; yet you leave it to a few broken gentlemen and a few nameless trappers. This great river winds into the unknown for hundreds of miles, through fertile meadows and kingly forests, until at last its shores rise and harden into walls of rock and its waters become torn and white and swift."

"And are there no forts, no farms, no homes above the Nashwaak?"

"Nothing of the kind, save a few little villages of savages. But there are many devils in that wilder-

ness, so Walking Moose tells me—devils of the river, of the forests, of the mountains. The devils of the river follow canoes in the black of the night and drag themselves aboard and devour the voyagers. There are other devils of the river who look like beautiful maidens—and these lure men into whirlpools. Walking Moose once knew a Frenchman who was thus lured to his death. The devils of the mountains look like wise and gentle old men. They look down upon the river from the mouths of high caves; and if one of them sees a lonely voyager, white or red, then he crawls out and cries piteously for help—and if once he lays a hand on that unfortunate wanderer he kills him and drinks his blood. And there is the loup-garou of the swamps and forests, that is a man all day and a wolf all night. Walking Moose has, with his own eyes, seen a tall man drop suddenly to all-fours and leap from his path into the thicket.”

The listeners shivered.

The brig's journey up the river was slow. Sometimes she sailed against the current, sometimes she was towed by her boats. She crawled through a land of rolling hills clothed with forests of gigantic pines and towering spruces, of great meadows of

wild grasses waist-high, and starred with blooms of yellow, orange, and blue, and shaded by tall and feathery elms. Silver salmon and armoured sturgeon nine feet long, leaped from the river's broad breast, and fell back in showers of spray. Eagles sailed against the blue, high above the brig's tops, or watched her slow passage from their eeries in the crests of pines. Red deer, moose, and caribou swam across the stream, or lifted their heads to the brig from their feeding among the water lilies along the muddy shores. Several of these animals were shot, or overtaken by the pilot and his brother in their slim canoc, and butchered while they swam. The flesh tasted better than any beef to the brig's company, and such of it as was not eaten immediately was salted away in a cask.

On the morning of the third day after leaving the fort at the river's mouth, two natives appeared in a canoe. At a signal from Black Duck they came aboard the brig without any sign of fear. They were known to Black Duck and Walking Moose. Captain Jean Richard gave each of them a knife, then questioned them concerning Louis de Lacourt. They told him that the great captain was their brother and their father, but that he had been

driven from his big fort three moons ago. That was all they knew about him.

On the evening of the fourth day the brig let go her anchor close to the southern shore. Jean Richard and Walking Moose stood together on the high poop.

"We must be drawing near to D'Armour's landing," said Richard. "I remember that it was on the northern shore, with great willows and elms overhanging it, and that the house was three miles back from the river, beyond the meadows, and behind a ridge of spruces."

The pilot did not reply immediately. He gazed across the river at the northern shore, and far away across the timbered meadows, for a full minute. Then he turned and scanned the red-stained surface of the river to the westward.

"We have come to it," he said at last. "There lies the Island of Ducks." He pointed upstream. "Near its foot, there, Oromocto comes in from the south—Oromocto, the deep water." He turned to the north again and pointed with level hand. "There is D'Armour's landing."

"Yes, that is it; but I have passed so many meadows and elms and willows that my mind and

eyes have become confused. That is it. I know it now. The seven willows—yes, and now I see the grey timbers of the little wharf, half hidden in grasses and bushes. But look beyond! Smoke! What does it mean?"

Walking Moose looked, and an expression of relief flickered in and out of his dark eyes.

"Fire," he said. "Big fire. D'Armour's house, maybe. The smoke grow fast. It burn fast."

"The devil!" cried Jean Richard. "My friend's house! Why did you anchor on this side of the river?"

"Good water here," answered Walking Moose calmly.

"The devil!" cried Richard. "And my friend's house burns over there! This country is bewitched! On deck, all of you! Swing out the boats! Monsieur da Santo, the boats, for your life!"

Captain Richard turned, and jumped down the short ladder to the brig's waist, still shouting for the boats to be swung out, lowered away, and manned; but Walking Moose stood motionless, gazing northward at the growing smoke against the fading sky, with a flicker of a smile about the corners of his mouth.

Jean Richard gave no thought to anything but his friend's need of swift assistance. He left Monsieur le Moyne in charge of the brig, with Black Duck and ten of the crew, and pulled for the other side of the river in three long boats, with the other gentlemen, twenty men, and Walking Moose. The boats were beached beside the little jetty, and drawn up for half their length among the tall water-grasses. Some of the men had brought their muskets and ammunition, pistols and cutlasses along with them, having left the brig in haste, and in uncertainty as to the nature of the expedition. Others carried axes and coils of rope.

Twilight had deepened to dusk by the time the landing was made. The foot-beaten path leading straight inland from the landing, through the willow shoots and ripe grasses, was no more than discernible. At a word from Jean Richard, Walking Moose stepped briskly forward along the trail. The others fell in behind him, marching as in file. The captain was close at the pilot's silent heels, urging him onward. The Indian grunted, and broke into a jogging trot. At that, every man in the procession mended his pace, with a dull thumping of booted feet and a swing and clatter of accoutrements.

The warm, still air was full of the hum of insects, the scents of seeding grasses, and ripening vines, the black weaving of hush-winged bats, the swooping and twanging of nighthawks above the crowns of the high elms. From far ahead shone a sullen red glimmer between the trunks of the wide-set trees.

“Forward! Forward!” urged Jean Richard. “My friend and his family may even now be perishing in the flames.”

Walking Moose smiled as he quickened his pace. The seamen and gentlemen followed with labouring lungs and stumbling feet.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRISONER

THE dusk deepened to dark. Men stumbled from the path, which could no longer be seen, and several of them fell full length in the warm grass, dew-laden and fragrant, and were quite content to lie there and blow. Jean Richard was forced to call a halt. The wavering, pulsing glow was higher now against the northern sky.

"The captain is a good man to have for a friend," said Harwood to Roger, "but I greatly fear that he will arrive at this fire too late to save the bedding."

"To your feet, lads! Forward!" cried Jean Richard.

And so the frantic advance was continued, and many a stout and hardy seaman panted for breath and regretted his commander's amazing energy. Several more halts were made before the ridge of pine was reached. The fire still burned high, leaping red just beyond the timbered ridge. The rescue party reached the top of the slope, and by the angry light of the conflagration looked down through

a fringe of trees upon a cluster of log buildings fenced around by a high stockade. Now the red light showed every little window of the cabins and the joints of the walls as clear as day ; and now the black shadow of the smoke struck the picture out. Beyond the stockade was a great clearing pronged thick with stumps, and at the back of it, and nearly half a mile from the buildings, the fire leaped and wavered and glared, devouring great heaps of brush and axe-felled trees.

"The devil!" cried Jean Richard, his voice high with relief, but slightly rasped with vexation. "Here's a brave to-do over a burning of brush. My friends, I ask your pardon for bringing you on this wild-goose chase, but I promise you that Monsieur D'Armour will attend to our dry throats for us."

All laughed heartily save Walking Moose, and a half-dozen mariners who had not enough breath left in their lungs for any expression of mirth. The pilot, breathing lightly, looked out at the furious but harmless fire with the ghost of a smile at the corners of his eyes and his mouth.

The captain led the way down to the big gate in the stockade. The gate was fastened. Richard

banged on its stout timbers with the back of his axe. He received no answer, though the night was young. He shouted—and still no answer came from the other side of the stockade. A nameless dread assailed him. He turned and looked at Walking Moose inquiringly and fearfully in the baleful glare.

“What does this mean?” he asked. “The gates stood open night and day four years ago.”

“Don’t know,” said the pilot. “Better climb over and see.”

The stockade was scaled, after difficulties and delays. The bare inclosure was empty of life. Not even a dog was to be seen. Jean Richard ran to the main door of the largest of the buildings, and beat upon it with his axe. The thuds of his blows rang through the house, and the echoes came jumping back at him. That was all.

“Empty!” he exclaimed. “Or is it that they have fortified the house against us, and are even now lurking within?”

Nobody answered the question. Jean Richard bawled his name at the door, then moved to one of the shuttered windows and bawled it again. No voice or movement from within replied to him. His consternation, and the chill of his nameless

apprehensions, extended to the spirits of his followers. The men clustered together, and stared uneasily at the silent buildings, their hands grasped nervously on their weapons, and their eyes gleaming red in the wavering illumination of the fire.

"A devil of a country!" whispered Roger de Belot to Thomas Harwood. "Monsieur de Lacourt vanished from his fort, garrison, baggage, and wife—and now Monsieur D'Armour not be found. What do you make of it?"

"Heaven only knows," replied the Englishman. "Some mischief is afoot, I'll swear. Perhaps the country is bewitched."

The captain smashed in the shutters of a window with his axe. He was becoming excited. He dropped his axe, drew a knife, and went headfirst through the window into the darkness of the interior. Claude le Moyne followed close, sword in hand. The others followed so eagerly that frequent delays were caused by the jamming of two bodies in the narrow entrance. At last all were in. The heavy shutters of other windows were thrown open from the inside, and the menacing glare of the fire lighted the wide, low rooms. The men ran from room to room. The scanty furniture was there—heavy,

home-made articles and a few polished pieces from France ; but of life the house was empty.

The party from the brig forced entrances into all the other buildings, but with the same result. D'Armour's settlement was deserted. Not so much as a cat was to be found. And yet ashes lay on the rough hearths, and pots hung from the cranes. Some of the bedsteads and bunks were bare, but upon others the bedding still lay spread. Some dishes still stood upon the dresser.

Some of the larders were bare, and some contained a few provisions. The bins were half full of wheat and barley and rye, some of it in the grain, some in flour. In the wood yards the chips of the chopping were still bright and new. The storehouse contained fish and flesh, smoked, salted, and dried. Wine was found in a cupboard of the big house and spirits in decanters on the sideboard.

It was evident that Monsieur D'Armour, his family, and his people had taken their departure in a hurry. The party from the brig ate and drank hastily of whatever lay nearest at hand, then left the stockade and made their way across the big, new clearing to the fire. The flames had fallen to a mere leaping and running of narrow dwindling

tongues by this time ; but the trunks and stems of the brush still glowed red, and the black smoke still climbed, and hung against the stars.

The men explored the glowing heaps of black and red woodland skeletons, circling them at as close range as the heat would permit. They discovered nothing to enlighten them. Behind the fires lay more stump land, and beyond that the high, black edge of the forest.

Roger de Belot wandered away from his companions, exploring the shadows beyond the fires. He reached the edge of the forest, and halted. The flames leaped up, and by their wavering light he peered through the heavy branches of the pines into the black recesses of the wood. He advanced, stepping noiselessly in the deep moss. He parted the sweeping boughs before him with his hands. By the light of another upflicker of the flames behind him he noticed a round, black patch in the dry moss at his feet. He stooped, and brushed the edge of it with his hand, and felt the fine dust of ashes. Sparks had set the dry moss afire, beyond a doubt ; then why was it that the fire had not extended in every direction and climbed into the dense, dry foliage of the trees ? He discovered several more of these

circumscribed patches of burned moss near at hand. He halted, puzzled. It was natural to suppose that these little fires had been set by sparks from the burning brush in the clearing ; but it was not natural to suppose that they had extinguished themselves within a few seconds of ignition.

Roger stood staring straight before him, his pulses jumped with excitement. Again the red glare from the fire washed in among the trees. It shone upon a pair of eyes which regarded the intruder unwinkingly through the branches of a young spruce not more than six feet away.

Roger's heart contracted sharply with the shock of it, and his brain halted, dazed by the sudden apparition and many conflicting promptings to action. Should he spring forward? Should he shout to his comrades? Should he turn and run? The weird light sank, and absolute darkness inclosed him. He dropped his right hand to the knife at his belt, but before he could draw the short blade he was hurled backward to the moss with stunning force, with knees upon his breast, merciless fingers on his windpipe, and a hard and sweaty palm crushed against his lips. Swift visions of torture and death went through his reeling brain like torn and flying fragments of a dream.

Roger sank into a state of troubled unconsciousness for a few minutes, then regained a troubled consciousness. His throat hurt him and his jaws ached. He was gagged and blindfolded, and thongs pinched the flesh at his ankles and wrists painfully. He lay in what he judged to be a robe of dressed hide, and by the movements of it knew that he was being carried over rough ground at a brisk pace. Soon the motions grew smoother. At last he heard the swish and brush of reeds about him, then the plash of feet in shallow water. He was lowered, and laid full length on something hard and ribby—the bottom of a canoe, beyond a doubt. He heard the dip of paddles, the slide and slobber of water close to his ears.

Roger de Belot's discomforts of body were as nothing when his discomforts of mind are considered. He knew nothing more of the natives of this country than what he had been told of them within the past week ; and he had been told conflicting stories. He wondered if his scalp had already been taken ; and after he had concentrated all his thought upon the top of his head for several minutes he was conscious of a tingling sensation there. But no, that could not be, for Henri Reignault had told him that to be

scalped was to die. And he was not dead. On the contrary, he felt very much alive, and in no serious pain. So he came to the conclusion that he had not yet been scalped. That operation was still to be experienced. He wondered if his captors would torture him. He regretted that Anne de Montigny's bullet had not gone truer and pierced his brain.

He felt the canoe touch the sand. He was lifted out and laid upon smooth shore, the gag was removed from his aching mouth, and a cup of cool water was held to his lips. He drank eagerly. Then the gag was replaced, but this time with indications of some slight degree of consideration for his feelings. He heard two voices talking within a few feet of him, but the conversation was in the Maliseet language, of which he did not know a single word. He heard the booming, gulping notes of the huge frogs of that river, the swoop and twang and piping cry of the nighthawks, the soft lap of water among the reeds. Minutes passed slowly, anxious and inactive minutes, that to Roger seemed to drag into hours. He prayed for action. If it was intended that he should die of this misadventure, let death come now, he prayed.

Roger de Beiot heard another canoe come ashore, the soft stir of moccasined feet upon the sand, a

grunt of surprise, and then a low gabble of conversation. By listening keenly to the voices, he learned that his captors had been joined by two more Maliseets. One of the new arrivals, standing close to him, and stooping so low that he could hear and feel his slow breath, spoke a word in French.

"Gentleman," said the person who was inspecting him so closely.

This statement was accepted in silence by the others. More slow minutes passed, during which Roger smelled tobacco smoke and heard scraps of unintelligible conversation. His arms were numb. He rolled over on his face to ease the pain in his wrists. This movement was noticed, and evidently understood by the savages, for one of them immediately unfastened the thongs at his wrists, placed his hands in an easier position at his sides, and there bound them painlessly by winding the thongs around his arms and body. Roger took heart at that, and would have expressed his gratitude but for the gag in his mouth. He rested easily now, and hope of winning through with his life stirred in his blood like wine. He was young, you understand, and even a ruined life seemed a sweet thing to him. *

He was lifted, and laid again in the bottom of the canoe. The canoe was run out through the water grasses. The paddles were plied without sound, but he could hear the water swirl back along the side of the frail craft from the strokes of the man in the bow, and now and again his intent ears caught the tinkle of water drops falling from the lifted blades. He had lost all sense of direction long ago, and soon after his second embarkation he lost all sense of motion. He sank into a light but restful sleep.

Roger de Belot was awakened at being lifted from the canoe by his heels and shoulders. The bandage across his eyes had slipped a little, and though he could not make out anything of his surroundings, he was able to detect something of the clear wash of the summer daybreak. He was carried up a short, steep bank, across a wide level, then up another steep slope. Dogs snarled and barked around him. His nose caught the scent of new-sawn timber, wood smoke, and cooking food.

"What have you there?" asked someone in French.

The fellow at his heels replied with a few words in the Maliseet tongue. He felt and heard people crowding around him as he was carried slowly for-

ward. He heard a key grind in a lock, and immediately after that he was deposited on a floor of hewn planks. He heard retreating footsteps, the bang of a heavy door, and again the grinding of the key in the lock. He felt secure now, though unpleasantly stiff in his joints. He was in the hands of Frenchmen, of his own countrymen, of friends of Jean Richard, like as not. In a few minutes someone in authority would come to him, and then his little adventure would come to a pleasant and amusing end.

The door of his prison was soon opened again. Someone stooped over him, lifted him by the shoulders to a sitting position, and removed the gag from his mouth and the bandage from his eyes. He blinked his eyes and looked about him. He was in a small chamber which was bare of furniture. The morning light came in at the open door and one small window. He saw a Maliseet standing beside him and two men in stained but civilized garments confronting him. A shock went through him at seeing that the faces of these two were covered with masks of white linen. He looked at their ungloved hands, and saw them to be the hands of white men. They wore swords, and their clothing had been both rich and fashionable in its day.

"Good morning, sir," said the taller and more slender of the two.

Roger returned the greeting politely.

"What is your name?" asked the masked man who had spoken before.

"My name is Roger de Belot, and I am the second son of Pierre de Belot, Count of Onzain."

The two masks stepped close together at that and exchanged guarded whispers. The prisoner watched them anxiously, and some of his earlier apprehensions weighed upon his heart.

"And what brings you here, Monsieur de Belot?" asked the less tall and less slender of the two, who had not spoken before.

"Answer your question yourself," retorted Roger indignantly. "I was gagged, blindfolded, and bound, and so lack information."

The other bowed in silence, and considered the retort with a hand on his chin; but his companion spoke up sharply.

"You understand the question, my young friend. What brought you into this country?"

"I have not yet been informed of your authority to question me; but I will tell you that I should refuse to answer the questions of the King himself

if he were not man enough to uncover his face to me I am Roger de Belot, as I have already told you ; but you ? Some base-born runner of the woods, I imagine, or some dirty pirate, in hiding from the law."

The man thus addressed stepped forward with an oath and a menacing gesture, as if he meant to strike the helpless youth on the floor ; but his companion gripped him by the wrist, yanked him to a standstill, then pulled him across the threshold, and out of Roger's sight. The Maliseet followed them calmly as far as the open door, halted there, and stood looking out. Roger heard a brisk and vehement exchange of speech, of which he caught the tones but nothing of the words.

Ten minutes later the Indian stepped aside through the doorway, and the shorter of the two Frenchmen reappeared before the prisoner. He had removed the linen mask from his face, and even now held it in his left hand. His face was flushed. He looked at Roger grimly, but not unkindly.

"I hope you will pardon my friend," he said. "He is not himself just now. Of late he has been consumed with anxieties, and his nerves are sick. So I trust that you will not judge him harshly, sir."

Roger was so greatly amazed and relieved at this change of front that he could only gape in answer.

"If you knew all, you would understand, Monsieur de Belot," continued the other. "Young though you are, and free from cares, I believe that you would understand, and forgive."

"Free from cares?" queried Roger, with a somewhat wintry smile. "My arms are bound to my sides, my ankles are bound, I have been gagged and blindfolded, carried violently away from my friends, and deposited in this place, of which I know nothing! If this is to be free from cares, then do I pray for anxieties and tribulations."

The other glanced aside, with an air of embarrassment. He was a man of about fifty years of age, of medium height, and sturdy build. His eyes were grey, large, and set well apart. His head and features were large and shapely, his expression grave but kindly.

"These are unsettled times," he said, "and young gentlemen who come adventuring to the ends of the earth must not expect to meet with all the graces and conventions of society in court circles. At the present moment, my friend and I are the slaves of circumstances, in this connection, at least. However

that may be, I will give myself the pleasure of loosing your bonds, and I have already ordered your breakfast to be brought to you here."

He stooped and cut the thongs at Roger's wrists and ankles.

"My name is Francis D'Armour," he said.

Roger managed to bow an acknowledgment despite his astonishment.

"Jean Richard's friend!" he exclaimed.

"Jean Richard is not an uncommon name," said D'Armour.

Roger de Belot was by nature a friendly young man, and he felt strongly drawn toward Francis D'Armour. So he told of the expedition to D'Armour's house, explained its inspiration, and described Jean Richard's amazement at finding the conflagration to be nothing but a fire of brush, and the settlement deserted.

"I am sorry, but it had to be," said D'Armour, gazing at the floor.

Just then a Maliseet woman entered the room with a platter of fried trout, a loaf of bread, and a mug of white wine. She deposited these things on the floor beside the young Frenchman, treated him to a swift and inquiring glance of her black eyes, then departed as noiselessly and swiftly as she had come.

Roger lifted the mug of wine and drank thirstily. D'Armour drew a small knife from his belt and laid it beside the platter, and, with the knife, ably assisted by his fingers, Roger de Belot made a hearty attack on the fish and bread.

"For how long have you been associated with Jean Richard?" asked D'Armour, with the manner of one who considers every word before uttering it, and weighs it as it passes his lips.

"For only a few weeks," replied Roger, "though I first met him several months ago."

"In France?"

"No. In Martinique, in the West Indies."

"So you are from the south, Monsieur de Belot?"

"Yes," replied Roger; and then it occurred to him suddenly that he would be wise not to leave all the practice of caution in speech to Francis D'Armour. He reflected that, under the circumstances, it would be indiscreet to let this mysterious gentleman learn that he, Roger de Belot, was a fugitive from the wrath of the Governor of Martinique. The times were indeed unsettled, as D'Armour had said; and to Roger it seemed that this wilderness was even in a more active and disconcerting state of unrest than the times.

CHAPTER VIII

THE APPEAL

‘ IF your captain is the Jean Richard of my acquaintance, then I am at a loss to understand why he has left those rich waters of the south for this bare land,’ remarked D’Armour reflectively. “ He is a reckless fellow, as I remember him—strong-willed, and fearless of laws and authority. Can it be that he has come to this wilderness for security, I wonder? Can it be that his scorn of official authority has made the islands too hot for him? ”

“ I need not tell you, sir, that it would be highly unbecoming of me to prate of Captain Richard’s private affairs,” said Roger, “ but I feel free to assure you that you have only to visit the brig and question the captain himself to learn all that you want to know. Jean Richard looks upon you as a very dear friend. I have heard him say so, and he proved it in leaving his brig and hastening to your assistance when he believed your house to be burning.”

“ It is the same, beyond a doubt,” said D’Armour,

fingering the pointed beard on his chin. "I'd give much to know what brings him here."

"He came to visit you, sir, and another of his friends of former years, Monsieur de Lacourt," replied Roger. "He was unfortunate in finding both his dear friends vanished."

"Poor Lacourt!" said the other. "That was a sad affair. Can you tell me if Captain Richard was the bearer of some message from the King to Monsieur de Lacourt?"

"I am not at liberty to say," replied Roger.

D'Armour eyed him intently.

"That is a new scar on your head, my young friend," he said. "You have been blooded to battle, I see. A nasty injury, on my soul! A shade more, and your skull would have cracked like the shell of a nut. So it seems that your northward voyage was not a peaceful one."

"This wound is the result of an accident," said Roger.

Francis D'Armour turned on his heel. Roger got stiffly to his feet at the same moment. The other glanced back at him.

"You must not overexert yourself," said D'Armour.

"I am perfectly well, save for a slight stiffness of the joints," replied Roger. "A little exercise will limber them. But before I go to the canoe, sir, will you tell me why you deserted your stockaded village last night?"

"The cance?" queried D'Armour "My dear lad, what do you want of a canoe?"

"I wish to be returned to the brig immediately, and so put an end to the anxiety of my friends."

"You do not understand. My dear sir, it is out of the question that you should be returned to the brig—immediately. To-morrow, or the next day, perhaps. I am sorry. I am a slave of cir umstance. But you will be well cared for. These are troublous times."

"The devil!" cried Roger

He sprang past D'Armour and across the threshold, and drove straight into the arms of the taller of the two Frenchmen, who had come to the doorway at that moment with the intention of entering the room. The long arms gripped him about the middle, but he struggled savagely, used his heels in a trick which he had learned when a very small boy, and toppled his captor to the ground. But the long arms did not relax their hold. In falling, he snatched the mask from the other's face.

It was a handsome face into which Roger glared as the two wrestlers rolled together on the ground, the face of a man of thirty years, perhaps. The clear skin was now flushed with anger and exertion, the pale eyes flashed, the thin lips snarled. It was a handsome face, but Roger de Belot did not like it.

Roger was on top. He had the advantage, and by quick work with his elbows and knees he was more than maintaining that advantage; but before the tall gentleman was entirely at his mercy Roger was wrenched from his position, dragged away, and flung into the bare room from which he had so recently escaped. The door of heavy planks was slammed into place from the outside, and the key once more snarled in the lock.

* * *

When Jean Richard called his men together he discovered, by the light of the fallen fire of brush, that Roger de Belot was missing. He ordered a search immediately. Some of his men returned to the deserted village, others hunted through the woods, the stump lands, and the meadows. Six anxious fellows searched a field of ripe barley until the standing grain looked as if a troop of cavalry had ridden through it. Roger's name was shouted.

Guns were fired. After the fruitless search had been carried on for several hours the captain decided that his young friend had returned to the river and the boats; so the whole party, led again by Walking Moose, made the return journey across the ridge of pine and the wide meadows to the little landing. Roger was not there.

The captain cursed heartily. Anger and anxiety shook every one but Walking Moose. The Maliseet stood aside, and surveyed the agitation of the mariners with his usual lofty calm. When Richard bawled several furious questions at him, then damned him for a wooden-headed fool, he did not blink an eyelid.

Jean Richard, Le Moyne, and Harwood held a whispered consultation, at the conclusion of which the Canadian called ten of the party to him by name. Four of these were unarmed, but at a word from the captain these four were supplied with muskets and ammunition by their companions. Mr. Harwood spoke a few words to Richard, then stepped over beside Claude le Moyne. The ten turned then, and, led by the gentleman from Quebec and the gentleman from England, marched off toward the deserted settlement, three miles inland. Walking Moose took

a step in the same direction, with the evident intention of joining or following them ; but Captain Jean Richard seized him by the naked shoulders, twirled him around in his tracks, and pushed him into one of the boats with such violence that he sprawled across the thwarts. Walking Moose grunted, and rubbed his shins. Otherwise, he showed neither astonishment nor displeasure. He seated himself in the bow of the boat. The three boats were run from the sand and quickly manned by Richard and his ten. The blades of ash struck the water, the bows were pulled around, and the long craft shot out upon the black water, heading for the anchored brig.

The brig was not where they had left it. The roots of every man's hair crawled on his scalp at that discovery. The three boats drew close together, then pulled apart, and drifted down with the black current. Every eye searched the gloom ahead and the utter blackness along the nearer shore. The boats rounded a bend in the river, and a shout of relief went up from them, for there blinked the brig's lights not more than a mile away—lights high in the rigging and lights low upon the water. She was burning a dozen lanterns and as many torches. The oars were plied now with a will.

As the boats drew near the brig they were challenged sharply from the rigging, the forecastle head and the bowsprit. Jean Richard's answer satisfied the look-outs.

As Richard mounted the bulwarks he was met by Da Santo. Da Santo carried a musket, but he dropped the weapon to the deck the better to embrace his commander. A swift glance showed Richard that every man who had been left with the brig was armed and on duty.

The Spaniard told his story briefly. Shortly after the departure of the captain and the rescue party for the distant fire Da Santo had placed an anchor watch of two men and retired to his cabin. He had fallen into a light doze almost immediately, from which he had been aroused by a shout and the sound of running feet overhead. Upon reaching the deck, a moment later, he had found the brig drifting swiftly, broadside to the stream. On all sides the river ran, black, empty, and silent. The men had been called from their bunks. A brief examination had disclosed the fact that the cable had been cut. He had ordered the second bow anchor to be let go. It had plunged, taking the mud, and held. It had continued to hold for the space of an hour, during

which time Da Santo had armed his men, and waited in silence, without lights. Then, suddenly and silently, the new cable had parted, and the brig was adrift again, swinging in the current. Da Santo had pressed all his lanterns into service then, and posted men in the rigging, to scan the dimly lighted water close around the vessel; but he had not risked another anchor. Anchors were scarce in that country, he supposed. The look-outs had seen nothing, had heard nothing. The brig had soon gone softly aground on a sand bar. That was all.

Jean Richard was puzzled. He suspected an uprising of the natives, and the Spaniard agreed with him. How else were Lacourt's disappearance, D'Armour's desertion of his stockaded village, the loss of Roger de Belot, and the cutting of the brig's cables to be explained?

Richard narrated his own adventures of the night.

"Why do they leave Captain Reignault and his little garrison in peace at the mouth of the river?" asked Da Santo. "If the natives are determined to wipe the whites out of this wilderness they would have set fire to that little fort, and slaughtered the garrison, long before this. Let us question the pilot."

Jean Richard sent for the pilot, but Walking Moose was not to be found anywhere aboard the brig. Black Duck had flown, also.

“We shall go up river to-morrow, and anchor off the little wharf of my friend D’Armour,” said the captain. “Le Moyne and Harwood may have some news for us by then. I’ll not be frightened out of the country by a few sneaking savages. I’ll find young Belot, dead or alive, or learn his fate, if I have to spend ten years in this accursed wilderness!”

At the first lift of dawn the boats were strongly manned, and the brig was pulled clear of the sand bar. A wind came up with the sun, and the sails were squared and trimmed to it. The wide waters and timbered shores showed no signs of human life—no flash of paddle, no wisp of rising smoke. The brig crossed the stream at the foot of the big Isle of Ducks, and let an anchor go in the shallow water off D’Armour’s landing.

Jean Richard went aloft, and gazed out in every direction over that beautiful and deserted land. His eyes explored the broad, blue river for miles to the east and the west without detecting anything astir on it save the head of a swimming moose and a flock of ducks. He scanned the wooded meadows,

the wooded slopes of both shores beyond the meadows, and the long island. Beyond the island he saw the narrow mouth of the Oromocto, or "Deep Water," and the thrust of its deep, black current into the blue of the larger river; but he looked in vain to the east and west, to the north and the south, for some sign of human occupation. He descended to the deck, saw to the loading of his culverins and great guns, and breakfasted.

Shortly before noon a look-out in the main-top reported a canoe crossing the river about a mile above the head of the island, from the northern to the southern shore. That was interesting; but nothing could be done about it. Several hours later the same man reported the approach of Monsieur le Moyne and his party from the direction of the deserted settlement to the northward. Le Moyne, Harwood, and their men reached the shore and were met by the boats. Every man carried a pack of provisions—grain, flour, or cured meat. They had spent the night within the stockade, on guard; but they had seen nothing to explain the desertion of the buildings and stores. They had seen nothing but a prowling fox, and had heard nothing but the cries of wild beasts and birds. In the morning they had searched

the clearings and woods around the stockade for Roger de Belot, but all in vain.

"We shall all remain aboard to-night," said the captain, "and in the morning we will strike."

"What will you strike at, sir?" asked Mr. Harwood.

"The deserted village," replied Jean Richard. "As it seems to be of no use to my friends we will see that it is of no use to these sneaking redskins. We'll take the stores, and fire the houses."

* * *

Roger de Belot had plenty of time for undisturbed thought before he saw anything more of his captors beyond the back and shoulders of the savage who stood guard outside his little window. The light that entered by the window was tinged with the deep gold of late afternoon when the key again turned in the big lock of the door. The door opened for about a quarter of its width and the young Maliseet woman who had brought him his breakfast slipped into the room. The door was closed behind her by an unseen hand. She held a platter of food and a bottle of wine. She wore a blanket over her head and shoulders, a stained skirt of dressed leather, leggings, and moccasins. The blanket shadowed her face. She placed the platter and bottle on the floor.

She glided close to Roger, who stood with his arms folded and his disdainful glance directed toward the closed door beyond her.

“ I will help you, if you will help me,” she whispered in his own language. “ Help me, for the love of Heaven ! Take me away from here ! Take me to your friends, for God’s sake ! ”

Young Roger de Belot gasped, and stooped a little to see the face beneath the blanket. He gasped again at what he saw.

CHAPTER IX

A LOAF OF BREAD

ROGER DE BELOT saw, in the heavy shadow of the blanket, blue eyes and a face of startling pallor. A hand touched his arm. He looked down at it and saw that it was slender and beautifully modelled, roughly stained with some brown stuff on the back but as white as marble at the wrist.

"You amuse yourself at my expense, made-moiselle," he stammered.

The door opened a little and the brown face of the Maliseet guard appeared. He was a tall young fellow named Sabatis. He spoke a word that was unintelligible to Roger, then withdrew. The girl darted to the door, slipped out, and closed it behind her. Roger continued to stand as she had left him for several minutes, staring at the door.

"What the devil does it mean?" he exclaimed, at last.

And well might he ask it, even of himself and without any hope for an answer. In the morning, when D'Armour was present, his food had been

brought to him by a young woman of the wild. He had remarked her black eyes and dusky cheeks. And in the evening, when he was alone, a French girl clothed in the garments of the Maliseet woman had brought him his bread and wine and asked him to help her. What help did she need, a beautiful French girl, in this place where Monsieur d' Armour and his handsome friend carried themselves like undisputed masters? Francis d' Armour was a gentleman. Jean Richard said so; and though Jean Richard was always ready to cry himself the son of a baker, Roger de Belot had absolute faith in his discernment.

"There is something wrong here," murmured Roger; and then, with some heat, "I'll help her if I can. I swear it by the bones of my ancestors!" he added.

He had no more than made this vow, and was about to step to the window and look out, when booted feet sounded at the door. He stooped swiftly, instinctively, took up a piece of bread and the bottle of light wine, and began to eat and drink. The door opened. The tall man entered, followed close by Francis d' Armour. Neither of them wore a mask this time. D' Armour closed the door behind him.

The tall man halted and regarded young Roger with an uncommonly cold and unpleasant smile. De Belot glanced at him coolly and raised the bottle to his lips again.

"You say that you are Roger de Belot," said the tall man. "It is easy to name a name."

Roger's hand trembled, but he finished his draught without haste.

"In that case, why have you neglected to name me your name?" he asked.

D' Armour smiled, and the tall gentleman flushed angrily.

"Not that I wish to know it," added Roger calmly, "since your behaviour has already made me aware of its quality. After mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that you must fill the post of barber to Monsieur d' Armour. It is a pity that he does not keep you in your place."

This insult was received with an oath and a twitching of facial muscles. The colourless eyes flashed like steel.

D' Armour laid a restraining hand on the arm of his angry friend and murmured a few words in his ear. Then he turned again to Roger.

"I regret your attitude toward my friend," he

said ; " but the gentleman does not wish you any harm, and is willing to make allowances for you, considering the peculiar circumstances in which you find yourself. We are not children ; we are not savages. Let us talk rationally, remembering our manners. Will you oblige me by telling me what you know of Jean Richard's mission to this country ? "

" I have already told you," replied Roger.

" To be sure you have. Pardon me, sir. He carries a message from the King for Monsieur de Lacourt. Very good. But how does he intend to deliver that message ? Where is Lacourt ? "

I said nothing about a message from the King, and I know nothing of Monsieur de Lacourt except that he vanished from his fort at the mouth of the river some months ago."

" So. Yes, it is a mystery about the Governor. Now that Richard has failed to find him, I suppose he will sail away before the first touch of winter ? "

" Perhaps so ; but I am not such a fool as to give information without receiving information in return. If you will tell me the name of your friend there, and your reason for deserting your village and for having me captured, I may answer some of your questions."

" My friend is Captain Roseau, a soldier of France."

" Thank you. I do not like his name any more than I like his appearance and manners. If he possessed even the slightest claim to birth or breeding, I should be delighted to give him satisfaction for my offensive remarks."

" There must be an end to this, and that soon ! " cried Captain Roseau. " As he refuses to answer questions when they are politely put to him, we shall see what a whip will do. Call Sabatis here."

" Not so fast," said D'Armour.

Roger went white about the lips and took a firm hold of the neck of the bottle of heavy glass. One head would break, at least, before a whip should touch him. D'Armour drew Roseau aside and talked to him at considerable length, guardedly but vehemently. He turned back to the prisoner at last.

" We wish to remove you to better quarters than these," he said. " You will oblige me greatly, and save yourself useless exertion, by accompanying us quietly."

" Why should I oblige you, in the name of a thousand devils ? " asked the youth, gripping the neck of his bottle firmly, all ready to swing and strike,

"Then oblige yourself. I ask you to come quietly, for your own good."

"You give it a strange name. If you are considering my welfare, I must request you to return me to my ship and my friends."

"Practise a little patience, and you will find as good a friend in Francis D'Armour as in Jean Richard. No harm will come to you here if you will but act with a rational degree of compliance. You are in no danger here—unless you make it for yourself with stubbornness and violence. It rests with yourself as to how soon I shall be able to explain the situation to you."

"I will go with you," said Roger, and he set the bottle on the floor.

The western sky was red when he stepped into the open between Captain Roseau and Francis D'Armour. He saw that he was within a stockade, but not the stockade which he had visited with Jean Richard and his companions. Low houses and huts of logs stood behind him and to his right and left. Through an open gate in the stockade he looked westward down a short slope, across a wide meadow, a narrow black stream, and wider meadows beyond. Low hills rimmed the distant meadows.

During Roger's short walk from his old quarters to his new, with D'Armour and Roseau at his elbow and Sabatis at his heels, he saw more than a score of persons moving among the huts or looking from their doors. The majority of these were whites. Children and dogs played together in the dust of the big inclosure. But the journey was a short one ; and within sixty seconds of leaving his former prison, Roger was again behind a locked door. He found himself in a building of two rooms. The larger room was furnished with a small table, two stools, and a bed of deerskins. The smaller was empty. Each had a small window heavily barred with iron.

Roger was not disturbed again that evening. When dusk deepened in his prison he retired to his couch of skins, for he was both tired and sleepy. Level sun-rays were reaching in between the bars of his windows when he next opened his eyes, and he had no more than sat upright on his hairy and odoriferous couch than the door opened and the slender figure with the blanket about its head and shoulders entered with food and drink. He sprang to his feet and stepped forward eagerly. He bowed, and glanced beneath the shading blanket.

" The devil ! " he exclaimed, and straightened his back with a jerk.

The young Maliseet woman did not seem to be astonished or in any way disturbed by this unusual greeting. She placed the food and the wine on the table, then turned and glided swiftly toward the door. It was opened for her, from the outside, by Sabatis. It closed behind her with a heavy, dead thud, and Roger de Belot was alone again.

Strange to say, Roger's sensibilities were more deeply hurt now than they had been since his violent capture in the woods behind D'Armour's stockade. He felt that he had been ill-used by a friend. Why had the girl with the blue eyes come to him last evening if she had intended to neglect him this morning? She was amusing herself at his expense. She was playing with him. She, too, was an enemy. His eyes smarted—why, he did not know. His heart sank with hopelessness. For several minutes he paced the rough floors of his prison, angry, humiliated, and grieved.

"She came to me unasked, and begged me to help her—and she was making a fool of me!" he muttered.

He felt very miserable. Anne de Montigny had tried to shoot him through the head, 'tis true; but that was in the heat of anger and in her father's

defence. This girl with the blue eyes had offered him her friendship, and asked for his, in cold-blooded derision. The thought went through him like a knife and left him quivering; for, like most men born of decent mothers, Roger was more deeply shocked and more keenly astonished at discovering cruelty or treachery in a woman than in a man. Why, he could not have told you, nor can I, for that matter. Perhaps he was old enough to have noticed that the majority of women are naturally generous and honest. A hard-hearted man may still be just and honourable; but a hard-hearted woman is as full of evil possibilities as she is rare, for she is unnatural.

Hunger drove Roger to the table at last. He had supped lightly the night before. He drank a little of the thin wine, then took up the tough loaf of bread from the platter and tried to break it. It cracked, but the halves held together stiffly. He examined it closely, caught a glint of something bright in the middle of the golden crumb, then pulled the two halves apart and laid bare a short, heavy steel blade. Quick as thought, he cleared the haft of the knife from the loaf and hid it in his belt. His hopes were up again now. From one window he could see a considerable expanse of

trodden earth, the fronts and doors of several huts, and the western gate of the stockade. From the other he could see only a narrow alley and a blind wall of logs. He devoted most of his time and attention to the window with the wider outlook. The hours dragged drearily along. Nobody came to him at noon, so he finished the wine and food which had been left over from his breakfast. He examined the short, heavy-bladed knife frequently but furtively. He was glad of it ; but his ideas as to what he was intended to do with it were of the vaguest nature. Was he in danger of an attack, and had the knife been sent to him to be used in self-defence ? Or was he to use it upon his captors without waiting to be attacked ? That idea did not appeal to him. Perhaps the knife might serve as a key of escape ? He examined the windows minutely, only to find that the ends of the iron bars were fastened to the logs on the outside, far beyond his reach. He examined the door ; but hinges, lock, and bolts were all on the outside.

It was several hours after noon that he was attracted to the westward-facing window by a sudden hubbub of voices. He saw an excited group just within the open gate, the centre of which was a

young Frenchman who held a paddle in one hand and gesticulated with the other. Men and women and children, white and dusky, came running, crying questions as they approached. Francis D'Armour and Captain Roseau were of the group.

Roger caught only a few words of the clashing and gabbled talk—"fire," "fort," "stores," "ruffians," and the name of Jean Richard pronounced in tones that were anything but affectionate.

The crowd dispersed. Roger wondered what his commander had done to cause so much excitement and anger among his captors; but his thoughts soon turned and centred again upon his own affairs.

He moved through and through, around and around his two rooms, searching the walls and his brains for some sign or inspiration that might lead to freedom. The inspiration came at last, and he turned his attention to the floor of the inner room. It was a floor of poles, each one roughly squared on the upper side and fastened down with wooden pins. In one corner these poles sprang slightly to the pressure of the foot and rang hollow to the rap of the knuckles.

Roger set to work with the short knife, prying at one end of that pole which seemed to be the least secure in its place. He left his work every minute

to make a round of the rooms, listening at the door and peeping and listening at the windows. At last one pole was loosened from the grip of the long pegs. He lifted it, and saw beneath it an air space about six inches deep between the under side of the floor and the earth. He then trimmed the points of the pins to about half their former size, so that they would slip easily in and out of their holes in the foundation logs, and returned the pole to its place. The pole showed no sign of having been tampered with, and yet he could remove it in a second. He hid the knife in his breast and again made his round of windows and door.

Roger heard the voices of D'Armour and Roseau at the other side of the door.

"For your own sake, as well as for his, I must ask you to keep your temper under better control," said D'Armour. "To be frank, I am puzzled to know what manner of devil has taken possession of you of late."

"But this cub is dangerous, I tell you," replied Captain Roseau. "He knows too much. You were a fool to tell him your name."

"I must remind you that my name is my own."

"And in return, I must remind you that I am more deeply concerned in this affair than you."

“Your reward will be greater than mine, I grant you; but our risks are equal, and I have already sacrificed my houses and stores.”

A key was inserted in the lock. Roger stepped back noiselessly and sat down beside his little table. He sank his head upon his hands in an attitude of dejection; and so D'Armour and Roseau found him.

“My affectionate friend, Jean Richard, who has sailed thousands of miles for the pleasure of paying me a little visit, has demonstrated his love by setting fire to my village and stores,” said D'Armour.

“I am sorry for your loss,” replied Roger, “but will swear that Jean Richard believed that he was acting for the best. If you had remained in your village, no harm would have come to it.”

D'Armour shook his head and Captain Roseau sneered.

‘Have you decided yet to tell us the truth concerning Richard's mission and your own to this country?’ asked Roseau.

“I have already told you. He came for his own pleasure.”

“A likely story. And for how long did he intend to remain with us, may I ask?”

“ For a year, at least.”

“ So he came in ballast, with no more than enough stores to last his company three months ! You are a clumsy liar, my friend.”

“ To insult an unarmed prisoner demands no great courage.”

“ You will remain with us until your amiable friend, Richard, leaves the country ”

Roger did not reply ; but he smiled behind his hand, remembering the girl with the blue eyes, and feeling the heavy knife inside his shirt. His visitors retired. He returned to his work at the floor, and kept at it until three poles in all were prepared for instant removal. The Maliseet woman brought him his food at sundown and went away without a word. The new loaf of bread contained nothing. He began to fear for the safety of the girl with the blue eyes.

When the last gleam of twilight had faded from the windows, Roger went back to his work. He lifted the three loose poles from their places and laid them aside without a sound. He knelt on the cool earth beneath the aperture at a distance of several feet from the outer wall and facing it, and began to dig with the heavy-bladed knife. After loosening about

a bushel of earth, he scooped it up with his hands and threw it to right and left beneath the floor. Then he worked with his knife again.

Roger was early astir next morning. He examined his hands, then washed them with great care in what remained of his thin wine, and dried them on the skirts of his coat. Next, he removed all signs of earth stain from his knees by vigorous brushing. He entered the inner room and examined the floor. It showed no signs of having been tampered with.

CHAPTER X

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

WHEN the door opened, Roger de Belot was seated beside his table. The blanket-shrouded figure entered and the door closed behind it. Then Roger got eagerly to his feet and advanced, for already his eyes had grown too sharp for that disguise of blanket, stained skirt and moccasins. He took the wooden platter of food and the bottle from her hands and set them on the table. He turned again, looked reverently beneath the hooded blanket, and met the shadowed and pleading gaze of the blue eyes.

“The knife?” she queried.

“It is here,” he whispered, touching his breast.

“And I have made good use of it. I have cut out a hidden way of escape from this hut.”

“And you will help me—at the risk of your life, perhaps?”

“I am at your service, mademoiselle.”

“Then to-night. Make your escape from here when all is quiet. How do you get out?”

Roger told her of his tunnel under the floor and the foundation log at the north-east corner of the hut.

"A friend will meet you there, with a blanket," whispered the girl. "She will guide you through the back of the stockade, through the woods, and to where I shall be waiting for you with a canoe. So we shall escape to your friends in the brig. I must go now. Do not fail me—and I shall not fail you."

"But the brig? I know nothing of its whereabouts."

"I know. It still lies in the big river."

Roger was left alone from then until the hour of sunset; and though he was well furnished with both matter and opportunity for thought, he accomplished very little clear thinking. He paced his quarters, from window to window, his brain in a feverish state of bewilderment, wonder, hope, and apprehension.

The young Indian woman brought him his evening meal, and went away without a word. He ate and drank, then continued to sit at the little table for hours, waiting. They were anxious and nerve-wearing hours. At last the darkness gloomed ashen-black at the barred windows. The night was sultry, the sky overdrawn with cloud. Thunder rumbled from the south; and, as the night wore on, unedged, blinking flashes of lightning flared frequently at

the window. There would be rain before morning—a heavy storm, perhaps.

Roger wondered if D'Armour or Captain Roseau would pay him a call before midnight. He hoped not. At last he decided that the time for action had arrived. He placed an empty bottle at the edge of the door, where it would be almost sure to be overturned by anyone entering the hut. He then went to the inner room, raised and laid aside the three loose poles, and stepped down into his narrow trench. The trench already tunnelled the big foundation log of the wall, and a few minutes more of work with the knife would open it to the surface beyond his prison. He set briskly but cautiously to work, cutting out the earth with the knife and removing it with his hands. He paused frequently to give ear. The task was almost completed when he heard the tell-tale bottle strike and roll upon the floor in the other room. He dropped his knife and was out of the trench and across the inner room as quick as a flash. He sank to his hands and knees and crawled to his couch of skins, his eyes fixed upon the dim yellow square of a lantern suspended low and motionless in the open doorway. He sank limply upon the couch, and at that moment a flash

of lightning illuminated the interior, wiping out the feeble glow of the lantern and stamping the outline of Captain Roseau sharp and black. Utter darkness shut down again.

"There you are," said the visitor. "For a moment I thought that you had gone."

"Who is there?" asked Roger, sitting up. His heart shook in his side at Roseau's words. Had his entrance from the other room been observed? Was his path to freedom to be discovered before he could make use of it? He pictured the floor as he had left it—the upturned poles, the open trench—and the sweat jumped upon his skin as cold as ice.

"It is I, Roseau," said the visitor, advancing and placing his dim lantern on the table. "Forgive me if I have disturbed your slumbers, my friend, for I have come with the best intentions."

He seated himself on the stool and set a bottle on the table.

"You left your wine on the floor, and I overturned it; but, fortunately, I have brought you a bottle of a fine vintage," he said.

"Thank you," replied the captive ungraciously, without moving from his bed. He spoke dully to

disguise his alertness, anxiety, and suspicion. Why this sudden change in Captain Roseau's manner toward him, he wondered.

Again the heavens whitened; but this time tremulously, as if with running fire. The dark blinked down, quick as a closing eyelid, and the thunder rattled and pounded like the explosions of a thousand great guns. The storm was approaching.

"The devil!" exclaimed Roseau. "But let us be thankful that it is not as bad as it sounds."

Roger de Belot was silent. He had nothing to say. A problem occupied his mind acutely. Was his unwelcome visitor seated in a position from which he could command the north-east corner of the other room? He worried over the question, but could not answer it with certainty one way or the other; but there was the chance that, even if Roseau occupied the required position, he would close his eyes during the intense, revealing flashes.

"When we come to know each other, we will be better friends," said Captain Roseau. "I will admit that I stand in need of friends, of men of your kidney. At the same time, I am in a position to reward them. If you will throw in your lot with D'Armour and myself, you will never regret it.

There is a future for a gentleman of spirit in our service, Monsieur de Belot."

Roger felt rebellious ; but he schooled his voice so that neither anger nor suspicion sounded in the tone of it.

" But I know nothing of the nature of the service," he said.

" You will not be expected to do anything unbecoming a man of rank, I assure you," replied the other. " You will help play a big game—with a spice of danger in it, of course, but with no dishonour."

He paused an instant, as if listening

" You will be well treated," he continued. " You will be given authority, and you will win wealth. What do you think of it ? "

" It sounds very fair."

" Yes, and it is as fair as it sounds ; and now that we begin to understand one another, will you answer me a simple question ? "

" With pleasure, sir. Let me hear it."

" What brings Jean Richard to this country ? "

" But I have already answered that question to the best of my ability. He came to see his old friend, Monsieur Louis de Lacourt."

“ With forty men, twelve great guns and culverins, and an empty hold ! Does it sound reasonable ? It will pay you to tell me the truth.”

Roger lost control of his temper then, and requested his visitor to go to the devil. The white fire flamed jaggedly at that moment, showing Roseau's handsome face like a mask of hate. Then the thunder clashed and rolled. In the blackness and silence that followed that terrific outburst of fire and sound, Captain Roseau got to his feet and spoke calmly.

“ Think it over, my friend,” he said. “ I'll call again in the morning ; and, in the meantime, to show that my intentions are of the most friendly nature, I leave you this bottle of wine from my own bin.”

Roger de Belot remained motionless on the couch of skin until he heard the door shut and the key grind in the lock. Then he sprang to his feet and felt his way to the gap in the floor of the inner room. He was thirsty, but he gave no thought to the wine of which Captain Roseau had made such a point. He lay flat in his tunnel, with head and shoulders under the bottom log of the wall, and dug before him with short upward strokes of the knife. He heard the

thunder crash above him. He lowered his knife and thrust strongly upward with his left hand. The earth came down in a shower and his hand went through the crust of dry sod to the outer air. Half a minute later, his head and shoulders were out in the black night, the wall of his prison pressing against his shoulder blades. He could see nothing, he could catch no whisper of sound. The world seemed to be holding its breath.

He brushed the loam from his head and face, then drew himself upward and outward from the mouth of the tunnel, slowly and with considerable effort. He cleared his legs, and stood upright, breathing quickly and staring around against the blackness. Suddenly the dark was torn from south to west by a blue-white intensity of flame that consumed the obscurity and depth of the sky and laid space naked to the human eye, as colourless as water in the palm of the hand. In that flash, Roger saw everything of earth and sky as if with the eyes of a god—the open gates of heaven, the blades of grass and grains of dust at his feet, drops of white balsam on the bark of a log, a spider's web across the corner of a window, towering pines etched clear to the least needle and slim cone, a section of the stockade, a cowering dog cringing against a closed door, and, at his very

elbow, a tall young woman with her fine eyes regarding him.

Then a blackness fell that seemed to press against the startled eyeballs ; but so swift was the change that the brain continued to hold for a second the livid outlines of that revelation.

The thunder shook the blind world with crash upon crash, deafening, monstrous, as if the pillars and arches and soaring domes of God's house were tumbling in ruins.

Slender fingers, warm and alive with youth, touched Roger's earth-powdered right hand and closed upon his fingers.

"Come!" whispered a voice. "We must get through the stockade before the next flash."

She moved, drawing him after her through the darkness. She did not hesitate nor stumble. They were beyond the stockade and in a wood of pines when the lightning flashed again. She turned, and for a second they stared into each other's eyes by that appalling glare, standing with clasped hands. Then dark and the tumult of the splintering heavens descended upon them. She cringed toward him, and a trembling shoulder touched his arm. In the still silence that followed, they moved northward through the woods, hand in hand. They were still under the

pinetrees when the floodgates of the massed and tortured clouds were opened. The warm rain came down in sheets, striking a prolonged and swelling note of deluge in the high tree-tops and filling the wood with a smoking mist that drenched and suffocated.

"This is terrible!" cried the young woman. "This is more frightful than the lightning and the thunder. It is as if the whole world were being washed away."

"Courage!" replied Roger de Belot. "Let us go forward. What of the canoe?"

"This way. It is not far from here. Keep hold of my hand."

They soon issued from the wood into the full, unbroken downpour. Roger seized his guide with both hands and reeled back with her into the partial shelter of a big tree. Scarcely knowing what he did, he held her close to him, as if trying to shelter her with his shoulder and arms. She did not draw away from him. She did not speak. He stared out at the sloshing dark across her wet, bowed head. The water pounded down in sheets, and smoked upward in spray.

The downpour lessened at last, slackening in its violence, as if the terrific pace had proved too

much for it. The girl moved in Roger's embrace, stepped away from him, and laughed lightly.

"Come!" she said. "We are losing precious time."

The darkness was as dense as ever. She led him down a slope and across a meadow. They waded through the high, rank grass of the meadow, as if through a hip-deep tide. At last the guide halted and whistled twice. A muffled voice answered her.

They found the blue-eyed girl lying in the shelter of an upturned canoe. She scrambled out, with a tremulous cry of relief. The two young women embraced, one sobbing, the other laughing lightly, and speaking little words of comfort as if to a frightened child.

"I thought I should die of terror," sobbed the blue-eyed one. "Oh, that horrible blue-white fire! And the terrific thunder! I thought the end of the world had come. I feared that God was about to strike me dead with fire, for my sin."

"For your sin!" retorted the other. "You dear little fool, you don't know the meaning of sin!"

They launched the canoe upon the rain-pitted stream, its bow pointed the way of the sluggish current. Roger was entirely ignorant of the science of propelling this variety of craft, so he crawled cautiously into the bow, and the young woman

whom he was rescuing took the post of responsibility in the stern.

"Adieu. And a safe voyage," cried the girl who had guided Roger from the stockade.

Roger turned sharply in his place, and came within an ace of overturning the cranky craft in doing so.

* "But I thought you were coming, too!" he exclaimed, in consternation.

The girl in the stern pushed strongly against the grassy bank with her paddle, and the canoe shot out upon the stream.

"Adieu."

"Adieu."

Nothing was to be heard save the drumming of the rain upon the surface of the stream. Nothing was to be seen save the dim gleam of beaten spray smoking around the canoe. The stream was slow and deep. The girl paddled feverishly. Roger sat low, drenched, bewildered, and helpless. A flash of lightning, long delayed, ripped the sky behind the curtains of rain, and illuminated the scene. Roger caught the picture in the winking of an eye—the narrow stream, black as pitch and veiled by water smoke, the rank, green meadows, the millions of vertical, flashing tendrils of the rain. His companion screamed, let slip her paddle, and covered

her face with her hands ; and on the instant that blackness shut down upon them the canoe turned over as quick as thought

The water felt as warm as new milk, as fresh-spilled blood. Roger sank deep, and while he was under that black tide he heard the thunder rolling. His bewildered wits cleared. He turned and darted swiftly to the surface. He was a strong swimmer, but the beaten smoke of the spattering rain almost choked him. He swam around in a narrow circle, groping for his companion. By good luck, he blundered against her almost immediately. He dragged her ashore.

Roger recovered the canoe ; but, search as he would, he failed to find a paddle. He emptied the water from the canoe and lifted his companion into it. They sat helpless, and drifted slowly along with the stream. The blackness held and the rain continued to fall, now blown slantwise by a wind from the west. The lightning withdrew, blinking faintly, then glimmering, then ceasing entirely. The thunder fell and receded to a distant rumbling.

" All is lost ! " wailed the girl. " He will kill me for this ! I would to God I were dead ! "

" Courage ! " returned the young man ; but his voice lacked conviction.

They bestirred themselves frequently to bail the rain water out of the canoe. The canoe was blown ashore again and again by the wind. At last Roger stepped over the bow and sank knee-deep in mud and water weeds. He drew the canoe far in among the rank reeds.

"I must find a paddle of some kind," he said. "A pole—the branch of a tree—anything with which to push along to freedom."

"There are no trees on the Oromocto marshes," she said drearily.

"I must try to find something," he retorted. "We cannot give in like this, without a struggle. Wait for me where you are, mademoiselle."

He splashed forward in the darkness, pushing the reeds apart with his hands, stumbling now on swaying tussocks, now sinking half-way to the hip in water and squelching ooze. This was not a meadow, but a flooded marsh, a swamp, a morass. Despair clutched him, and a flicker of fear went through his blood. The hopelessness of it! The horror of it! He could not see his lifted hand before his face. The next step might be his last, plunging him to the bottomless slime of a quagmire. He turned to retrace his steps to the canoe.

CHAPTER XI

FOR SWEET HONOUR'S SAKE

THE wind increased in weight and steadiness; the rain blew over; the darkness thinned ever so slightly. Roger de Belot stumbled and struggled wildly in blood-warm water and clinging scum of rotted vegetation. His frantic hands encountered a tussock. He dragged himself half-way out of the quagmire and lay panting for several minutes. That crawling horror of the lost in an unknown country mastered his spirit now; for he had been struggling in the morass for many minutes—for half an hour, perhaps—without finding the canoe or the stream. He shouted. A faint answer came back to him from an unexpected quarter. He raised himself on the quaking tussock and shouted again. The answer was fainter this time—or was it only the wind in the wet reeds?

Roger won back to the margin of the slow, black stream at last. The wind had broken the clouds by now, and a few stars glinted high up between walls of black. The air was cooler, and Roger bared his

chest to it, standing knee-deep in the ooze. The wind thrashed the surface of the stream and crushed the water-soaked grasses with a sound that seemed to Roger the very voice of desolation. He shouted against the wind, and got no reply. He shouted down the wind, and only the slashing wind and tortured waters answered him.

The clouds continued to break and trail away and the sky to lighten. Roger suspected that the canoe, with the blue-eyed girl crouched in it, had been blown into the stream and set adrift. He decided to follow the stream downward toward the big river. He had no idea of how far he was from the broad St. John. A mile, perhaps—or twenty miles. He informed himself of the direction of the current by leaning far forward over the black depths and feeling for it with his hand. He followed the spongy margin of the stream for an hour or more, sinking to his knees at every step in clinging mud. He came to firmer ground at last, and sank, face down, upon it, utterly exhausted. He had not found the canoe. The wind had died, and all the clouds had been swept away beyond the vague horizons. Faint stars cast light enough to show dim outlines of wood and hill. Roger aroused himself, removed

his boots and drained the water from them, scraped some of the mud and slime from his person and continued his journey. He had lost his company, his canoe, even his knife. He was lost in an unknown wilderness, without food and without weapons. He was too weary to think. He was too weary for despair or for hope. He continued to go forward doggedly, following the black river.

At the first lifting of day in the east, Roger crawled into a dense thicket of willows and alders. He pillowed his head on his arm and drifted into blessed unconsciousness. He slept soundly, for several hours. Consciousness returned to him sharply, as if he had been called, but no voice had spoken his name, no hand had touched him.

He opened his eyes, without raising his head from his stiff arm. The blood retreated upon his heart, and his face went colourless as death. He sat up slowly and stared hopelessly at the men seated among the alder stems close in front of him.

There were two, one middle-aged and one young. The elder was smoking a long pipe. He smiled pleasantly at Roger de Belot.

"Good morning, sir," he said. "I hope your sleep has been refreshing."

"You have found me," said Roger sullenly. "What now?"

"And quite by accident," replied the other. "After finding madame adrift in the canoe, and searching through hundreds of acres of these devilish morasses, we gave you up for dead and drowned in the belly of a quagmire. So we came in here, my son Pierre and I, for a drink of cool spring water; and here we found you."

Roger's tongue itched with a desire to question, but he kept it quiet. What was this talk of "madame," he wondered. Did the fellow refer to the blue-eyed girl? He could not believe it.

The man with the pipe produced a flask of brandy and handed it over to his prisoner. Roger drank eagerly and immediately felt some return of interest in life. The other opened a leather pouch which hung from his belt and brought to light slices of white bread and cold roast venison. The three breakfasted, and Roger managed to eat his fair share of the limited supply of food, despite the heaviness of his heart.

"I am ready," said Roger.

"For what are you ready, sir?"

"That I do not know. For captivity, at least; perhaps for death."

"You have courage—yes, and by the crowns of the saints you have the eyes and the brow of a brave man who was once my captain in battle! You do not look like a pirate's bastard."

"How is that!" cried Roger, with a gleam in his eyes that caused the other to draw back swiftly and remove his pipe from his mouth.

"I repeat only what Monsieur de—what Monsieur the Captain told me."

"Roseau? He is a liar and a coward! I am Roger de Belot, as he knows—Roger de Belot, son of Pierre de Belot, Count of Onzain!"

The other dropped his pipe, scrambled to his feet, pulled Roger from the ground, and enfolded him in his arms. His embrace was like the traditional embrace of a bear.

"Saints in glory!" he cried, in an ecstasy of joy and amazement. "A De Belot, of Onzain! The son of my old commander, of my beloved master! I should have seen it in those eyes, at the first glance, fool that I am!"

Roger struggled clear of the embracing arms.

And you?" he asked breathlessly.

"Come here, Pierre!" exclaimed the other. "Come and embrace the son of the great gentleman after whom I named you."

Roger did not resist. He stood motionless and stared at his captors. The youth approached him, embraced him warmly, and stepped back.

"It is well," said the father. "Monsieur, I am Robert le Blanc, and this youth is my son Pierre. His mother is a woman of this Maliseet nation. In my youth I served as a soldier under your father, the good count. We called him the good captain in those days. And you, his son, are here! And I have hunted you! Ten thousand devils!"

Roger stepped forward and clasped Le Blanc's hands.

"You are my friend, then? You knew my father?" he cried.

"Yes, I am your friend—and I give thanks to the saints that I find you now, when you stand in need of a friend!"

Questions and answers were exchanged. Then Roger told the story of his recent adventures, keeping to himself only his reason for leaving Martinique. Robert le Blanc listened intently, with frequent noddings of the head. At the conclusion, he spoke a word in Maliseet to his half-breed son. The youth slipped noiselessly from the thicket.

"Why did they take me away from my comrades?"

asked Roger. "Why did they keep me captive—and why did D'Armour desert his village?"

"They think that you and Jean Richard came to spy upon them, in the King's name—even to capture them and carry them back to France," said Robert le Blanc. "And, in truth, I was of the same way of thinking until a few minutes ago. It is a confused situation for the wits of an old soldier, sir."

"In the King's name, you say? Why should the King spy upon them? I can make nothing of that, my friend—unless it is that D'Armour and Roseau had something to do with the disappearance of Monsieur de Lacourt and his garrison. Can that be so? Who is this Captain Roseau?"

The joy went out of Robert le Blanc's face. He wagged his head, looking glum and uneasy

"I am your friend, Roger de Belot," he said. "Ask me for my purse, my sword, my musket, and they are yours. You need my help now. It is yours, sir, even though I should be forced to risk my life, and that of my son, to help you. But I am not free to answer your questions, for I am still in the service of Captain Roseau."

Pierre le Blanc stood before them and spoke a word to his father

"It is well," said Robert. He turned to Roger. "We shall go inland a mile or two, to a safer hiding-place than this, and when night falls we shall take you to your friends. Pierre has hidden our canoe. Come, sir."

"One moment, my friend," said Roger. "You say that you are still in the service of this pig Roseau, and yet you are willing to guide me back to my companions. How is this?"

"Because you are in danger, and because you are the son of Pierre de Belot, under whom I fought in my young manhood and whom I loved. Is it not enough? Come, my friend!"

"Wait! I think it only fair to you to warn you that the matter will not rest with my return to the brig. Roseau is my enemy. I can find it in my heart to forgive D'Armour his share in the indignities I have suffered, but never that pig Roseau. So I warn you that you return me to the brig to the sure undoing of the man whom you now serve."

"This is very puzzling, sir. It places me in an awkward position. If I take you back to the stockade it is to risk your life; and that I will never do. And yet I am Captain Roseau's man now, and have much at stake in his enterprise. I cannot ask

you to keep silence. The honour of your race forbids it. And here, on the other hand, is my honour—only that of a poor soldier, 'tis true, but precious to me. You and Jean Richard and his thirty men would smoke Roseau out of his den? Yes; but how will that be accomplished, sir? Roseau is well hidden."

"Not so, my friend. By the look of the stream yonder, and by a name which I have heard which means deep water, I am of the opinion that Roseau's village is on the Oromocto."

"The devil!" exclaimed Le Blanc gloomily "You are sharp, sir; but my poor brain is like mud in my skull. I can see nothing clearly save the fact that it is my duty to save the life of the son of my old commander. It must be done at all costs. Let my ambitions go! Who am I, to harbour ambitions? I am a dull fellow, once a common soldier and now a runner of the woods—and Pierre de Belot was my friend. So I will take you to the brig, sir, and ask no favour of silence in return."

"Not so fast," said Roger. "Your honour is safe with me; and yet, in simple justice to myself and to Jean Richard, I cannot return to the brig without relating all that I know of Roseau and

D'Armour and their mysterious behaviour. So I'll go back to captivity, and I do not stand greatly in fear of losing my life by doing so, for I have a poor opinion of Captain Roseau's power to harm me."

Robert de Blanc stared blankly.

"You mean that you will return to the place you escaped from?" he asked, in a slow, dull voice.

"Under the circumstances, yes. What else can I do?"

The half-breed lad, who had been gazing intently at Roger with bright and admiring eyes, spoke a word to his father. Robert's face cleared and his eyes flashed.

"I understand!" he cried, "De Belot, every inch of you! No man's honour will suffer at your hands—not even the honour of a poor soldier. But I cannot permit the sacrifice, sir. You must return to your brig. My honour and ambitions are small matters—and Captain Roseau can take his chances."

Roger de Belot was stubborn. He had braced his courage to the intention of returning to the captivity and unknown dangers from which he had fled, and nothing that Robert le Blanc could say to shake his resolve had any effect.

"I wash my hands of it!" exclaimed Le Blanc,

in a voice of despair. "I refuse to take you back. Go; but you go alone!"

"But I do not understand the management of a canoe."

"So? But I had no intention of offering you my canoe, sir."

"I can walk. Adieu, my friend. Give me your hand."

"Ten thousand devils! This is more than an affair of honour, I see. I go with you, sir. What else? But I might have guessed, fool that I am. She has blue eyes. I was young myself, long ago—the devil take it!"

It was close upon noon when they reached the stockade, after following the sluggish, black stream through miles of flooded meadows and wastes of dank and scummy green. A crowd collected and escorted the three through the big gate—an awed crowd of French and natives, men and women. Roger walked between father and son, his hands free, his chin up, his eyes undismayed. He was unarmed, but he was prepared to take Captain Roseau by the throat, if need be. He was not afraid. The faces of the crowd were not unfriendly. He felt that D'Armour would lift a detaining hand

and that Robert le Blanc would strike for him, if his life were threatened.

"Sabatis is dead," whispered someone.

Captain Roseau was nowhere in sight. Francis D'Armour appeared and approached the recaptured youth with a slow step and a gloomy face.

"I did not bring him! I swear it by all the saints!" cried Robert le Blanc. "He is not what the captain told me, but the son of Pierre de Belot. See, his hands are free. He returned of his own mad will."

D'Armour shot a keen glance at Roger, then turned in silence and led the way to the strong hut from which the young man had escaped only a few tumultuous hours before. The crowd followed. D'Armour, the senior Le Blanc, and Roger entered, and then D'Armour closed the door.

"What do you know of that?" asked D'Armour, pointing at a bottle standing on the little table.

De Belot had not been sure of what to expect from D'Armour in the way of greeting or question, but this was beyond his wildest imagining. He looked his astonishment.

"Have you seen that bottle before?" asked D'Armour. "It is a simple question. Answer me. Yes or no?"

"Captain Roseau brought me a bottle of wine last night and left it here on the table," replied Roger, reading in the other's dark eyes that the question was seriously asked. "He recommended it to me as a rare vintage from his own bins. I did not touch it."

D'Armour sighed, and the shadow in his face deepened.

"I suspected as much," he said drearily. "Sabatis drank of it—and died in agony."

Robert le Blanc gripped D'Armour by a wrist. His weather-tanned cheeks went grey and his eyes widened with horror.

"It was poisoned, you say?" he exclaimed. "And he gave it to this gentleman? Monster! Coward! Devil! Where is the swine?"

"Peace!" retorted D'Armour sharply. "Lower your voice. Remember all that we have at stake, you and I. Are we children, or fools, to ruin ourselves for the empty satisfaction of bawling his infamy from the roof?"

"I am a simple soldier," replied Le Blanc sullenly. "I'll not serve a coward, a devil. He has poisoned Sabatis. He intended to poison the son of my old captain. Wrath of Heaven! Let me at him!"

Roger de Belot said nothing. He gazed at the bottle with stricken eyes. His heart felt cold and his bones like water with the horror of that treachery.

D'Armour talked to Le Blanc vehemently, in a low, rasping voice. Robert grumbled and grunted. Suddenly he cried out angrily :

“ And risk his life ? You are mad ! ”

“ What else ? You forget the lady in the affair. ”

“ It is all of her doing, I'll swear. So let *her* fight. A duel ? His honour ? Hang him by the neck, say I ! Honour of a dog ! ”

* * *

D'Armour's valet waited upon Roger de Belot with a change of linen and other fine raiment, scented soaps, brushes, and a razor. After that came a cook with a tray of choice foods and a dusty bottle. The cook tasted the wine in Roger's sight before serving it. Then came Monsieur D'Armour, and the servants withdrew.

“ You must fight Captain Roseau, ” said D'Armour.

“ Why ? ” asked Roger. “ What right has that treacherous pig to expect the honour of fighting a gentleman ? ”

“ You ran away with his wife. ”

Roger gasped in dismay and astonishment.

"His wife? Which?"

"Which?"

"I—I tried to help a girl in distress. I did not know she was anybody's wife. I thought her a girl. She—she has blue eyes, I think."

"Yes, Madame—Madame Roseau has blue eyes. It is unfortunate."

"You may say so. I thought her a prisoner, like myself. I did not know anything of that hog Roseau's private affairs. Are there other ladies here?"

"My wife and daughter."

"So! Madame and Mademoiselle D'Armour. And—and are they well?"

"They are in good health, sir. Why do you ask?"

"Heaven only knows! I am confused. I will fight Roseau."

They went secretly to a little clearing in the pine woods, half a mile behind the stockade. Captain Roseau walked in silence. He did not permit his eyes to encounter Roger's disdainful glance. Robert le Blanc and D'Armour charged the pistols and paced off the ground. Roger felt cool and fearless. He was a good shot; and he was determined to shoot straight to-day.

CHAPTER XII

A DUEL

THE duellists were placed twenty paces apart, each with a loaded pistol, each with his back presented squarely to the other. At a word from D'Armour they were to turn and fire. Roger faced north, Roseau south. The sunlight flooded into that forest room from the west, clear and golden across the still spires of the forest. A bird sang, high up in the top of a pointed fir. The duellists waited, each staring fixedly at his wall of shadowy forest, each a-tingle with eagerness for the word to turn and slay. They already held their clumsy weapons chin-high, the muzzles pointed straight up at the passionless, unfathomable blue.

D'Armour glanced across the narrow dell at Robert le Blanc. The ex-soldier nodded. D'Armour moistened his lips and was about to cry the word when the silence was shattered by an explosion and a yell of rage and pain. Roger lowered his pistol to his side and turned slowly. Roseau's pistol lay on the ground, and Roseau swayed weakly,

and gripped his right wrist with his left hand. Blood oozed between his fingers and dripped to the moss and splattered his white hose. A wisp of smoke clung among the lower branches of a young fir, pearl-grey against the dark green of the forest.

D'Armour and Le Blanc ran to the wounded man.

"Foul play!" snarled Roseau, and swooned in Le Blanc's strong unwilling arms. Roger de Belot recovered from his astonishment and ran toward the dissolving smoke, the loaded pistol still in his hand. He dashed reckless into the thick woods and ran straight ahead at top speed for several hundreds of yards. Then he halted, breathing guardedly, and harkened for some sound of flight. He heard nothing but the hum of insects and the chirp of birds. The light was dim in that brown underworld of forest with its roof of heavy green and its thousand massive pillars.

Roger searched through the underbrush for several minutes, then turned to retrace his steps. He had not walked far before he was brought to a nerve-wrenching stop by a sudden apparition close in front of him, and a hand on his arm.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Did you shoot——"

A hand was clapped to his mouth

"Not so loud," cautioned the tall girl whom he had last seen by the terrific glare of the lightning.

"Yes, I shot him. Where did I hit him? I aimed at his right arm, to disable him; but I shall not grieve if the ball went through his heart."

"You broke his wrist, I think," replied Roger his voice as flat as a sleep-talker's.

He gazed at her with a light in his eyes that hinted a profounder emotion than amazement.

"That will serve my purpose," she said, her eyes meeting his steadily and a faint smile touching her lips.

"But why did you do it?" he asked.

"One must do something," she replied. "A girl must amuse herself in some way, even in this wilderness."

"Perhaps you saved my life, mademoiselle."

"It is not unlikely, sir. He is a famous marksman."

"I, too, am not without skill with the pistol; but I should be happy to think that you saved me from death, mademoiselle. I am Roger—Henri-Charles-Saint Ives de Belot, your humble servant."

The young woman laughed lightly, with a note of delicate mockery in her voice.

"I must go, now," she said. "The others may join the search."

"But I have so many questions to ask," he protested. "For one, who are you? And why did you help me escape last night? And why did you shoot at Roseau?"

"I am Ysabel D'Armour," she said. "I may answer the other questions later. Now I must go home, or I shall be missed by my mother. Don't follow me, Monsieur de Belot. Go back to the others."

She turned and slipped into the underbrush, leaving him standing with his hat in his hand and an expression of joyous bewilderment on his boyish face. She trusted him already like an old friend, it seemed, for she had not thought to caution him against disclosing the identity of Roseau's assailant. She took his friendship and his discretion for granted.

Roger found the forest glade empty, save for Captain Roseau's coat and fallen pistol. He picked up the pistol and turned it idly in his hands, his eyes considering it but his thoughts beyond the green walls of the dell. The weapon was large and of the latest model. It was mounted in silver, elaborately engraved. Behind the big hammer was a gold

plate set in the mahogany, and upon this plate were engraved the initial letters of a name. His eyes dwelt upon these letters for several seconds in musing and preoccupied regard; and then, quick as light, his thoughts switched and followed his glance, his glance narrowed and brightened, and the pistol shook in his fingers.

“L. de L.,” he said slowly. “L. de L. It sounds familiar.”

And then, “Louis de Lacourt!” he cried.

Roger de Belot did not take advantage of that opportunity of escape. He did not consider it; he did not even see it. He hastened back to the stockade, with a pistol in each pocket of his skirted coat and his grey eyes gleaming with determination. He entered the enclosure by way of the big gate and shouted for Francis D’ Armour. Men and women appeared, eyed him curiously, but did not offer to molest him. D’ Armour appeared in a doorway of the central building.

“The devil!” he exclaimed, “I’d forgotten all about you!”

Roger marched up to the threshold and pulled a pistol from his pocket with a belligerent air. D’ Armour retreated a pace and laid a hand on the

edge of the door, as if he intended to slam it in his visitor's face ; but Roger, too quick for him, stepped across the threshold and wedged a shoulder against the door.

" Look at this ! " cried Roger. " See what I have found ! Look at it ! "

" A pistol," said D'Armour, eyeing the weapon uneasily. " I see it, my friend. You found it in the woods, I suppose. Well done ! "

" A pistol, yes," returned the young man sternly. " But I did not find it in the woods. Look closer, sir. You charged it with your own hands. The pistol of Monsieur de Lacourt ! "

" The devil ! " exclaimed D'Armour.

" You may well say so," sneered Roger. " The pistol of Louis de Lacourt—let fall by Captain Roseau ! And yet I have heard that you were Lacourt's friend ! "

D'Armour stared. His face was flushed, his eyes and puckered brows showed bewilderment. He did not speak.

" I suppose he poisoned the Governor, even as he tried to poison me," continued Roger violently. " But you ! I had formed a better opinion of you. I could have believed that you were an honourable

man, in spite of your suspicious actions, if I had been told so a few minutes ago. But now? Never! The associate of a murderer! I do not wonder that you deserted your village and fled into hiding when you heard that Jean Richard was ascending the river. But Richard will deal with you. He does not turn his back on a friend or the memory of a friend. The murderers of Louis de Lacourt shall answer for their crime."

The expression of D' Armour's face changed. The brows smoothed, the eyes lightened. The blank bewilderment gave way to a look of relief and incredulous wonder. The black moustaches trembled slightly with the swift relaxing of the mouth. He glanced aside for a second, then back again—and now his eyes were inscrutable. He shrugged his broad shoulders, and smiled.

"Have it so," he said, with so evident a note of restraint in his voice as to catch the other's attention.

"Then you admit it!" cried Roger, his tones shrill with anger and disgust.

"I admit nothing," replied D' Armour, with a derisive gesture of the hands. "Think whatever you choose of me, sir. I give you permission."

"Have you no sense of shame?" asked Roger

scornfully. "Have you no conscience? You, born a gentleman, bred a soldier and a scholar! You, the father of that beautiful and courageous girl!"

D'Armour became all attention, quick as a flash. His eyes brightened and contracted until they became searching, piercing points of black fire. The smile left his lips.

"You amaze me," he said. "I was not aware that my daughter had the honour of your acquaintance."

"I have heard of her," stammered Roger, blushing hotly at his blunder. The older man's piercing glance and slow, cutting voice daunted him, confused him, cooled the heroic glow in his heart and eyes.

"It strikes me, Monsieur de Belot, that you have heard too much for your own good," said D'Armour coolly.

Roger produced the second pistol, thus arming both hands. The idea of escape, and thoughts of his friends aboard the brig, came to him now very sweetly and urgently. He would go! He would fight his way out of this nest of treachery, blood, and lies! So he stepped backward across the threshold; but before he could turn to make a dash for the gate the strong arms of Robert le Blanc embraced him from behind and held him helpless.

Roger was taken back to the two-roomed hut from which he had escaped so short a time before in the tumult of the storm. A glance showed him that the floor of the inner room had been strongly repaired. He sank upon a stool beside the table and hid his face against his arms. He was in desperate straits. He cursed himself miserably for not attempting an escape when the road lay open. Instead of taking advantage of that golden opportunity he had returned to confront and confound his enemies with the proof of their crime against Lacourt—fool that he was! His rash action had not helped the dead Governor, but had sealed his own fate.

Roger's grim reflections were not disturbed until several hours after sunset, when sounds of unusual activity beyond his log walls aroused him from his inaction of despair and drew him to the window which commanded the main gate. By the dim light of stars and a young moon he saw that the gateway was alive with men. He caught the gleam of metal, words of greeting, the clank of a scabbard, and snatches of talk and laughter. A lantern appeared, a yellow blur. D'Armour carried it. The voices fell to whispers. The dim figures and the

dim lantern moved aside out of Roger's range of vision, some of the crowding figures to the right, some to the left. Silence reigned again within the stockade; but now it seemed an unnatural silence to the prisoner. He knew that a score of armed men had entered the stockade—a score, at least—on some friendly affair. Why had D' Armour silenced them so quickly and withdrawn them from the range of the prison window? Why should he care whether or not Roger de Belot, the helpless prisoner, knew of the arrival of an armed and friendly force?

Roger heard a cautious step at the door. He glided noiselessly to his couch of skins and lay down, feigning sleep; but he turned his face to the door and shadowed it with an arm. The door opened slowly, cautiously. Roger's heart leaped and grew cold. A sudden dryness caught his throat and the roof of his mouth. Was this his murderer?

"Are you awake?" asked the voice of Francis D' Armour.

Roger did not answer. He breathed heavily, brokenly.

D' Armour closed the door behind him and crossed the room toward the couch, stepping firmly.

Roger sat up, ready to slip to this side or that or to

spring straight forward at his visitor's throat ; but he felt a great pity for himself, for he was unarmed.

" Who is there ? " he asked.

" So you are awake at last ? " said D'Armour, halting. " You are a sound sleeper, sir—which comes of having a clean conscience, I suppose. But this is neither the place nor hour for adventures into the realms of philosophy. Follow me, if you please."

" Has my hour arrived ? " asked Roger bitterly. " Am I now to suffer the fate of Louis de Lacourt ? "

" Monsieur de Belot, you are a blockhead ! " retorted the other. " I have stood between you and death more than once since we had the misfortune to meet ; and still you nurse the thought that I intend to kill you. But this is not the only indication you show of lack of ordinary intelligence. Come, sir, I am waiting to set you on the road to freedom."

" Why ? " asked Roger.

" Why ! " exclaimed the other petulantly. " My dear young man, let me tell you that you are vastly mistaken if you think I want to keep you here. You had a chance to leave us this afternoon, and I

heartily wish that you had taken advantage of it. I have several reasons for desiring to see the last of you. I am willing to indicate one of these reasons. I have been questioning my daughter since my last conversation with you. She is an honest girl, and has admitted that she helped you in your attempt to escape, last night, and that she shot Captain Roseau to-day in her anxiety to save you from injury or death. Doubtless this information puts you upon very agreeable terms with yourself."

Roger's young blood glowed in his veins.

"And suppose I refuse to go?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"I warn you that if you refuse to leave this place immediately and by the means which I have taken the trouble to get ready for you, I shall withdraw my protection—and Captain Roseau will be the death of you, by fair means or foul, within twenty-four hours."

"I will go; but I will return."

"Very good. When you return as an open and armed enemy, I shall know how to deal with you."

"You do not fear the anger of Jean Richard?"

Francis D'Armour snapped his fingers. Roger thought of the recent arrival of armed men, at that,

but an instinct of caution kept him silent on the subject. He got to his feet and followed D'Armour. They left the hut, crossed the deserted inclosure, and passed through the unguarded gate. They descended the short slope and crossed the meadow of ripe grasses by a narrow path. A canoe lay half-hidden by willow shoots in the edge of the black tide. A dark figure knelt in the stern of it, paddle in hand.

"There are food and wine in the canoe, and Flying Plover will take you safely to within hailing distance of your friends," said D'Armour.

Roger took his place, with his back against the forward bar and his face to the Maliseet.

"Adieu," said D'Armour.

"Au revoir," answered Roger.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE

FOR a time, Roger de Belot's mind was pleasantly occupied with Francis D'Armour's statement concerning his daughter ; but his thoughts and spirits gradually subsided, and his blood gradually cooled, under the influence of the Maliseet's silence, of the frail and desolate voices of the night, of the black current of the stream and the vast dimness of the shores. Uneasiness possessed him and sharpened to fear. His mind turned to the mysteries and tragedies by which he had been faced and shadowed during his brief captivity—to Roseau's hostility, D'Armour's uneven attitude, the behaviour of Roseau's blue-eyed young wife, the bottle of poisoned wine, the death of Sabatis, the duel and its amazing interruption, and the pistol of Louis de Lacourt. His mind touched these matters fearfully, one by one, tried to weigh them, searched for some gleam of light in which to examine them, only to fall back, daunted and baffled. He considered his own position ; and, in viewing it fully, he came to the

conclusion that his case was as desperate as ever. He realized that Mademoiselle D' Armour had been forced to a confession, that Robert le Blanc had been kept away from him at the last, and that he was as securely in the power of D' Armour and Roseau now as he had been when locked in the hut within the stockade.

Roger decided that this release from his prison was a grim joke on the part of his mysterious enemies. He believed that the duel had been conceived in the same spirit of grim humour—that Roseau was to have turned before the signal and shot him in the back—that he would be lying dead in the forest glade at this minute but for the heroic behaviour of D' Armour's daughter. It was not unreasonable to suppose that they were unwilling to run the risks attendant upon the murder of a French gentleman openly and in their own village. So they had tried to poison him ; and they had failed. So they had arranged to kill him in a duel ; and again they had failed. And now ? Now he was to be dispatched neatly, the moment sleep should overtake him, by his silent companion. He pictured it in his horrified mind. A blow over the head from the blade of the heavy paddle, then the thrust of a knife

—and then a grave in the black river or in some slimy, green quagmire.

Roger felt no hunger ; but in spite of the fear of death in his breast, he felt a stinging thirst. He reached behind him and drew a bottle from the basket. He opened it, and extended it toward Flying Plover with a curt invitation to drink. The Maliseet rested his paddle across the gunwales and took the bottle. He accepted the invitation to drink without hesitation, and whole-heartedly ; and when he passed the bottle forward it was half empty.

Roger sat with the bottle in his hands for fully fifteen minutes, staring through the gloom at the savage, before he quenched his own thirst ; but as the fellow continued to paddle strongly, without any sign of weakness or internal discomfort, he drank at last.

In spite of his determination to remain wide awake and on his guard against treachery, Roger nodded—nodded and slept. He was young. He was tired in mind, body, and spirit. He slept soundly. He awoke suddenly, confused by the dregs of sleep and panic-stricken at the swift realization that he had slept. He scrambled blindly to his feet, ready to ward off the treacherous blow, and to fight for life

with his naked hands. His shins struck the gunwale of the tilted canoe, and out he went into the river.

The plunge served to clear Roger's wits and eyes, though the water was only knee-deep. He righted himself, stood firmly with his feet in the mud and long-stemmed, uprooted water lilies entwined about his legs, seized the bow of the canoe with both hands, and stared at the man with the paddle. The first, colourless light of day was abroad upon the wide river. Roger realized that he had slept in peace for several hours. The Maliseet, a round-faced, mild-eyed person of heroic proportions, returned his gaze with something of inquiry, but nothing of anger, in his glance. If he entertained murderous intentions he certainly did not show them. Roger's bewilderment was increased. He looked around him and saw that he was on the big river, the St. John. A thin veil of mist still clung to the broad current.

"You go ashore now," said Flying Plover. "The big ship not far. You find him behind that bluff."

Roger relaxed his hold on the bow of the canoe and turned his head to look at the shore close behind him and the wooded bluff about two hundred yards distant on his right. Quick and silent as thought,

the canoe shot backward out of his reach. Its slender lines blurred and merged in the crawling mists.

“Adieu!” called Flying Plover.

Roger de Belot turned and waded ashore. He hoped that the Maliseet had told the truth about the brig, for he was without food and without weapons. He followed the strip of beach to the right. The river was low, and so he was able to get around the point without having to climb the wooded flank of the bluff.

He saw the brig, and his heart leaped with joy and glowed with a sense of home-coming. She lay at anchor to the eastward of the bluff and about fifty yards away from the nearest point of the shore. Her hull bulked vague and high in the mist, but her spars and rigging were drawn clear against the brightening sky. He did not hail her immediately but seated himself on a boulder at the edge of the water and gazed upon her fondly, enjoying all the sensations of the moment to the full. There were his friends and comrades, his safe berth and his place at table. He had grown to love that old brig and every loyal heart aboard her; and now he knew it. A voice came to him, clear and strong across the water—the voice of Jean Richard raised in song.

The poetic captain did not sing of love now, but of battle. The song ended, and Roger was about to hail the singer, when a sound behind him caused him to spring to his feet and turn swiftly. It was the clatter and thud of heavy iron upon stone and sand. He was just in time to see a figure in a blue coat disappear in the thick foliage at the top of the bank, and to within a few yards of where he stood rolled a six-pound shot.

Roger gazed at the curving wall of green which topped the low, curving shore. Nothing moved. He glanced at the round shot, then turned his attention to the beach which swept away to the eastward in a long curve. The beach was narrow and thickly overgrown at this season of the year with tall, coarse grass. At several points this grass ran inland to the thickets of willows at the base of the steep bank and outward to a distance of five yards or more into the water. Patches of that rank vegetation grew to a height of five or six feet. The night mist still clung in it, white as washed wool.

Roger caught sight of something above the mist in the tops of the grasses. Something appeared, only to vanish instantly. It might have been the top of a human head, or a hat, or the blade of an oar. Whatever it might be, it was enough for Roger. He

turned and waded into the river. Fear blew cold on the back of his neck, but he kept his muscles and nerves well in hand, and advanced slowly, without splashing. He felt a chilly curiosity as to the number of hostile eyes that were regarding his back at that moment from the screen of foliage at the top of the bank. He wondered dully how the fellow in the blue coat had come to drop the round shot ; if they had really managed to place heavy guns on the top of the bank ; if he would be fired upon before he got into deep water.

Roger halted for a second, with the water to his hips, and pulled off his sodden boots. He shouted his name, and plunged forward in a long, shallow dive, and as the waters closed over his head he heard the bang of a musket behind him. He came to the surface well off the shore, in the crawling mist, and struck out strongly for the brig. Sounds came to him from the brig, as if beaten out on a drum—challenging cries, the clatter of tackle thrown down upon the deck, the thud of running feet. He heard the splash of oars over his right shoulder and knew for a certainty that boats had lain hidden among the reeds.

“ Throw a line,” he shouted. “ It is I, Roger de Belot.”

A volley of musketry crashed from the brig, telling him that the attacking boats had got clear of the cover, and been observed. A heavier crash of sound directly behind him told him that a great gun had hurled its message from the top of the bank. He dived again and swam like a seal. He was a swift and tireless swimmer. He reached the brig's side, and again shouted his name. The end of a rope struck the brown current between his hands with a splash. He laid hold of it and scaled the side. Willing hands pulled him over the rail, and Jean Richard received him in a crushing embrace.

There was no time just then for explanations. The fight was on, and every man aboard the brig was hard at it. The big guns and culverins flashed in reply to the red flashes from the shore. Muskets and pistols rained lead into and around the four crowded boats, and the boats retorted in kind. Bitter smoke thickened the rising mist from the river and hung yellow and stinking in the damp air to the height of the brig's tops. A round shot wrecked the high-pitched jib-boom. Another gashed the foremast. Splinters of teak jumped from the shoreward rail and spinters of pine flew from the bulwarks. Musket balls hummed through the rigging and ripped into the furled sails. A

charge of canister killed a man on the forecastle and wounded two others.

The boats were beaten off three times, and after the third repulse they pulled sluggishly off for the shore, two of them very low in the water, all of them silenced. They were still crowded, but not now with living, eager fellows lusting for battle. The long oars moved feebly, weakly manned. Dead men cluttered the red gratings and wounded men bled out their violent lives across the wet thwarts.

The firing slackened, then ceased, ashore and aboard the brig. The pall of mist and smoke was thinned and dispersed by sunlight and morning breeze. From the brig four long-boats that had taken part in the attack could be seen pulling slowly downstream, close to the shore, until they finally disappeared around a point about half a mile away. The wooded bank opposite the brig, which had shown such violent activity of round shot, canister, and musket fire, now showed no sign of life; but at the foot of the steep incline lay three huddled, motionless figures. The wide river was empty, meadows and forests were at peace under the morning sky.

Jean Richard came to Roger and embraced him for the second time.

"Thank God you are safe, and home again!" he cried. "I had almost given up hope of ever seeing you again, alive or dead. But who are they? How did they get their guns placed on the top of that bank? And how did you give them the slip, my dear lad?"

And the warm-hearted fellow embraced Roger again, and before Roger could reply to a question, others came and embraced him—Harwood, Le Moyne, Da Santo, and a dozen members of the crew.

"I have a long story to tell, but this is no time for it," said Roger. "I am hungry."

Jean Richard sent an order to the galley for breakfast to be served as soon as possible.

"But I will tell you now that those men ashore and those in the boats are not the people who have had me in captivity," said Roger. "I escaped from them, 'tis true; but I was ignorant of their existence until a few seconds before you heard me shout."

"The devil!" exclaimed the captain. "You speak as if the country were alive with armed forces; and yet we have not been able to get within gunshot of a red man or a white until this morning."

The capstan was manned and the anchor walked up. Headsails were spread to the faint breeze, and the brig swung around and went slowly down

the river with the current. The big guns were reloaded, and breakfast was served on deck to all hands.

Roger de Belot was urged to narrate his adventures. He commenced, but had not proceeded far with the story before Jean Richard interrupted by jumping to his feet, stamping the deck, and swearing furiously.

"Francis D'Armour!" he cried. "What imp of the pit has entered into him? He was my friend! And he deserted his village and fled from me. And he captured you. And he cut my cable and set me adrift. The man is mad—or a black-hearted rogue. I thought he was the victim of foul play, so I took his stores and burned his settlement, so that they should not serve his enemies. Thank Heaven that I dealt him that blow, though it was struck blindly! But are you sure that it was Francis D'Armour? It may have been an impostor. Describe him."

Roger gave a brief but vivid description of D'Armour.

"That is the man!" cried the captain. "What dog has bitten him?"

"I don't know," answered Roger. "Madame Roseau showed me a way of escape, but it failed and I was brought back, to learn that Roseau had

made an attempt on my life with poisoned wine. I did not drink any of the wine, praise the saints ! But a savage named Sabatis helped himself to it, and died in agony. So a duel was arranged to dispatch me by foul play ; but I was saved from that by—by an accident. I picked up Roseau's pistol—and on it were engraved the initial letters of the lost Governor's name. I told D'Armour that he and Roseau were Lacourt's murderers, and he could not deny it ! ”

“ Roseau ! Roseau ? Describe this Captain Roseau ! ” cried Jean Richard.

Roger complied with the request in a few biting phrases.

Jean Richard's ruddy face went the colour of old sails. He flung his arms straight above his head and turned his face upward in a great gesture of protest to Heaven.

“ You are mad ! ” he cried. “ The whole world is mad ! The man you describe is Louis de Lacourt himself ! ”

Roger and the other gentlemen gaped at him, dumfounded.

“ Look ahead ! ” cried a man on the forecastle. “ There rides their ship—and she is hoisting the boats aboard and making sail. ”

CHAPTER XIV

THE FORT IN THE WILDERNESS

THE strange vessel flew the flag of the French king. She was no more than well under way before she ran her nose into the head of a submerged sand-bar. The brig drew down upon her in the deep channel, the matches in the gunners' hands burning white in the sunshine, the forecastle head and the starboard rail lined with musketeers. Down fluttered the King's flag.

"The devil!" exclaimed Jean Richard. "There is a hero for you!"

The brig let go an anchor astern and hung within pistol range of the intruder, still headed down river, and ready to slip her cable and run on her course if need be. A young man in a plumed hat appeared on the poop deck of the stranded brigantine. He removed his hat with a flourish and bowed low.

"I am at your mercy, Monsieur de Lacourt," he cried.

"So it seems," shouted Jean Richard, in reply. "The fortunes of war. I must request you to come

aboard, monsieur, and explain your business on the river, and your recent demonstrations of hostility."

The commander of the brigantine was all for explaining matters from where he stood, at long range; but Jean Richard refused to have it so. Jean Richard remarked dryly that the matches were scorching the fingers of his none-too-patient gunners. So the commander of the King's vessel put off in his gig and came aboard, accompanied by another officer and six armed men. He was politely but coolly received. His face was as grey as a tallow dip. He glanced around the brig's decks; and his face became as white as a wax candle.

"Were you anxious to meet Louis de Lacourt?" asked Jean Richard.

"Not exactly, sir," replied the other breathlessly. "His Majesty's orders. Nothing personal, I assure you, sir—not but that I should be proud to meet Monsieur de Lacourt—ah—unofficially. That is, unprofessionally. But you must not think that I, Lieutenant Charles St. Ovide, am in any way responsible for the recent—misadventure. I have been in command only half an hour—that is to say, since the death of Captain Tessier. The captain's death was caused by a musket ball,"

"If you are looking for Monsieur de Lacourt, sir, I think I can lead you to him," said Jean Richard.

"Not at all, sir," answered St. Ovide hastily. "Of course I am honoured and pleased with this meeting, sir; but I am not looking for you."

"You are of the opinion that I am Louis de Lacourt?"

"Yes, sir—that is, if you do not object."

"So be it. And may I ask what you intend to do now?"

"With your permission, sir, I shall take my shore party aboard, haul off this mud bank, and return to France to report Captain Tessier's death, and—the peaceful and loyal condition of this country."

"Softly does it," replied Jean Richard, smiling pleasantly at the nervous young man. "You have more provisions of flour, wine, and spirits than you require, for the return voyage, I imagine. Very good. You will kindly set to work immediately and transfer three tons of such provisions from your hold to mine. Then you may get your men and guns out of the woods and sail away." And so it was arranged. The brigantine had lost its sting with Captain Tessier.

The brigantine got clear of the sand bar before

sunset, and drifted away on the current of the wide river, her hold considerably lightened of flour and wine, her crew sadly reduced in number and efficiency and her muddy guns back in their places on her deck. The brig did not shift her berth that night, but continued to ride to her anchor in mid-channel; and as the dusk deepened on the river, lanterns were hung in her rigging and along her sides, and the watch was doubled. The night was chilly. Jean Richard and his gentlemen supped in the commander's cabin. After the meal, Roger de Belot repeated the story of his adventures, but now with a care to details of character and incident that had not been possible before. His friends were around him. Yellow lamplight filled the little cabin. Wine stood at his elbow—safe wine, to be drunk without fear. His heart was warm in him. He talked well; and his friends listened with sympathy and unwavering attention. And when he told how Mademoiselle D'Armour had saved him from treachery by firing upon Lacourt from the woods, emotion shook his voice in his throat.

“But what of the girl with the blue eyes?” asked Claude le Moyne. “Blue eyes, you said? I should like to hear more of her. I have a weakness for

blue eyes—such an overpowering weakness that it once drove me ten fathoms deep in love with an English lady—and a married one at that.”

“But this blue eyes is also married,” replied Roger. “I have told you all that I know about her.”

“I firmly believe this fellow who calls himself Captain Roseau to be Louis de Lacourt,” said Jean Richard. “If so, Lacourt is a rascal, a coward, and a false friend. Years ago I heard a rumour that he once tried to sell this wilderness to New England; and though I killed the rumour at the time, with a show of steel, I am inclined to believe it now, by Heaven! There is poor blood in Lacourt’s veins—and now it is working, evidently. His grandmother on the spindle side was the daughter of a barber, I have heard. But there! Who am I to speak slightingly of the blood of barbers?—I, Jean Richard, the son of a sabot maker.”

“Of a baker, sir,” corrected Le Moyne.

“True, a baker—but at one time the honest man followed both callings,” returned the captain. “As for Francis D’Armour I can only think that he is possessed by a devil, or has been bitten by a mad dog. But we will get to the bottom of the

mystery before we leave the river, my friends ; and someone will pay for the anxiety we have been put to, and for the attempts on our comrade's life."

"Roger tells of reinforcements," remarked Harwood. "Where would they be from, do you think ? Is there any considerable settlement farther up the river ?"

"They are from Fort Nashwaak, no doubt of it," replied the captain. "Good ! To-morrow we shall start upstream to investigate that fort."

"But are we not to ascend the Oromocto to-morrow, and teach those treacherous dogs a lesson ?" asked Roger. "I promised them a quick return, sir. I promised them the weight of your hand."

"They shall feel the weight of my hand, lad ; but this is not the ripe moment for laying it upon the backs of their necks, I think," replied Jean Richard. "To leap in the dark and afterward make your plans in the ditch is a mistake in tactics. It is not always wise to apply deep-sea methods to rivers. We can afford to wait until we learn a little more about what to expect from the gentlemen on the Oromocto. It is in my mind that they are playing a desperate game. They are waiting for us now, with their plans ripe and their garrison reinforced.

As soon as the reinforcements arrived they freed you and returned you to us in the charge of a guide, that you might speedily return to their arms with Jean Richard and all your other intrusive friends at your heels. They thought you were ignorant of the reinforcements. The spring is set, the hook is bated. Very good. I am in no hurry to test the jaws of the trap. Let it wait. We can afford to wait. We have a good ship, good company, good wine, and plenty of food."

"But do you not fear that D'Armour and Lacourt may escape you?"

"I do not fear it. Even if they were anxious to leave this country they could not get very far away from it in bark canoes; and I am confident that they do not dream of leaving it."

It was late when Roger de Belot crawled into his familiar bunk. He was glad to be back in it. He thanked the saints, and his patron saint in particular, for the divers mercies that had been extended to him of late. The sound wine, the talk of his friends, and the songs of Jean Richard made a pleasant hum in heart and brain. He thought of Ysabel D'Armour. He was still thinking of her, though somewhat mistily, when he sank to sleep.

But he did not dream of her. He dreamed vividly of Anne de Montigny ; but when he awoke he could recall only a few sweet, disquieting fragments of his dreams ; and by the time he reached the deck, even the pang of sweet disquietude had fled.

The brig started on its voyage up-river to Fort Nashwaak before sunrise. Fort Nashwaak stood on a natural mound near the mouth of the swift stream of the same name, thirteen miles beyond the mouth of the Oromocto and on the other side of the St. John. There was no wind when the journey was commenced, so the four long-boats were lowered and manned to take the brig in tow. Progress was slow ; but with the sun came a stiff breeze from the south, and sail was made and yards were squared. Soundings were taken constantly, and by this means half a dozen sand bars were avoided before noon. The brig passed between the Isle of Ducks and the black mouth of the Oromocto within two hours of her anchor. No sign of human life could be seen from the deck ; but a sailor who went aloft to the main-royal yard reported a wisp of blue smoke several miles inland to the south.

The wind gathered force and shifted until it hummed out of the south-east. It struck the surface

of the river against the course of the current, and so rubbed it up into sloshing black waves with heads of foam. The brig ploughed along at a good pace, with two leadsmen in her chains and a keen-eyed fellow lying out on the end of the jib-boom, and staring down into the black and amber waves. Lumpy purple clouds banked the horizon to the south and east early in the afternoon. They mounted the blue dome sullenly yet swiftly, rolled to right and to left, took the sparkle out of the sunshine, and then obscured the sun. Lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and a squall struck the wide river and beat its surface to a sheet of flying, smoking froth. After a few minutes of this the wind eased and the rain sluiced down. The brig's scuppers spouted like pumps. Hatches were fastened down.

Jean Richard went aloft. He soon returned to the deck, drenched and dripping, and joined the helmsman. The mainsail was furled, then the fore. The furling of topsails, to'ga'ntsails, and royals followed. The northern shore of the river showed vague and grey through the curtains of the rain. The leadsmen in the chains gave shallow water and still more shallow. An anchor was let go astern and the brig swung around to the current.

“ Here we are,” said Jean Richard. “ Over with a boat, lads ! ”

The captain and ten men went ashore, armed with cutlasses. It would have been useless to carry firearms through that downpour. Le Moyne and Roger de Belot were of the landing party. Jean Richard led the way, a naked cutlass under his arm, and his head bowed to the rain. They crossed a strip of sand and climbed a short, water-torn bank. They crossed a flat grown thick with alders, scrub willows, and wild cherries, following a foot-worn path that was already ankle-deep with mud and water. Their boots and clothing squelched and reeked with warm water. The captain kicked off his boots and threw aside his sodden coat. Those of his followers who wore boots and coats followed his example. The flat was not more than two hundred yards in width. A wall of black, rain-beaten forest loomed before the invaders.

Jean Richard and his party followed the path into the high forest of pines and up a steep hill without a moment's hesitation. The rain drummed and hummed through the myriad stiff boughs and innumerable wiry needles of the woodland roof with the sound of interminable surf along a coral reef.

At the top of the hill stood the high log walls of the fort. The gate stood wide open. No sentry was in sight. Jean Richard turned his face to his men with a nod and smile, then entered through the gate and passed swiftly across the rain-hammered yard to the door of a long, low barrack of logs. Le Moyne and Roger de Belot advanced to his elbows, and the others pressed close upon his heels.

The captain paused for a second with one foot on the threshold of the door, and turned his glowing, rain-drenched face to his men.

"Avoid bloodshed, if possible," he whispered.

Then he threw the door wide and sprang into a dusky, smoky hall. A glance showed him every detail of the place. A fire burned smokily on a wide hearth at the far end of the apartment, before which two squaws were attending to several roasting joints of venison and a spit of ducks. Five white men sat on stools near the hearth, with cups and pannikins in their hands and bottles on the floor beside them. A dozen savages sat in a row along the wall. On a table in the centre of the apartment lay a sword and several pistols.

Jean Richard and his companions saw all this in a glance. Jean Richard darted to the table where the

arms lay, and faced the white men. Roger joined him, took up a brace of the pistols, and saw to the priming. Le Moyne and the others flashed their blades before the eyes of the terrified and unresisting savages.

"Consider yourselves my prisoners," said Jean Richard pleasantly.

One of the tipplers dropped his pannikin to the floor with a clatter. Another got to his feet with a thick and defiant shout, swayed for a moment, and then reseated himself heavily. A thin, elderly man in a coat laced with tarnished gold, stained breeches of velvet, and stockings of silk, arose from a chair with slow dignity. The cup in his hand shook and swayed. His eyes shone with an unnatural surface lustre. These signs of inebriety accorded ill with his patriarchal beard and moustaches and thin, silver locks.

"I am Geoffrey Devine, commander of this fort," he said, his voice husky with more than a sense of outraged dignity. "Who the devil are you?"

"I am Jean Richard, of the brig *Rose*," replied the captain.

The old man advanced unsteadily, but truculently. He halted within a pace of Richard and stared at him.

His eyes suddenly lost their opaqueness and surface gleam, and his lower jaw sagged.

"You? Jean Richard? Not so fast, sir!" he exclaimed, with bewilderment and excitement in his voice. "Oh, my poor head! My failing memory! But I shall have it in a minute. It was long years ago. You were little more than a lad."

Jean Richard started forward and seized Monsieur Devine by the shoulders. His face was grim. He shook the old gentleman violently, then whispered passionately into his ear. Devine gasped, stared, nodded. The captain patted him lightly on the shoulder.

"Is it not so, my dear friend?" he asked, smiling kindly but intently into the old officer's eyes.

"It is so, my friend," replied Geoffrey Devine faintly. "It is even as you say, Captain Jean Richard."

Nothing of this escaped Roger's alert eyes; but as he could make neither head nor tail of it he promptly put it from his mind. What interested him much more keenly was the fact that after a brief address from Monsieur Devine the four white men and twelve red men of the garrison accepted their swift change of condition without protest. Nobody

was bound or shackled. Knives were taken from the Maliseets, and the pistols on the table were thrust into the belts of the new masters of the fort. That was all. One of the squaws was sent into the cellar for more wine, by way of a trap-door in the floor. The table was laid with dishes of earthenware and pewter, the roasts and ducks were served, with long loaves of wheaten bread, and all the Frenchmen sat down and dined like brothers. The Maliseet warriors were served on the floor, as usual. The indignity of their position did not seem to ruffle their tempers in the least, and certainly failed to spoil their appetites.

Geoffrey Devine's manner was curiously pre-occupied during the meal. He treated Jean Richard to many covert glances. He frowned frequently; and he nodded his ancient head and stroked his white beard quite as frequently. He let the flagons pass him with a sigh.

By the time the meal was over the storm of rain and thunder had passed. Captain Richard wrote a letter to Da Santo, and dispatched it to the brig by one of his men. Then he went the rounds of the fort and its houses with Devine, Roger, and Claude le Moyne. Old Devine was steady enough on his

pins by this time, but still curiously subdued in manner. He led his visitors to the big guns on the platforms in the corners of the fort, to the magazines of small arms, powder and shot, flour, dried fish, and cured meat. The fort was well supplied with everything needed to keep life in those on the inside, and to deal death to any persons desirous to get in from the outside.

Devine did not deny that he had sent ten Frenchmen and fifteen Maliseets from his garrison to reinforce D'Armour's settlement—against an expected attack from a party of New Englanders, so D'Armour had notified him.

CHAPTER XV

A HOME-COMING

“ WHICH proves Francis D’Armour to be a liar,” remarked Jean. “ But why don’t you tell me something about Monsieur de Lacourt? I’ll venture to say that he is the moving spirit in this riddle of treason and treachery. You can afford to be frank with me, my dear sir. I am an honest man and master of this situation and of the brig in the river, whatever I may not be.”

The old man showed keen distress—the chill of fear and the twinge of an uneasy conscience.

“ What do you know of Louis de Lacourt? ” he asked.

“ That he is a false friend,” answered the mariner sternly. “ That he is a coward, a bully, and a liar. Enough, in fact, to cause me to remain in this country until I learn more. He has corrupted D’Armour, who was an honest man when last I saw him. He has corrupted you, my old friend. He held one of my gentlemen in captivity for a little while, and attempted his life foully and treacherously.

And what of his marriage? Monsieur de Belot learned at first-hand that madame is already anxious to escape from him. Who is she?"

"She was a great heiress and a ward of the King," replied Devine tremulously. "Beyond that, we know nothing. It is my belief that Francis D'Armour even does not know her maiden name. Lacourt is ambitious; but it seems that he has lost hope of ever enjoying her vast estates. His Majesty has seen to that, has declared Lacourt an outlaw and a traitor, and doubtless taken the lady's lands and castles to himself. But a less ambitious and vengeful man than Louis de Lacourt would be content with his winnings—a beautiful and noble woman and a fortune in jewels."

"A fortune in jewels, you say?"

"Even so, sir. The lady brought her caskets away with her; and it is said that they contain diamonds, rubies, and pearls to the value of one hundred thousand crowns. I do not know. I have never seen the jewels, nor have I seen the lady."

"And what is the form of his ambition now?"

"You do not know, sir?"

"That's as may be, my friend. I wish to hear it from you."

“ He dreams of becoming overlord of this country —not Governor of it, under the crown of France, but ruler of it in his own right. The savages on the river have already made him their king ; and even now he holds all the people of the valley in his grasp, white and red, from the mouth of the river to the great falls three days’ journey above here.”

“ Your senses nod, my dear old friend,” replied the captain dryly. “ This fort, for instance, is held by Jean Richard. Jean Richard’s brig is in the river. D’Armour’s village is in ashes and his stores are in the brig’s hold. It seems to me that Jean Richard, not Louis de Lacourt, is master of the river.”

In reply to Jean Richard’s letter, Mr. Harwood and six men arrived from the brig. The Frenchmen and Maliseets of the fort’s original garrison, with the exception of the old ex-commander, were locked up for the night in one of the detached huts. Jean Richard returned to the brig, taking Monsieur Devine along with him. A sharp watch was maintained throughout the night both ashore and afloat, but no enemy appeared. In the morning the brig was towed into the mouth of the Nashwaak, and a distance of several hundred yards up that strong, black stream. There she was anchored in midstream,

the high wooded banks safely concealing her from the big river.

Roger de Belot was restless. Again he urged his captain to take the offensive part with the people on the Oromocto, again reminding him that he had promised D'Armour the weight of Jean Richard's wrath. But Jean Richard shook his head and smiled.

"Rest assured that I shall not fail to make good your promise, lad," he said. "Your honour and dignity are safe in my hands. My blood is hot enough, the devil knows; but I do not intend to oblige Lacourt and D'Armour by allowing it to smoke my brain in this affair. They are playing a deep game, and we shall play a waiting game. Patience is a virtue which we can afford just now better than they can."

Roger had to pretend to be content with that. He saw that this Jean Richard, the son of the baker of Pont Levoy, was no more to be hurried against his will than to be held against his inclinations. He wondered at himself for not showing his displeasure at the other's policy in a few high, hot words. Richard was his friend, 'tis true; but, on the other hand, he was only a peasant. But he did not venture beyond wondering at himself. He had seen

the captain's bright, dark eyes take on an expression that suggested the will of tyrants and the blood of kings. He remembered the swift and masterly dispatch of black Da Costa. He reflected upon his own and his fellow-adventurers' devotion and respect for their commander—yes, and their love for him—and came to the conclusion that he must be one of nature's noblemen. He had read of these phenomena somewhere—with decided scepticism. But it was the only explanation of Captain Jean Richard.

Days of inactivity crawled slowly away, fretting the spirit of Roger de Belot. The other members of the brig's company accepted these days of tranquillity as philosophically as did the prisoners. The captain issued orders to his crew that no one was to venture beyond the immediate vicinity of the fort and the hidden brig, and informed his gentlemen that they would ignore this precaution at their own risk. The shore and waters of the big river were to be avoided like death. No pistol, musket, or fowling-piece was to be discharged until further orders. Should any stranger, white or dusky, be espied near fort or brig, he was to be captured and brought in.

Roger fretted to be gone, to be up and doing. He had not reckoned on these days of full-fed, tiptoeing peace. The Oromocto, the Deep Water, called to him with the voice of romance and curiosity from dawn to dark. But at night his dreams were full of the azure seas, lilac sands, white surf, and glowing green peaks of the Caribees. He listened to Jean Richard's songs, and wearied of them. He listened to Claude le Moynes's story of Quebec, and of fighting around the coasts of Newfoundland, and to Tom Harwood's stories of England—and he wearied of them all. He wearied of sword-play, of dice and cards, of sound wines, even of sound companionship. Nothing of all this escaped the notice of his friends. One evening Jean Richard went over to him, where he stood apart from the others, laid a hand on his shoulder, and smiled kindly into his eyes.

"You are in love, lad," said the captain.

Roger blushed.

"I spoke lightly and foolishly, my friend, when I assured you that the skull would heal more quickly than the heart," continued Richard. "I spoke then as a rhymster, a cynical juggler of words, and not as a man who has been through love and loss, joy and despair, a score of petty victories, and one

defeat more bitter and irrevocable than death. But be of good cheer, lad. We shall have action soon. The world turns ever; and we who fled from the unrighteous wrath of a jack-in-office yesterday may drive such small fry before us to-morrow. You made no mistake when you threw in your lot with Jean Richard, when you won his regard with your spirit and honesty. There are possibilities in Jean Richard. And I admire the young lady greatly. She won me with her quick spirit and dexterity of hand, painful as they were to you at the time. But that girl is honest and true, you can take my word for it. Heaven help her father when she discovers that your accusations were well founded. So cheer up, lad. The world turns ever, and death or dishonour only can quench hope."

Roger stared, blushed more deeply than before, and turned away in confusion. Unwittingly he touched his fingers to the scar above his right temple.

Ten days had passed since Jean Richard's bloodless conquest of Fort Nashwaak when, within twelve hours of that admirable commander's speech of embarrassing encouragement to Roger de Belot, a fleet of canoes was reported in the big river. Jean Richard hustled his prisoners into their hut, and sent

for reinforcements from the brig. He sent scouts into the alders and willows of the flat; and word was brought in to him of the swift approach of the canoes, of the landing of ten white men and fifteen Maliseet warriors, of the careless advance across the flat

"I knew they would come, sooner or later," said Jean Richard.

The scouts fell back upon the fort before the advance of the home-comers, unseen and unheard. The party from the canoes was led by a tall fellow with an inflamed nose and a swagger.

"Are these your men?" asked Jean Richard of old Devine, in a low whisper.

The ex-commandant nodded his head and nervously moistened his lips with his tongue. The captain laid a hand on the thin old shoulder.

"I'll not hurt them, if it can be helped, my friend," he said.

The home-coming garrison advanced cheerily, unconcernedly. Their leader broke into song as he cleared the tangles of the flats and commenced the ascent of the piney hill. His men followed, the white men crowding upon one another's heels, the red men trailing out indolently in the rear. The morning air was fresh and golden and still.

“Give a halloo for the wine to be brought up and uncorked all ready for us, for we have had shallow draughts of late at Fort Oromocto,” suggested one.

So the gentleman in front, with the ruddy nose, stopped his song, and bawled for the wine to be prepared. But no answer came from the hill.

“The devil!” exclaimed the leader, hastening his steps. “They are all befuddled as usual, depend upon it.”

As the head of the procession issued from the sloping forest into the little clearing in front of the fort, a dusky warrior who brought up the extreme rear, and had not yet cleared the bushy flat, halted suddenly, faced to his left, stooped, and gazed into a tangle of willows. His moccasined feet suddenly shot out from beneath him and he disappeared backward, face down, from the muddy trail. But none of his comrades saw his swift and unnatural retirement. No one heard the brief grunt which escaped him as his stomach struck the path. All eyes, all thoughts, all ears were strained toward the top of the hill.

The gate of the fort stood open and unguarded. Forest and fort were silent save for the piping of a bird in a young fir and the chatter of a red squirrel on

the roof of a storehouse. The tips of the taller trees stirred a little in the breath of the morning, but the thick underbrush was motionless. The gentleman with the burnished nose led his men through the open gateway and across the yard to the door of the central building.

Before the leader could lay his hand on the wooden latch, the door swung open and five strangers armed with muskets and cutlasses sprang forth and presented the muzzles of their pieces at the breasts of the home-comers.

CHAPTER XVI

THEACHERY

THE leader reeled backward against the men at his heels, and turned with a yell of warning and dismay. He saw his followers crowding to him through the gate—stumbling, cursing, shouldering one another, and letting fall their unprimed muskets in their haste—as if the devil were behind them. He saw two figures on the high platform in the western corner of the wall. He saw that the great gun on the platform was reversed and that its muzzle was sharply depressed. He saw a gleam of metal along the top of the wall and a flash of blades behind his jostling men in the gateway.

“ I surrender ! ” he yelled.

It was a bloodless capture, and Jean Richard was delighted with himself. The prisoners were disarmed and fed. Richard talked aside with old Geoffrey Devine for several minutes earnestly and persuasively. The ex-commandant nodded his head and finally grasped Jean Richard's hand. Before the sun went down on that day of bloodless victory

and defeat, the old man had talked Monsieur Jumeau of the roseate nose and every other member of his ex-command into changing his allegiance from the service of Louis de Lacourt to that of Captain Jean Richard.

Roger de Belot looked now for an immediate attack on the Oromocto ; but he looked in vain. It seemed to him that Jean Richard had entirely forgotten his false and scheming friends, and thought of nothing but winning the trust of the men whom he had first robbed of their fort and next of their liberty. So Roger decided to investigate the Oromocto on his own account. He devoted two days to acquiring something more than the rudiments of paddling a canoe ; and then, at a late hour of a chilly night, he launched his bark upon the Nashwaak and slipped out with the current to the big river. He wore a knife in his belt. He had removed his coat at starting, wrapped it about his two loaded pistols, and laid it tenderly in front of him in the bottom of the canoe.

There was a tang of frost in the air, for the season was September. He did not notice the cold, however, for the effort of plying the paddle warmed him, and his blood was aglow with the prospects of adventure

and romance. He thought of the joy with which he would be received by Ysabel d' Armour, that beautiful girl who had risked her life for him, that brilliant, daring creature of equal French and Spanish blood. He did not think at all of the displeasure that Jean Richard would undoubtedly feel upon learning of his departure, nor of the perils of his adventure.

The moon was in its third quarter, but a high, thin mist veiled the entire sky. The night was grey; the outlines of the nearer shore were vague and blurred, the surface of the river was a vast, unbounded empty waste. Roger let his canoe find its course with the current, and paddled strongly on that course for fifteen or twenty minutes. Then he swung the bow of the canoe to the right, and slipped across the silent tide and grey waste toward the southern shore. It seemed to him that he paddled for miles before he heard the whisper of lily pads along the sides of the canoe and so knew that he was near the shore. The grey gloom lightened a little, and he saw dimly the wall of reeds and the loom of the steep bank beyond. Again he headed the canoe down river. By keeping in touch with the shore he would be able to form some idea of his position from

time to time and would be sure not to pass the mouth of the Oromocto. He paddled with as little sound as possible and kept his ears alert. The long stems of the water lilies entwined his paddle, and he was forced to clear the blade of them several times. He heard swimming things close about him and the flop and gurgle of huge frogs. The canoe slid across lily pads and floating blades of dank water-grass, and brushed through clumps of high reeds now and again. A flock of ducks went up in front of him with a startling tumult of flapping, splashing, and quacking.

Though Roger's thoughts were for the most part busy with Ysabel, in thrilling review and yet more thrilling anticipation, they dwelt a little upon other inmates of that fascinating and dangerous post. He thought of Lacourt with a twinge of hate, of Lacourt's young wife with a twinge of pity. Lacourt's affairs had become common talk at Fort Nashwaak during the past three days. According to Monsieur Jumeau, Lacourt treated his young wife with snarling harshness when not with sneering disregard; and on her part, the childish infatuation that had inspired her to the elopement and the flight into the wilderness had turned to fear and hate

Roger thought of these things, and promised himself the joy of slapping the face of Louis de Lacourt at the earliest opportunity.

Suddenly Roger laid his paddle noiselessly across the gunwales, and leaned forward, listening. He heard a soft stir upon the water ahead and the dip and drip of a paddle. He heard voices. With one silent stroke of his paddle he sent his canoe shoreward broadside on against the wall of reeds. The murmur of talk approached. He leaned forward, unrolled his coat, and lifted his pistols. He primed them anew from a flask of powder in his belt. So he waited, the canoe lying motionless against the reeds in the sluggish, yellow water. By the murmur of talk and the liquid stir of the paddle he knew that the unseen canoe continued to approach.

And now he heard a voice clearly, and recognized it as that of Louis de Lacourt. His pulses quickened.

"The Maliseets are all for me, and old Devine is like a child in my hands," said Lacourt. "Even if your father behaves like a fool, we can hold the Nashwaak until spring—and then away. You have nothing to fear."

"I am not afraid," replied the other voice lightly. Young Roger de Belot felt a chill like the caress of

death from scalp to heel. A wave of faintness went through him like a physical nausea. Then rage stung him like a hot iron and steadied him.

The occupants of the approaching bark took shape in the grey night. The man sat in front, idle, with his back to the bow. The girl knelt astern, and plied the paddle. They came abreast of the waiting canoe, and Roger saw that Lacourt's right arm was in a sling.

Roger's canoe slid out sidewise from the wall of reeds. Roger leaned to the left, and laid his left hand on the gunwale of the other craft, amidships.

"You are my prisoners," he said harshly.

Lacourt struck clumsily with his left hand and a serviceable knife. Roger retorted promptly with a vicious, chopping stroke of his paddle upon the treasonous Governor's crown. Lacourt sagged forward with a gurgling sigh. Ysabel d'Armour screamed.

Roger forced both canoes through the reeds to the lip of the narrow beach. He sprang ashore and transferred the limp form of Louis de Lacourt to his own canoe. The girl attacked him like a fury, but he snatched the paddle from her hands, thrust her aside, and bound Lacourt securely with

that unconscious adventurer's own sash. He turned from his task just in time to seize her wrist and disarm her of one of his pistols. Then she told him what she thought of him.

"Why did you befriend me?" he asked bitterly. "Why did you wound Lacourt—on my behalf?"

"On your behalf?" she sneered. "I shot him to teach him a lesson."

"I don't understand," said Roger dully.

"I love him!" she cried. "Do you understand that?"

"You love him? But he has a wife—your friend," he said stupidly.

"Oh, you poor fool! You jackanapes! What do you know of love?"

Roger's anger returned to him so violently at this as to dry his mouth like ashes.

"I may know nothing of love," he cried, "but, by the saints above, I know something of honour! Go back to your father and your mother. As for this treacherous, vile spawn of hell, I shall take him where he will learn something of honour with his neck in a rope!"

The girl had no retort ready for that. Her sneering, hot courage died at the threat. Fear

gripped her throat. She stood motionless and silent before him, with bowed head, dim as a ghost in the grey, veiled moonshine.

"There is your canoe," he said harshly. "Go back to your father."

She approached him, her empty hands extended in a gesture of supplication. He shivered, but stood his ground. She halted within a foot of him—so close to him that he could see her eyes, dark and soft and pleading. The whisper of her frightened breathing was in his ears, the caress of it upon his cheek. He saw the tremble of her slender shoulders, the labour of her breast.

"Roger," she breathed, "Roger, are you so stupid—or are you cruel? You did not come back for me; you sent no word to me—and I thought you did not care. Roger—and once you held me against your heart—and I risked my life for you—and you went back to your friends and forgot me, and left me in danger and despair!"

He did not move. He gazed at her with wide eyes, spellbound by a great and astounding bewilderment.

"It drove me mad with shame," she whispered.

Her face came closer—that beautiful face, and the

wonderful, pleading eyes, and the parted, pleading lips.

"Roger, I lied to you," she breathed. "I care nothing for that vain braggart, that empty fool. I love you—and you drove me to madness. Do you care? Do you care a little? Why did you treat me so? Roger! Roger! Are you dumb? Are you blind? Are you of wood and stone? Tell me. Roger—do you love me—a little?"

But Roger was speechless. His heart smoked in his breast; his mind was dazed; his blood thrilled to many nameless and commingled emotions, some sweet and sad as dream kisses, some bitter as defeat.

"Speak!" she sighed. "Would you kill me with shame—and despair?"

He felt her breath upon his cheek. A strand of her fragrant hair brushed his neck. He felt her hands upon his sides, then her soft, strong arms about him.

With a cry of fear and disgust he wrenched himself from her arms, and hurled her from him with such violence that the knife which she had plucked from his belt flew from her grasp, and fell at his feet. He had felt the point of it against his back, but action quicker than thought had saved him from that treacherous death

“ You devil ! ” he cried huskily.

She crouched speechless on the sand, breathing quickly, brokenly.

He turned and sprang to his canoe, pushed it from the sand, stepped aboard, and paddled frantically through the reeds and out upon the grey river. He was cold with horror. He bent to his work, and the strong blade of maple-wood bent to his desperate strokes, and the canoe leaped upon the black water like a thing alive. His brain and every fibre of his being strove to get far away from that horror of treachery that had flashed red and naked to them back there on the sand.

The canoe thrilled from stem to stern. The crossing of the wide river was accomplished. Roger laid aside his paddle, and turned his face to the grey river behind him. He heard no sound of pursuit.

CHAPTER XVII

JEAN RICHARD'S JUDGMENT

ROGER stepped over the gunwale into the shallow water, waded forward, and stooped low over his prisoner. The fellow in the bottom of the canoe opened his eyes and returned the glance with a glare of unutterable hate. Neither spoke. Roger pulled the canoe off the sand, and returned to his place. He headed up river, kept close to the shore, and paddled slowly, pausing often to listen to the furtive, weird night sounds of the great stream. His pulses were quieter now, and his poor heart was heavy as stone. He wiped cold sweat from his face with a shaking hand. It was the captive who broke the silence.

"Where are you taking me to?" he asked.

"To Fort Nashwaak and Captain Jean Richard—and a noose at the end of a strong rope," answered Roger.

"A brave and honourable return for your freedom," said the captive.

"It will be a rare sight, two rogues hanging by the one rope and the one neck—Captain Rosseau,

coward and assassin, and Monsieur Louis de Lacourt, coward, traitor, and seducer," replied Roger.

After a long silence, the prisoner spoke again.

"Ten thousand crowns to you, my friend, if you free me and put me ashore," he said. "Ten thousand crowns and ten thousand acres of this rich land."

"Address me again, you dog, and I beat out your brains where you lie!" cried Roger de Belot.

The threat was effective, and the balance of the journey was accomplished in silence. Dawn was lifting in the east when Roger ran his canoe ashore in front of the fort. He unfastened his captive's bonds, pulled him roughly to his feet by the collar of his coat, and rushed him ashore with a pistol muzzle at the back of his neck. So the journey across the flat and up the wooded slope was made. They were challenged from the wall as they reached the edge of the clearing.

"It is I, Roger de Belot, with a prisoner," cried Roger.

They marched to the gate, and there stood while the sentry scrutinized them from the top of the wall. The little clearing was now full of the grey, clear twilight of dawn. The gate opened at last, and Jean Richard stepped out.

“ Louis de Lacourt ! ” he exclaimed. “ It is you, then, in very truth ? Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself and your behaviour ? ”

“ What ! You, my old friend ! ” cried Lacourt, stepping forward. “ This is joy ! This is good fortune ! I feared that I had fallen into the hands of marauding New Englanders. ”

“ Keep your ground ! ” snapped Richard, folding his arms and eyeing the ex-Governor with a black and forbidding stare. “ Monsieur de Belot, is this the person who attempted your death by poison ? ”

“ It is the same, ” replied Roger. “ It is the Captain Rosseau of whom I told you, sir. I went out on the river last night and found this—this person in a canoe. So I brought him in. ”

“ Did you wound him ? ”

“ No ; I did nothing more than hit him over the head with a paddle. I have told you how he came by the injury to his arm. ”

“ So he was not alone in the canoe, Monsieur de Belot ? ”

“ No, sir ; but his companion escaped me. ”

“ And now what have you to say for yourself and your cowardly and infamous behaviour, Monsieur de Lacourt ? ”

Louis de Lacourt had nothing to say. He shrugged his shoulders.

“And what is this I have heard about your ill-treatment of madame, your wife?” continued Jean Richard sternly.

Lacourt shrugged again, and sneered, but he did not answer.

“Coward and murderer!” said Jean Richard, with the air of an indignant prince sitting in judgment. “False subject and false friend! Liar! And you thought to play with Jean Richard? Fool! But I know of a cure for such foolishness as yours.”

Lacourt did not ask the nature of the cure, and Jean Richard did not name it. Lacourt asked nothing, said nothing. He was marched into the fort and placed in an empty hut, and four armed men were detailed to guard the hut. When news of Lacourt's capture spread through the garrison and reached the men on the brig, Roger was congratulated on his daring and luck. But Captain Jean Richard did not congratulate him. It was all one to Roger as to who praised him and who overlooked his successful venture abroad, for he was sick at heart. He retired into the woods overlooking the anchored brig, and moped there for several hours.

Jean Richard had a long talk with old Geoffrey Devine. The ancient adventurer was deeply shaken by the news of Lacourt's capture.

"And 'tis only a few days ago that he was lording it over us like a king," he said. "His were the great promises and the high hand. His was the silver tongue. But even when he was master he could not speak the truth. He lied to me when he sent for reinforcements—and yet the truth would have served his purpose as well, for Jean Richard was nothing but a name to me. And now he crouches in that hut, as helpless as a babe—and like to hang by the neck for his ambitions, his treachery, and his lies."

"I will think about his hanging," said the captain.

Jean Richard sought out Roger de Belot and questioned him closely about his adventure. Roger told the truth; and, pressed, he admitted that Lacourt's companion had been a woman.

"So, lad? A woman? A squaw, doubtless," said the captain.

"A white woman," said Roger, staring straight before him.

"You have blood on the back of your shirt, lad," said Richard.

"She pricked me with my own knife," said Roger.

"So," returned Jean Richard indifferently. "You must have the cut washed, lad. There is often poison in a wound of that kind. I am of the opinion that Lacourt was not intending to spy upon us when you encountered him, lad, but was simply bound on a visit to this fort in the belief that it was still in the hands of Monsieur Devine. It is evident that no word of our occupation or whereabouts has reached the Oromocto. I should take a great deal of satisfaction in Lacourt's immediate death by hanging; but, on the other hand, he may be of use to us as a lure."

"A lure?" queried Roger.

"Something of the kind," said the captain, staring down thoughtfully at the swift, deep tide of the Nashwaak. "I have not worked it out yet, but I expect to have all those traitors in my power, and everything cleared up before spring."

Now white frosts fell every night, though the days continued blue and warm. The painted foliage of the maples glowed upon the hills for a little while, then floated down to the forest floor leaf by bright leaf. The elms changed from green to palest yellow, and blackbirds flocked noisily in their high

crowns. The ducks gathered in hundreds in every reedy creek, backwater, and pond.

One evening, within ten days of Lacourt's capture, old Geoffrey Devine approached Jean Richard with a troubled brow.

"Some of the men of my old command are wondering why you do not hang Louis de Lacourt," said Devine. "They are well disposed toward your person, sir, and content with their new service; but they stand in awe of Monsieur Lacourt. Some of them think that you are afraid to hang him. They entertain a great opinion of his power."

"So? And what do you advise me to do, my friend?" asked Richard.

"Hang him!" exclaimed the old officer. "What have you to fear from that vain and traitorous dog, dead or alive?"

Jean Richard smiled, and shook his head.

In the morning, Jean Richard had all the men of the original garrison of the fort, white and red, paraded before him.

"My friends, I have decided to give Monsieur de Lacourt his freedom," he said. "His utter helplessness, free or in bondage, and his inability to harm me, have excited my pity. He is not bad enough

to deserve hanging ; he is not strong enough to make it worth my trouble to keep him a prisoner. So I have decided to let him return to his friends. If any of you wish to accompany him, to the number of five, you are free to do so ; but in rejoining his service you become my enemies again. Perhaps Monsieur de Lacourt will be able to feed you through the winter—though I doubt it. Perhaps he will be able to protect you against the final reckoning with Jean Richard, but I doubt it. This country has only one master, my friends. Any five of you who think that Lacourt is that master will oblige me by advancing three paces.”

One man shuffled his feet uneasily, but nobody left the ranks.

“ So ! Then Monsieur de Lacourt must take his departure unattended,” continued the captain. “ But that cannot be, for he is suffering from a broken wrist. Monsieur Devine, you will oblige me by selecting two trustworthy Maliseets for the duty of taking Lacourt in a canoe to within a few miles of his friends’ post.”

Louis de Lacourt went away from Fort Nashwaak without a word, and the two canoe-men who accompanied him on his journey returned next day.

Jean Richard felt now that he could trust Devine's men with a considerable degree of freedom. He did not believe that they could do him any harm even if they wanted to. A few of them might be foolish enough to desert and carry information to the Oromocto, but his position was too secure to be injured by the work of spies. His were the ship and the strong fort, the thirty picked men to be trusted to the death, the guns, ammunition, and stores. So he sent a party of natives out to kill moose and caribou and set others to woodchopping. There were no desertions on the part of the white hunters or the red. Men came in with the game, tarried a few days to make merry with their comrades, then returned to the trackless forests and barrens for further supplies of venison. The men of the brig's company did not go far afield, however. They amused themselves with shooting water-fowl and grouse in the vicinity of the fort. Some of the Maliseet warriors and their women worked busily at the manufacture of snowshoes and moccasins.

The nights became colder and the shortening days held the warmth of summer only for a few hours when the sun was at its height. Snow fell one night, only to vanish before noon. Great grey geese from

the north passed high over the fort every night, south-bound. Dusky duck, teal, whistlers, and wood-duck left the ponds and reedy shallows in scores and hundreds and vanished behind the southern horizon ; and next morning the still waters of their deserted feeding grounds were covered with thin, elastic ice. This ice did not pass with the chill of the early hours ; and it thickened night by night, and crept out from the shallows and sheltered places until ponds and streams and even the great river were spanned from shore to shore. The brig lay frozen fast at her anchor.

Snow fell, and the cold descended upon the wilderness like a blight. Men slept cold even in the fort and aboard the brig. The roaring fires on the wide hearths of the fort could not beat the frost back to the thresholds, and when the fires sank during the black hours the frost laid its hands upon the very hearthstones. The majority of Jean Richard's men had never so much as imagined such severity of climate. For a time it seemed to depress them physically and mentally, but with warm clothing, a plentiful table, companionship, and red fires they soon lost their awe of the scorching frosts and breast-deep snows. The air was dry, and save when snow was falling it was as clear as glass.

Roger de Belot was among those who, for a time, experienced the vague and numbing depression of mind and body, but he attributed it to the behaviour of Ysabel d' Armour rather than to the frost. Perhaps he was right. His faith in woman had certainly received a blinding buffet.

CHAPTER XVIII

WINTER

ROGER regretted the fact that he had not died on shipboard of the wound in his head—and he sometimes surprised his inner self in the act of dwelling tenderly on memories of the white hand that had discharged that pistol, of the flashing eyes that had directed it. He remembered that those eyes had not always flashed.

The weeks passed, bringing no sign or word of Louis de Lacourt and Francis D'Armour. Roger learned to run on snowshoes. His mood lightened, and his appetite increased. The sacred and joyous season of Noel was celebrated with feasting and song and play. Savages of all ages, from crones and ancients of eighty winters to babes at breast, came in from near and far and received a comforting lesson in practical Christianity. They squatted for days in every sheltered corner of the fort and in front of every hearth. They ate, they slept, they awoke only to eat again, but when they arose at last and turned their faces to the doors they pressed gifts of furs and

carven trinkets upon Jean Richard and called him Father and Master and Brother.

A little thought that had been lurking somewhere between Richard's heart and brain ever since the day he took possession of Fort Nashwaak, now moved and glowed with warm life. Why should not he, Jean Richard, accomplish where Lacourt had failed? Why should not he, Jean Richard, hold the lands and the hearts which he had already won—under the distant King, if need be—against the King, if need be? After all, he owed the King nothing. Far from it! He was homeless, and here was a home. The great world held nothing for him now that he knew of.

Jean Richard sang a new song one night, and of all his gentlemen and mariners who heard it only old Geoffrey understood it.

Set too high for safety ; set too high for loving ;
Set too high for trust and love, yet we loved and trusted.
Gold was in our hearts then, gold was in my hands then—
Now I hold an iron blade that never yet has rusted.

High we sat and near we sat, you and I together ;
Cheek to cheek and heart to heart, for the world to see ;
In the Age of Gold, Sweet, in the April weather,
Hand in hand and cheek to cheek and knee to knee.

Set too high for peace ; set too high for loving ;
Yet we drank of that warm cup—loved and dared and
trusted.

Gold was in our hearts and hands ; dust is in my heart
now ;

In my hand the cold iron peace has never rusted.

You paid life for loving. I took Hell for Heaven.
Hand from hand and breast from breast love and life
were riven.

Do you watch me play my part, gazing down from heaven,
Weeping for your April lover buffeted and driven ?

When God strikes my hand aside and stills my clashing
play,

Will He know the fight's to him who has bravely striven—
Lonely, broken, bleeding—through a hopeless day ?
Stoop low then, Sweet Soul, and lift me to your pearly
heaven !

A loaded sledge and three fur-clad figures came to
the gate of the fort early in the New Year, at the
first red shimmer of dawn. Roger de Belot was on
duty at the time, and at the sentry's challenge he
dropped a robe of beaver skins from his shoulders
and ascended swiftly to one of the gun platforms in
an angle of the walls. He looked down upon the
three shaggy figures and the loaded sledge. In the
unearthly, menacing light of the new still-born day

the visitors wore an air of unreality, like being out of an old folk-tale. Roger scanned the clearing and dim aisles of the wood beyond, but detected no hint of life

“What would you have?” he asked, shivering in the breathless grip of the frost.

“Sanctuary,” replied a fearless and familiar voice.

“Robert le Blanc!” cried Roger. “So you have come at last. But where are your friends?”

“My friends are here, sir,” replied the soldier “We four are alone—Madame de Lacourt here, my wife, and my son. Open to us, master, for the love of the merciful saints.”

The other members of the guard were on hand by now, and at a word from Roger one wing of the great gate was swung inward. Robert le Blanc, his Maliseet wife, and his half-breed son entered, drawing the toboggan after them. The gate was closed and barred behind them. Roger confronted the elder Le Blanc.

“What of Madame de Lacourt?” he asked. “You spoke of her.”

“She is there, poor soul,” replied Le Blanc, indicating the long bundle of robes upon the sledge with a gesture of the hand.

"Dead?" cried Roger, retiring a pace and staring at the motionless shape

"She still breathed a few minutes ago," replied the old soldier. "But lead the way, sir, to shelter and a bed and stimulant, for the love of Heaven! Would you have her die here, on the wrong side of your door?"

He lifted the robe-wrapped figure tenderly in his arms, advanced to the nearest door, and sent it flying inward with a blow from the sole of his foot, and on the very threshold he came face to face with Jean Richard. But Robert le Blanc did not halt, did not so much as pause in his stride.

"What is this?" exclaimed Jean Richard, stepping aside.

"A sick woman," retorted Le Blanc "A betrayed wife. Lead me to a private chamber, sir, where my wife may attend to her—and bring spirits—your best. This is Madame de Lacourt."

"The devil!" exclaimed the captain. "Roger, does this fellow speak the truth! Does he hold a woman in his arms—and is it Madame de Lacourt?"

Roger stepped to Le Blanc's side, parted the robe slightly, and saw the soft hair of pale gold and the pallid brow of the girl with whom he had attempted to

escape from the fort on the Oromocto during that night of deluge and disaster. He nodded his head and stepped back.

"My own chamber is at her service," said the captain, pointing to a door at the end of the hall.

Le Blanc carried his unconscious burden away to the apartment indicated, accompanied by his wife and one of the young Indian women of the garrison. Richard sent another servant after them with brandy, hot water, and blankets. Robert le Blanc returned almost immediately and thanked the commander for his hospitality.

"She is breathing," he said. "She has swallowed a little of the brandy. I think she may live—now that she is away from that devil."

"You mean Lacourt?" asked Jean Richard.

"Yes, I refer to that pig, that coward, that vile son of a——"

"Has he poisoned her?"

"Poison! You may well say it, sir. He has poisoned her with hate."

Jean Richard took Le Blanc to the fire, and made him doff his beaver-skin coat and cap. Roger de Belot and the other officers crowded around. Harwood brought Le Blanc a great cup of wine.

The soldier pledged a health to them all and drained the cup at a toss. He wiped his rugged moustache with the back of his hand and sighed deep.

“I am at your service, gentlemen,” he said.
“Ask me what you will.”

Jean Richard questioned him, and this is the information he received, stated briefly :

Louis de Lacourt was tired of his wife—had been tired of her for many months—and never made the slightest effort to disguise the fact from her. He had been heard to tell her that he had married her, risked his neck to carry her away from her royal guardian, for her vast estates ; that since her estates had escaped him and he had found himself with nothing but her person and her handful of jewels in his possession, he had regretted his rash act every day, every hour of the day, and more and more keenly with the passing of each day. He never addressed her without a sneer. He frequently accused her of having forced herself upon him, thus laying the blame of his outlawry upon her shoulders. For her part, whatever tender sentiments she had ever entertained toward him had soon changed to fear, and from fear to a sullen, silent hatred. She had tried to escape from him several times, but he

had always thwarted these attempts and taken her back to his house with a sneering pretence of solicitude. If he had beaten her, tortured her flesh, he could not have been more devilishly cruel. Once she had tried to kill herself, but he had stayed her hand. Perhaps her desperation had driven her only to a show of self-destruction. Robert le Blanc did not know whether lack of courage or religious principle kept her from destroying herself or her husband, but he would swear that it was neither love of life nor love of Louis de Lacourt that held her hand. D'Armour had often expostulated with Lacourt for his treatment of the unhappy girl. Yes, Le Blanc was willing to admit that D'Armour possessed a kind heart and a sense of honour, but he maintained that D'Armour was a weakling, despite his fine eyes and imposing figure.

"Have they food on the Oromocto?" asked Jean Richard.

"I believe I heard the measure scrape the bottom of the meal bin before I left," said Le Blanc; "but they have fish and venison."

"I should like to know the truth about that duel I was to fight with Lacourt," said Roger de Belot.

"The truth, sir?" queried Le Blanc. "You were there. You saw it."

“ Was treachery intended? Had it been arranged that Lacourt was to wheel before the signal and shoot me in the back? ”

Robert le Blanc sprang to his feet with an oath. His eyes blazed with indignation.

“ I will tell you the truth, Monsieur de Belot! ” he cried. “ I feared that very thing—and I warned Lacourt that should he turn before the word he would die on the instant, by my hand. You might have felt safe from treachery that day, monsieur, with Robert le Blanc on the ground—Robert le Blanc, who served your father long and well.”

“ And who has served Louis Lacourt since then, ” returned Roger, with a thin smile. “ If a man is to be judged by this service then he should beware of exchanging an honest master for a rogue.”

“ Enough of this, my friends, ” interrupted Jean Richard. “ A man does not change his heart with his shirt. I used to serve the King, and now I serve Jean Richard, but my heart and conscience are as clear now as when the royal favour shone upon them. Monsieur de Belot, let me tell you that honesty is written on this brave fellow’s brow. It looks out of his eyes. My young friend, even the best of us—even gentlemen born like yourself, monsieur—

are twisted and bent into strange services by the hands of circumstance."

"I admit it, sir; and I ask this brave man's pardon for my suspicion!" cried Roger, and he turned and embraced Robert le Blanc.

Breakfast was served, and while Jean Richard sat at meat an Indian woman came from the inner chamber and placed a gold locket and chain on the board in front of him, and informed him that it had been removed from the bosom of Madame de Lacourt.

"But why do you bring it to me?" asked the captain.

"At madame's request," replied the woman. "She wishes it to be in safe hands. It is her most valued possession."

"True," said Robert le Blanc, from the other side of the table. "Madame values that trinket highly, sir; and Lacourt has permitted her to keep it because its value in stamped gold is as nothing. I have heard her say that it was her mother's death-bed gift to her when she was a babe in arms, and that it contains a portrait of her father, but I have never seen it open."

Jean Richard took the trinket in his hand, and eyed it curiously.

"And has she never mentioned her father's name to you?" he asked.

"Never," replied Le Blanc. "Nor has Lacourt. I imagine it to be a great and unfortunate name, and it has been kept a secret even from Monsieur d'Armour."

"It is a pity for her that this great person had not lived to protect her," said the captain grimly. "A father might have succeeded where a king failed. Let me have a look at this fine gentleman."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOCKET

JEAN RICHARD took the locket in the fingers of both hands, opened it, and looked. A sound escaped him, from deep in his throat, that was neither a sigh nor a sob. His gaze became fixed and dulled upon the thing he held in his fingers. The muscles of his strong neck twitched slightly; his strong hands shook; the blood flashed from his cheeks, leaving the weather-worn skin cold and grey. Even his straight shoulders seemed to have acquired a stoop and slackness so swiftly that the eyes of his amazed friends had missed the instant of change. His expression of face and eyes and shoulders was of horror more confounding than a physical blow, of dismay, of remorse keen as the thrust of a knife.

His officers and Robert le Blanc and the Maliseet servants gazed at him in a silence of astonishment and concern. The play of knives and fingers and jaws was stilled; even the breathing of the company was stilled.

Jean Richard snapped the locket, shut, enclosed

it in the palm of his hand, and arose from his place at table. Without a word or glance to his friends, he walked down the hall to the closed door. The men at the table, all craning their necks and staring, saw the captain rap on the door with his knuckles, saw the door open and admit him.

"The captain recognized the portrait!" exclaimed Claude le Moyne.

"You may well say so, but he did not seem to like it any too well," said Harwood.

"What does our Jean Richard know of great names and great faces?"

"It is my humble opinion, young gentlemen, that your captain has not always sailed a brig."

"He is an honest and honourable man—but a peasant."

"He is a poet, and I have never seen a greater swordsman."

"I have heard him say, a dozen times, that his father was a baker."

"Madame's jewels are worth a fortune—diamonds and rubies and pearls. I have seen them. Lacourt has them now."

"Perhaps her father was a pirate. The sight of his picture struck our captain cold—and I have seen

him face death without so much as the flicker of an eyelid."

"You have seen much with the eye and little with the understanding."

"Well said, Monsieur Devine; and yet, in the wars, I have seen peasants die like princes. I, Robert le Blanc, am the son of a tavern keeper—but I have never blinked an eye at the face of death."

"You are a soldier, my worthy friend. To bear arms honourably, in a just cause, is to ennoble oneself."

"If he had seen the face of his brother in the locket he could not have been more deeply shocked."

"Hush! Here he comes. An old man, by the saints in heaven!"

"You speak truth. Peace, gentlemen."

Jean Richard did not return to the table. He stood beside the chimney, an elbow against the rough stone, his face averted from the company and his shoulders bowed.

The men at the table forgot their food and drink. They conversed in whispers, staring at Jean Richard with sympathy and curiosity in their eyes. At last Roger de Belot left his seat and approached the captain. He halted beside the bowed figure. Richard did not stir.

“ I am at your service—we are all at your service,” said Roger, his voice husky with emotion.

The captain lowered his elbow from the chimney, and turned slowly. His face, usually so ruddy, was haggard and colourless ; the eyes, usually so bright and alert, were now fixed in a dull and lifeless stare

“ Forgive me,” stammered Roger, “ but—we are anxious, sir—and curious to know the cause of your—your indisposition. The portrait in the locket—of madame’s father ? You recognized it, my dear friend ? ”

“ Yes, yes, I recognized it—as the portrait of an old comrade, a friend of happier days,” replied the captain faintly “ She—the suffering, betrayed, disillusioned child in there—is the daughter of that wayward, self-centred man—of that old comrade of mine. You will forgive my emotion, lad. You can understand. Lacourt was in my hands—and I let him go with his life ! ”

Roger grasped the captain’s hands, then left him and went back to the table. He told the others what he had learned, and they all felt deep sympathy for the victim of Lacourt’s heartlessness and for their captain, but their curiosity was not satisfied.

Jean Richard was a changed man. In a minute

he had changed—had aged from a seasoned, active man of forty to a worn man of sixty. The face of his old friend in the locket, the misfortunes of his old friend's child, had lowered the fires of his spirit and drawn over them a grey ash. The cheery soldier and indefatigable singer were gone, and in their place remained a grey, worried person as silent and depressing as a mute—an old man everlastingly tiptoeing and listening at the door of the sick room or sitting hunched before the fire with his head between his hands. Even those square, soldierly hands seemed to change in colour, shape, and expression—they paled and narrowed and took on an air of listlessness.

Madame de Lacourt lay in a critical condition for two weeks, delirious with fever every night, holding life with imperceptible breath through the cold, bright days. Robert le Blanc's wife and an old squaw wise in the use of herbs fought death in that rude chamber. Jean Richard prayed. One could see that he was praying when he paused outside the door, though his lips did not move.

The skill and attention of the Maliseet women—and, it may be, the prayers of Jean Richard—won the fight. The fever left the young woman; her

pulse steadied and strengthened, her eyes grew clear to their azure depths, and a tinge of pink touched her cheeks. And at that change Jean Richard and the whole garrison changed also. Something of the old fire and colour returned to the captain's eyes and face and hands, and his shoulders lost a little of the droop that had so recently come to them. The men of the garrison sighed with relief, and threw off a weight that had depressed their spirits for two long weeks. They had suffered with their captain, but without understanding. Now would be action of some kind, they told one another.

Madame Lacourt was happy—happy for the first time since fleeing from France. She was happy in her freedom from her husband and in the protection of Jean Richard; and happiness brought health and beauty pulsing back to her every breath she drew. She was very young, and happiness is the birthright of youth, and youth dies hard in the heart of a woman.

On the twentieth day after Madame de Lacourt's arrival at Fort Nashwaak, Jean Richard led her from her room, and presented his officers to her, speaking of her as "Madame," addressing her by the name of Jeanne. All were struck by her golden beauty.

Roger de Belot was amazed at the change in her since he had last seen her, desperate and afraid, on the Oromocto. Her eyes were blue and deep as the seas about Martinique. Her hair of soft, palé gold parted on her white brow, framed her small face of white and rose, and rippled upon her slender shoulders. She wore a costume which Jean Richard had purchased from the wife of Chief Sacobie and that Madame le Blanc had cut and fitted to her slender form—a costume of soft yellow hides trimmed with discs of blue shell around the short skirt and with white ermine about the collar. The collar was high at the back, but low at the white young throat. Her belt was of white wampum. In that setting her delicate, clear European beauty shone like a diamond in the palm of a savage.

One by one, Jean Richard's adventuring gentlemen bowed low before her, lifted her white hand to their lips, then stepped aside and stared at her with eyes at once shy and eager, diffident and bold. She remembered Roger de Belot, and her fingers tightened on his.

"You saved my life from the black water, monsieur," she said, and her azure gaze seemed to melt and waver toward him

Again he bowed low, and murmured a word, then stepped aside and in his confusion trod on a moccasined foot of Claude le Moyne.

"What did she say to you?" whispered Le Moyne.

"I pulled her out of the river once," replied Roger. "You have heard of it. She mentioned the fact; that is all."

"You were in luck," whispered Le Moyne. "Had I been in your place I'd never have left the Oromocto, except in her company. I swear it by the crowns of the saints! And she asked you to take her away! And you made a botch of it! Ten thousand devils!"

Jeanne soon retired to her room. The captain produced his choicest wine, which had been transferred from the brig's lazaret to the fort—and the company made merry. Jean Richard himself was lively, but not merry. He had prayed, and his prayers had been answered, and now the time for action was ripe. He was glad, but not until Louis de Lacourt lay dead at his feet would his conscience be clear.

"To-morrow, before daybreak, I set out for the Oromocto," he said.

Every white man in the hall jumped to his feet at that, cleared sword or dagger from his belt, and flashed it aloft, and uttered a wordless shout of exultation.

Every man of the garrison volunteered for the expedition against the stronghold on the Oromocto, but Jean Richard would take no chances. He left a strong force in the fort and a strong guard on the brig when he set out for the Oromocto in the black morning. Half a dozen Maliseet warriors went in front, marching in their usual formation and breaking a path through the snow with their broad rackets. Jean Richard followed next, with a musket on his shoulder and a long, straight sword girded high at his waist outside his furs. After him marched Roger de Belot, Claude le Moyne, and twelve men of the brig's crew.

The windless air was blighting cold. The sun arose like a disc of ice. The snow was dry as sand. The only sound was the creak and whisper of the frosty rackets over the snow. The pace set by the natives was one to test the sinews of the Frenchmen, but no one weakened or lagged behind. The mouth of the Oromocto was reached three full hours before noon, and there, in the shelter of a grove of firs, the

expedition rested for an hour. No fire was lighted. A repast of frozen bread and roasted venison as hard as a stone was disposed of, and then several big leather bottles were produced and passed from hand to hand, from lip to lip.

The early winter dusk was grey over snow and wood when Jean Richard and his party came in sight of the stockade. They halted before it on the frozen meadow below the slope. A small door in a wing of the great gates opened, and a man heavily clothed in furs stepped forth and advanced, unattended. Jean Richard went forward, and met D'Armour midway between the stockade and the twenty visitors.

"I never thought to meet you under such painful circumstances as these," said Jean Richard sternly. "I thought you a friend, and how have you treated me since my arrival on the river? You imprisoned one of my lieutenants; you cut my cable; you planned the annihilation of my company. How do you explain your behaviour?"

"Why did you bring an armed brig up the river?" returned D'Armour. "And why did you fire my village?"

"You poor fool!" retorted Richard, and then:

" I suspect that you have been nothing more than Lacourt's tool," he continued, more calmly, " and for that reason I am inclined to treat you mercifully. But I must have your master "

' My master ? "

" Louis de Lacourt."

" You had him once—and why, in the devil's name, didn't you keep him ? "

" I am not here to answer your questions. Produce me this Lacourt, so that I may hang him to the nearest tree, and you and yours shall go free. Refuse, and you shall swing with your master "

" I cannot produce him. He is not here."

" You poor fool! Is that your answer ? "

" It is the truth. Lacourt is not here."

" I am sorry that I cannot accept your word for it."

Jean Richard turned on his heel, and walked slowly back toward his twenty men. D'Armour hesitated for a moment, then turned and retraced his steps to the stockade. He barred the door behind him and called his garrison to him in council. His garrison now consisted of only twenty men, and only fourteen of these were Frenchmen. Scurvy had visited the stockade since the first snow.' His

company had been weakened by death and desertion. Scarcity of food and excitement had driven a number of his soldiers out to share the hardships and adventures of their red allies. He informed the survivors of his company that Jean Richard intended to attack the stockade.

"How much powder have we, monsieur?" inquired one of the men.

"Perhaps fifty charges. No more," replied the commander.

"He is even now retiring across the stream," said another. "He will not attack before morning."

A Malisiet climbed the stockade and dropped to the snow beside D'Armour.

"He has sent two runners back to Nashwaak to bring in ten more men and two culverins on toboggans," he reported.

D'Armour looked around at his disheartened company.

"I will not ask you to try to hold the stockade," he said. "We have not more than two rounds of ammunition for each musket. We could not keep them out of the stockade for ten minutes. We shall fall back on Sacobie's village on Round Lake. Pack the toboggans. We shall march in an hour."

CHAPTER XX

DESPERATION

IN the meantime, Jean Richard had retired his men to a grove of pines on the far side of the snowy stream, dispatched two of his men to the Nashwaak for reinforcements, and made camp. A great fire was built in the heart of the grove and a warm meal was eaten. Sentries were posted on the outskirts of the little wood.

The reinforcements of men and metal from Fort Nashwaak arrived before the belated dawn. The culverins were placed within a hundred and fifty yards of the gate of the stockade, set on foundations of logs. In the red, uncertain illumination of dawn the heads of men could be seen above the stockade, but no shot was fired upon the crew of the culverins. The culverins fired twenty shot into the planks of the gate without drawing any reply. In the strengthening light faint streamers of smoke could be seen ascending from the chimneys behind the stockade.

“ If they wish to fight at close quarters, we will

humour them," said Jean Richard, and he immediately advanced upon the front of the stockade with his whole force.

They reached the high barrier without being challenged. As one man, they sprang upward, seized the points of the stockade with their gloved hands, and pulled themselves breast high and over. They dropped down into an empty yard, drew their swords and cutlasses, and dashed at the silent huts. And the huts remained silent. They were empty. The fort was deserted, and a broad trail led away from the rear of it into the dark, high forest to the east.

Jean Richard led his eager men in pursuit of the fugitives. The tracks to follow were deep and broad.

"They carry loads for a long journey," said the captain. "We shall overhaul them, never fear."

But the sun was three hours above the horizon before one of Jean Richard's Maliseets caught sight of a member of the rear-guard of the fugitives. The pursuers increased their pace. Ten minutes later, several musket shots rang out in front, and one of the brig's men clapped a hand to his shoulder and staggered aside. The sailor was not wounded, however. The bullet had glanced off the tough hair and hide of his moose-skin coat.

This was the commencement of a fight that lasted almost two hours and was never stationary for more than a few minutes at a time. It passed eastward through growths of pine and spruce and grey maples. Jean Richard and his thirty advancing aggressively, the others falling back sullenly. Though the combatants did not number more than fifty, red and white, the moving front of the battle was wide. It was a screened and broken engagement, loose in detail—a thing of furtive shots, scattered volleys, brief encounters between single combatants in the underbrush, but the general action never faltered, and Jean Richard was not once in doubt of the result.

As the skirmishing became closer, drawing in to a finish, the men from Fort Oromocto let their packs fall to the snow. D' Armour turned for the last time, and stood his ground, with Madame d' Armour and their young son crouching behind him. D' Armour had discharged his pistols, and had not reloaded them, and now he drew his sword and threw aside his outer coat of mink skins. His dark and comely face was grey with despair. Jean Richard ran in upon him ; the woman and child screamed. Richard stepped back clumsily on his long rackets, but he

had already delivered his sting. D'Armour's right hand hung empty at his side, the back of it red with blood which trickled down from his sleeve and dripped from his fingers.

D'Armour stared miserably at Jean Richard, making no plea for mercy, no effort to escape. His despairing eyes did not flinch before the wet steel in the other's hand.

The captain glanced at the woman and child, then back at D'Armour.

"Where is Lacourt?" he asked.

"Gone—these three weeks," replied the other, his voice flat and faint. "I do not know where he is. I have looked for him."

"A likely story!" sneered the captain. "The truth, you treacherous dog, or I butcher you where you stand!" he continued, his voice leaping up to the spur of passion.

The woman ran to him, and sank upon her knees before him.

"It is the truth!" she cried. "He went away—and our daughter went with him. Be merciful, monsieur—as you hope for mercy! Grief and shame have broken us. She is our child, our daughter—and he has robbed us of her, body and soul!"

"Enough, madame," said the captain. "Attend to your husband's wound."

He turned away, his face suddenly changed from sneering rage to pity, and set briskly about the business of staying the hands of the fighters and calling in his men and his prisoners. Three of his men were dead and five were wounded more or less seriously, but D'Armour's loss was heavier in both dead and wounded. After a short rest, the return journey was begun. The Maliseets carried the wounded in litters. D'Armour's men carried their packs, as before, but their muskets and cutlasses were carried by their captors.

Jean Richard walked with Roger de Belot and Claude le Moyne. He told them of Lacourt's latest piece of infamy, as he had heard it from the distracted mother. Roger received the news in grim silence, but Le Moyne swore passionately that he would rid the world of Lacourt, and free madame from the insult of that foul life, if he had to search through the wilderness single-handed to accomplish it. The captain shot a keen glance at the young Canadian's flushed face, then turned to Roger.

"Who was with Lacourt that night you captured him on the river?" he asked

"It was—this same Mademoiselle d'Armour," answered Roger.

"I thought as much. It is a pity that you did not capture her and bring her in."

Roger shook his head. In his opinion nothing would have been gained for the girl or her parents by any act of his at that time, but he did not say so. He was puzzled at finding his pity for Madame Lacourt—yes, and for Madame d'Armour—to be more acute than his pity for Ysabel d'Armour. The tender sentiment which romantic propinquity had bred in his heart toward that beautiful and erring young woman had been torn from him so violently that even his sympathy was killed.

"It was my own fault," said Jean Richard. "I had him in my hand, and I let him go. But I shall have him in my hand again!"

The stockade on the Oromocto was reached at early dusk. A halt was called for the sake of the wounded, fires were lighted, and the evening and night were passed beneath the roofs of Louis de Lacourt. The balance of the homeward journey was accomplished next morning without accident.

At Fort Nashwaak the D'Armours were given a hut to themselves, and there they lived lonely with

their shame. Jean Richard was their only visitor. Pity had killed his anger against Francis d'Armour.

One night within a week of the return from the Oromocto, when Jean Richard was leaving D'Armour's hut, he was confronted by Claude le Moyne. The young Canadian drew him aside from the immediate vicinity of the huts with an air of secrecy and embarrassment.

"Captain, may I ask when you intend to hunt down this dog Lacourt and make an end of him?" he asked.

"All in good time, my dear friend," replied Richard. "You may be sure that I shall make a tragic end of him sooner or later."

"That is not enough for me, sir," retorted the other, with spirit. "Every day that he lives is a challenge to the honour of—of every gentleman in this fort. If you do not feel called upon to wipe out this black shame, sir, then I must move in the matter without your assistance. I can wait no longer, sir."

"And may I inquire into the nature of your concern in Lacourt's life or death, my young friend?"

"My concern is that of any honest man who sees a blackguard left unchanged."

“ It seems to be more than that, by your warmth in the matter.”

“ It is more than that ! Why should I deny it ? I am my own master, and you, it seems, are the lady’s guardian. There you have it, sir. I do not ask her secret. For all I know or care, she may be the daughter of a pirate or of a prince, but as the saints in high heaven hear me, I shall rid her of that cur and offer her my heart and name.”

“ A very good name, my friend, and a very good heart. And what does the lady say to your suggestion ? ”

“ Do you think I have mentioned it to her ? Ten thousand devils ! I have never spoken a dozen words with her.”

“ I believe you. But let us suppose that you rid the world of Louis de Lacourt and then learn that the lady is in no mind or heart to risk adventuring upon a second husband. What then ? ”

“ I shall have rid her of that living insult at least ”

“ You have seen her only a dozen times ; you have not spoken a dozen words to her ; you are in two minds as to whether she is the daughter of a pirate or a prince—and yet you want to kill her

husband that she may be free to accept your heart and hand. What midwinter madness is this, Claude le Moyne de Ste. Monique ? ”

“ Madness ! Saints pity you, sir—for it is evident that you have gone through life with blind eyes and a dull heart. I have been mad. I have been a blunderer and an empty, swaggering fool, but now the sanity of love has cleared my heart and my brain ! ”

Jean Richard laid a hand on the young man's shoulder and explained to him the uselessness of going in search of Lacourt now, as he had heard it from Francis d'Armour. Lacourt was still enjoying the protection of the Maliseets ; he was even now in hiding with a strong party of them ; the big chiefs were still loyal to Lacourt, and the warriors at Fort Nashwaak were still loyal to their big chiefs. The Maliseets were a peace-loving people and inclined to be friendly toward all Frenchmen, but their first and last friendship was toward one another. Jean Richard pointed out to Le Moyne the fact that in the running fight through the woods there had been no bloodshed, no signs of enmity, between the opposing parties of natives. He told of D'Armour's search for Lacourt. D'Armour had set out with a

dozen guides, every one of whom had expressed himself as being perfectly willing to lead him to Lacourt, and they had led him through the wilderness for five days—and on the evening of the fifth day he had found himself back at the stockade on the Oromocto.

“ We must wait until hunger or his own vanity brings Lacourt to us ; or until the leaders of the Maliseets decide to transfer their loyalty from Lacourt to us ; or until the river opens, when Lacourt will leave the woods for the coast in search of food or a ship,” concluded the captain

Le Moyne was convinced by Jean Richard’s argument, though against his inclination.

The winter wore on to spring. The lengthening days brought grey skies and drenching rains and mild winds, then an ardour of sunshine that sank to the foundations of the hills of drifted snow. The blue of heaven softened and deepened. Hundreds of crows appeared one morning and set the high pines clanging with their harsh but joyous cries.

The waters of the Nashwaak, beneath the sodden ice, were swollen by the seepings of millions of acres of melting snow. The awaking stream broke its fetters, and drove its wreckage of grey ice against

the flank of the big river. The big river lifted its weighted shoulders.

The ice of the St. John began to run on the fifteenth day of April, in swirling blocks on a flooded tide. The ice-freighted flood covered the low meadows and islands, bending and raking the yielding growths of alder and willow, and uprooting and carrying along with it many a stiff old tree. After two days and nights of this the flood began to subside, and great rafts of rotting ice were left stranded on the torn shores. Three days later the river was clear.

The brig had not been damaged by the run of ice in the mouth of the Nashwaak. The captain set men to work on her decks and sides, her spars and rigging, with oakum, tar, and "slusb." Her sails were attended to, and her cables were cleaned.

Sunrise of the first day of May showed a canoe approaching Fort Nashwaak through the tops of the flooded bushes at the foot of the mound. Three people occupied the canoe, two plying the grey paddles and one sitting idle amidships. Roger de Belot and half a dozen men of the morning watch hurried down the path through the pines to meet the voyagers at the water's edge.

As the canoe drew near it was hidden from Roger

by a screen of brush. It touched the land. Roger forced his way downward through the brush, and came face to face with Ysabel d' Armour at the edge of the water. He stepped back a pace, with an exclamation of astonishment and embarrassment. She darted forward and caught his unwilling hand. Her face was thin, and the flash and glow were gone from her black eyes.

"Are they here?" she cried. "Are they alive—my mother and father?"

Roger snatched his hand free.

"Back to the gate!" he cried to his men. "There may be a fleet of canoes close inshore."

"There is but one canoe," protested the young woman, but the men paid no heed to her and retreated to the path, shouting a warning.

CHAPTER XXI

STRONGER THAN HATE

THE young woman laughed bitterly, stood uncertain for a moment, then told her paddlers to lift the canoe ashore and follow her. She turned then and ran up the path after the retreating Frenchmen.

The garrison issued in disordered readiness from the gate. Many of the brisk fellows were only half dressed, but all were fully armed. Jean Richard was at their head. Francis D'Armour was with them. Questions were shouted. Scouts vanished into the underbrush to the right and left of the path. Roger de Belot made known his suspicions to the captain in half a dozen words. He was already ashamed of his panic, for neither river nor shore showed any sign of an attacking force. Of all his enemies from the Oromocto, only Mademoiselle D'Armour had as yet appeared. She stood at his elbow with her two dusky canoemen behind her.

Suddenly the young woman uttered a broken cry and darted forward through the press of armed men. They fell away before her, some with staring eyes,

others with averted faces. She swayed, then sank to the ground at her father's feet. She embraced his knees and hid her face against them.

A spell of silence and inaction descended upon the garrison of Fort Nashwaak. Embarrassment and sterner emotions struck the faces of some of them red as fire, of others grey as old sailcloth. Even the most hardened fellow there now turned his glance away from the stricken father and kneeling daughter. Jean Richard swore softly into his black moustache, then glared around him at his men.

Francis D'Armour stood motionless for seconds that crawled as slow as minutes, staring down at the young woman. A shudder passed through him from head to heel. He stooped, at last, loosed her clinging arms from about his knees and raised her until she stood upright. She sagged against him; her eyes avoided his and she pressed her face against his shoulder. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. So the two stood for a little while, dead to everything save the agony in their souls. Suddenly the man squared his shoulders and glanced around him with dull eyes and a tortured face. He turned then and moved slowly toward the fort, holding his daughter close against his side with his

right arm. She stumbled forward with bowed head and downcast eyes. They had passed through the open gate before a man of the garrison, gentle or simple, moved or uttered a word.

Jean Richard sighed and swore. He brushed a hand across his face, then ordered his men back to their scattered posts of duty. He questioned the two young Maliseets who had brought the girl to the Nashwaak, but failed to obtain any information beyond the facts that they had accompanied her at her own urgent request and had paddled hard, without rest, for many hours. They admitted that they had not been eager for the task but undertaken it in pity for the young woman. When questioned about the activities, intentions and whereabouts of Lacourt they showed a flicker of fear in their dark eyes—yes, and a flicker of a more lively emotion than fear. But they refused to answer. They stared sullenly over the questioner's head, their eyes grown suddenly as dull as stone.

The scouts returned, singly and by twos and threes, and reported that they had found no sign anywhere of men or canoes. No menace showed on the river or lurked in the woods for miles around.

Francis D' Armour sought out Jean Richard after

breakfast. The two were given the upper end of the hall to themselves. Jean Richard placed a chair for the man who had once been his friend, and poured wine for him. He asked no questions. He seated himself before his guest, veiled the curiosity that burned in him and waited. D'Armour drank thirstily, emptying the generous cup twice. Then he leaned forward and gripped the captain's knee with fingers like wood.

"That is done with," he whispered, violently. 'It has turned to hate in her heart—that lawless passion. I thank God that she has come to her senses at last. The dog is false—false to the marrow—and I think he is mad. She hates him now. She hates and despises him even more bitterly than she despises herself. She has been a fool—but he is something worse than a fool. Even the Maliseets have opened their eyes at last to the truth. They see his vileness now and many of their chiefs are falling away from him. He has broken other hearts than those of the daughters of France. Nothing is too low for his sport, as nothing is too high. And now she has come to us—my poor daughter—to warn us of his last piece of black trickery. He has sold us—every mother's son of us, man, woman and child, white and red alike—to an English pirate."

"What!" exclaimed the captain. "Sold us you say? Out with it!"

"The pirate's schooner is even now in the river, manned by the veriest spawn of hell, and Lacourt has gone aboard to pilot her up to this fort. That is the word she brings."

Jean Richard had listened quietly, and with a sympathetic pallor of countenance, to the distracted father's preamble; but at the startling and entirely unexpected conclusion of the humiliating statement he sprang from his seat with an oath and freed himself unceremoniously from the grip of the other's fingers.

"The devil!" he cried. "And here we sit and swill wine!"

He called his officers to him and gave them the news in a few ringing words. Activity leapt up in the fort like flame. Belts were snatched from floor and wall and buckled on by eager fingers. Men stood straight for a moment to receive their orders, then turned and ran about their duties. Jack and cup and platter were left half-empty on the board.

Francis D'Armour was left alone in the hall. Even the Maliseet women were gone into the outer sunshine and excitement. He filled his cup again and tossed off the wine.

"It fails to stir me," he said, and smiled bitterly. "There is no fire in it, no life, no healing. My poor heart would continue to bleed though I drank a cask of the stuff."

He left the hall and returned to his own hut. He found his wife and daughter seated on a couch of deer skins, the daughter in the mother's arms. He gazed at them compassionately for a moment, then turned to a shelf against the wall, and loaded and primed his pistols. He buckled on his sword.

"What is it? What do you mean to do?" she asked, fearfully.

"Jean Richard is manning the brig," he replied.

Madame d'Armour put her daughter gently from her arms and went to him, leaving the girl crouched in misery upon the bed with her face in her hands and her slender shoulders quaking.

"You will kill him?" whispered the woman.

He nodded grimly. She drew the long sword from its leather scabbard and pressed her lips to the grey blade.

"Saints speed it true!" she whispered.

He snatched it from her and stared at her with a swift blankness of horror in his eyes. She was of pure Spanish blood and of a family renowned for

the beauty of its women and the unscrupulous ambition of its cavaliers. She was thirty-eight years of age and still beautiful. She had always been a true and loving wife and comrade to Francis d'Armour, since their marriage twenty-one years ago; and yet he knew that it was the blood of her race that had proved the ruin of their daughter.

"Not that!" he exclaimed. "What have the holy saints to do with my revenge? Comfort our child; and leave me to deal with her seducer."

He caught her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers.

Within an hour of D'Armour's confession to Jean Richard, the brig was in the big river and a dozen canoes were slipping downstream ahead of her along the northern shore. The women were left in the fort, in the protection of Monsieur Devine and a dozen Frenchmen.

Madame Lacourt went to the door of the D'Armours' hut. Her golden head was uncovered, her blue eyes were dim with pity. Thrice she raised her hand to the latchstring, only to let it fall again to her side. She breathed quickly between parted lips, and the bright blood pulsed and paled beneath the clear skin of her round cheeks and rounder

throat; but there was nothing of grief in her agitation. Pity and a nervous embarrassment were the emotions that distressed her. Months had passed since she had last seen Ysabel d'Armour; and until the return of Jean Richard from his expedition up the Oronocto she had suspected nothing of her friend's relations with Lacourt. Now she knew all, and she felt nothing but pity tinged with horror. The horror was for her friend, not for her.

Madame Lacourt opened the door at last and slipped quickly into the dusky interior of the hut. Madame d'Armour faced her, recognised her with a cry of shame and dismay, then stepped forward and seized her by the shoulders.

"Go!" she cried. "Is she not punished enough? Is she not suffering now? What harm has she done you? She has saved you from the monster—at the cost of her own soul!"

Ysabel cowered on the bed, writhed there with her face between her hands. Madame Lacourt seemed to grow in Madame d'Armour's grasp. Her eyes flashed and her cheeks flamed.

"Her soul!" she cried. "What of her soul? You talk like a fool! Take your hands from my shoulders, madame!"

Madame d'Armour obeyed, with a dazed air. This was not the bloodless, white creature she had known and pitied.

Jeanne ran to the couch, knelt beside it, threw her arms around Ysabel, and drew that dark head against her own golden head.

Madame d'Armour continued for a moment to gaze in wonder at the two young women; then she took her little son by the hand and went out of the hut into the cool sunshine and the murmur of the high pines. Her face was wet and bright with unheeded tears. She walked back and forth, back and forth before the hut. Her little son, clinging to her hand, gazed up at her face with round eyes. One of Monsieur Devine's sentries on the wall turned and looked down at her with pondering eyes and pursed lips. A big, red-breasted thrush sang in a red-budded maple that overhung the wall. The sentry turned and looked out through the trees. He saw a gleam of white between the green branches of the pines, far away down the river. It was a topsail of the brig.

"It will be a good fight," said the sentry, with regret in his voice. "That Jean Richard is a great soldier, they say, and never takes a beating, though

he was born as poor and humble as any man of us. Blood will flow like red wine at two sous the pint."

Madame Lacourt left the hut, confronted Madame d'Armour, and embraced her. Her small, bright face was wet with tears, but her eyes were deep and clear. The sentry turned again and looked down at them.

"You are a brave woman—and I thought you were only a bloodless child," said Madame d'Armour.

"I am happy," replied Jeanne; "and in the face of your grief, I am ashamed of my happiness. Ysabel is brave."

"Happy?" queried the older woman. "Happy, child?"

Jeanne blushed and lowered her eyes. A little smile, tender and joyous, curved her lips.

"You hate your husband—and you know that he will soon be dead; and so you are happy," continued the other.

"Yes, I hate him—and I am glad to think that he is about to die; but I had forgotten him," replied Jeanne. "There is nothing but shame and bitterness in the thought of him, dead or alive."

"And yet you are happy! You need not repeat it, child. I see it in your face, in your eyes, on your

lips Is it the young De Belot, my dear, or the golden Englishman, or the black Le Moyne ? ”

‘ Monsieur de Belot is nothing but a child and Monsieur Harwood is nothing but a sailor.’

“ Love is a wonderful thing, my dear. It is stronger than hate and shame and despair, praise be to the saints ! ”

CHAPTER XXII

ANNE DE MONTIGNY

THE big fore-and-aft schooner moved slowly up against the spring current of the river, towed by three of her boats. Her hull was long and narrow, her spars heavy and tall. The white paint of her sides was streaked with rust stains and blistered in scaly patches by tropic suns. Her slack canvas banged occasionally in a futile, puffing breeze. Bunches of ripening plantains and bananas hung red and yellow and green above the flat roof of the galley. Blue smoke went up from the galley pipe and was whisked about and dispersed by the breeze. A line rigged athwartships high above the deck carried a flapping display of breeches and shirts of various colours and materials—the morning's wash. Little brown birds from the forests and wild meadows flew twittering through the rigging. A dozen men lounged about the decks. It was a peaceful scene.

Two men stood elbow to elbow on the forecastle head, watching the labouring boats and talking. One of them turned occasionally to the main deck

and spoke an order which was bawled aft by the mate to the helmsman. This was the commander of the schooner, an Englishman with a freckled face, green eyes, and a maimed right hand. His sun-bleached hair hung between his bulging shoulder blades in a stiff tail tied with dirty ribbons. His manner was at once menacing and jovial, assured and furtive. His dress was untidy, unclean, and bizarre. He was individual. Even in the wearing of his weapons he was individual, for his heavy cutlass hung at his right side, his knife was in a leather pocket at his right knee, and his pistols hung upon his breast in a canvas contrivance of his own invention. Ever since a desperate trader had hacked off three fingers of his right hand with a hatchet, early in his career, his left hand had been his sword hand. He was no less a personage than Captain Amen Bolt, a curse of the Atlantic from Trinidad in the south to Newfoundland in the north.

Captain Bolt's companion on the forecastle head of the schooner was Louis de Lacourt.

The unsolicited attentions of an English frigate had forced Amen Bolt into the Bay of Fundy and the river. He had not paused at the mouth of the river to burn the little fort there and murder its

garrison. Lacourt had come aboard with a fine story of opportunity for conquest and loot and a casket full of diamonds and rubies. He had handed over the jewels to Captain Bolt—with the exception of half a dozen of the largest stones, of which he had made no mention—promised him a cargo of peltries, and in return asked for the absolute annihilation of the fort on the Nashwaak. Amen had listened with an air of polite interest and willingness to oblige, with the box of jewels tucked securely under his arm; but who will say what treacherous plan was flickering in his mind before Lacourt happened to mention the name of Jean Richard. At the mention of that name, the green in his eyes had darkened, he had asked half a dozen questions, and then shaken hands on the bargain.

“That meddler!” he had exclaimed. “Thrice he has beaten me off a fat prize. And he did not take them himself. He let them go, damn him! What he is, the devil only knows; but he is no honest gentleman of fortune. But we shall need two men to every one of his to master him.”

“I can promise you ten to one,” Lacourt had replied. “All the savages of this country are my brothers. You shall see them in hundreds when the attack begins.”

This had satisfied Captain Bolt ; for Lacourt had brought a native pilot aboard with him, Walking Moose by name, who had nodded his head in confirmation of every word of his master's.

And now, as the schooner crawled slowly up the flooded river to annihilate Jean Richard, Captain Amen Bolt felt that he was engaged in a very satisfactory affair. He did not trust Lacourt ; but that did not distress him. Lacourt was in his power—as the pretty gentleman would soon discover after the capture of the fort. But this prospect of getting Jean Richard into his hands promised the solution of a problem that had been troubling him for several weeks.

The problem needs explaining. Just before leaving the West Indies in haste, Amen had descended upon the country residence of a high official of one of the islands and carried off the said official and his daughter and a silver dinner service. The game had not been worth the candle ; and Amen Bolt had informed his distinguished prisoner of that fact the moment he was safely clear of the island. He knew that his prisoner was the master of a considerable fortune in coined gold of England, France, and Spain. The hope of obtaining this treasure had

inspired him to the raid upon the unfortunate gentleman's residence. As soon as he was clear of Martinique he had stated his case frankly to the Governor. He had pointed out that, though he was a man of a peculiarly obliging nature, he could not see his way to carrying passengers for nothing, and that to return to Martinique now and put his guests ashore was out of the question. Then the high official had admitted the treasure of coined gold and had promised Amen exact and minute information concerning its whereabouts the moment he and his daughter were set ashore in some inhabited country, safe and unharmed. The treasure was of the value of twelve thousand pounds of English money—enough for Amen to retire upon.

The high official had set all this down in black and white, in the form of a bequest to his old and honoured friend, Amen Bolt, master mariner, addressing it "To Whom It May Concern" and strengthening it in every second line with the name of God and with expressions of his hope of eternal damnation if it were not a free, true, and just statement of his wishes and a lawful deed and conveyance of his property afore and above and herein mentioned and described. To this imposing document he had set

his hand and seal in the presence of witnesses. Captain Bolt had pocketed this document and decided to set his prisoners ashore, safe and unharmed, at the earliest opportunity. He believed that the daughter would keep her father to the fulfilment of the contract. But until now he had been given no opportunity of setting the two ashore. French ships had chased him through the islands and English ships had hounded him northward to the very mouth of the great bay ; and now he decided to hold his prisoners until after the encounter with Jean Richard. He would send Jean Richard and the Governor and the girl south for the gold, holding all Richard's friends as hostages until his return with the treasure. He had seen and heard enough of Jean Richard to recognize his honesty.

Amen Bolt and Lacourt chatted idly on the fore-castle head as the schooner crawled slowly up the river behind the labouring boats ; but the pirate was thinking of the pleasure he would derive from the act of slapping Lacourt's face and then sticking a knife into his side, and Lacourt was belabouring his brain for some plan of outwitting Amen after the fall of Jean Richard, of recovering the casket of jewels, and of obtaining possession of one of

Amen's two prisoners. They were the blackest pair of rogues afloat that day on salt water or fresh ; but Louis de Lacourt was the blacker of the two.

A canoe appeared suddenly upon the river, shooting out from the bushes on the southern shore. It contained two redmen, who plied their paddles furiously. Captain Bolt drew Lacourt's attention to it. Lacourt stared at the approaching canoe in silence, his brows drawn slightly.

"Are the savages friends of yours?" asked Bolt.

"Every Maliseet on this river is a friend of mine," replied Lacourt.

The canoe came alongside, and the man from the bow climbed over the rail and dropped lightly to the deck. Nobody molested him. He was naked to the waist and unarmed, save for a knife in his belt.

"Who is your friend?" asked Amen Bolt of Lacourt.

"He is called Little Hawk," replied Lacourt. "He is a chief. I wonder what he wants."

Little Hawk caught sight of the two on the fore-castle head at that moment and advanced slowly up the deck, his head high, his copper shoulders

squared, his face impassive as a mask sharply cut from wood. The men about the deck turned their heads and eyed him with indolent curiosity; but he paid no more attention to them than to the planks he trod. He sprang up to the forecastle head, lithe as a panther, and confronted Lacourt. Lacourt shifted his feet uneasily and smiled somewhat weakly. Amen Bolt glanced keenly from the face of the Frenchman to that of the Maliseet.

Little Hawk spoke a few words, very quietly, in a language unknown to the pirate. His eyes flickered, but his face remained expressionless. Lacourt replied in the same tongue, at considerable length and in a conciliating voice. He gesticulated with his hand and shoulders. The wooden quality deepened in the Maliseet's face.

"Your friend does not seem to be greatly pleased with you," remarked Amen, in French.

Little Hawk turned his head slowly and gazed fixedly at the pirate for a moment, then addressed him in the same language.

"I have but asked my white lord, the adopted brother of my tribe, why he took my young wife away from me?" he said. "I have asked him if his white mistress was not kind? His answer flies on a broken wing."

Amen Bolt laughed harshly at Lacourt. Lacourt bit his lip and spoke sharply to little Hawk. Little Hawk sneered openly in the Frenchman's face, turned, and stalked slowly down the ladder to the deck. He sprang to the broad rail, turned to the fore-castle head, plucked the knife from his belt, and hurled it quick as light. He plunged into the river. Lacourt and Captain Bolt ducked their heads and jumped aside, and the knife whanged into a forestay and hung there, wobbling, the keen blade sunk into the tough, tarred fibres of the hemp to its haft. But for the Frenchman's speed in side-stepping, it would have been sticking stiffly in human flesh and bone.

"Don't fire on him," cried Amen Bolt to the men on deck. "Let him go. It is no affair of ours."

He turned sharply upon Lacourt, who stared at the knife in the stay with pale eyes and a slack jaw.

"A somewhat unusual demonstration of affection," he sneered.

Lacourt swore. They saw the canoe out on the river, drifting with the current. The Maliseet in the stern sat low, with his paddle across the gun-wales. The dripping face of Little Hawk appeared

over the other end of the canoe. He squirmed in over the bow of the cranky craft, as flat on his belly as a snake. He took up his paddle. The canoe turned and followed the schooner.

Charles de Montigny and his daughter Anne sat in the cabin. The Governor of Martinique had lost weight and youth in the past ten months. Shortly after the dramatic departure of Jean Richard and Roger de Belot from Martinique, Anne de Montigny had learned what Roger had discovered of her father on that tragic morning; but, in her grief, her father's crimes had seemed but a small thing to her. Her grief had brought on a brain fever. For weeks her condition had been critical. Her return to health had been slow. She had recovered nothing of her old spirit. The thought that she had murdered Roger de Belot haunted her day and night. Every night in her dreams she saw again his sudden collapse, his groping hands, the blood streaming upon his face. She had killed him. The hand that he had kissed had flashed death into his heart and brain. What did she care for her father's fear and repentance? Nothing. His grovelling remorse, his feeble efforts to comfort, sickened her. She lived with the memories of that terrific deed and for the

memories of those wonderful months that had gone before it. The night attack of the pirates on the villa, the capture and the long voyage, had neither frightened nor interested her.

The two sat on a narrow locker in the low-roofed cabin, silent and miserable. The girl's hands were clasped in her lap. Her eyes stared straight before her, unseeing. Her father's hands twitched on his knees. The flesh of his cheeks was sagged and mottled. His lips trembled. His eyes moved constantly this way and that, with glassy gleams. He was afraid—afraid for his daughter and afraid of his sins. A black devil of fear rode high on his shoulders and throttled him with its arms. He drank to unhorse this horrible rider, to clear his wits, and to revive his courage. Brandy was the champion that he called to his assistance a dozen times a day, almost as often every night. But fear continued to ride him. He was drunk now—soddenly, silently drunk. But his apprehension was not deadened, the black imp of fear was not loosened at his neck. The brandy had lost its trick of striking fire and froth in him.

Feet thumped on the steps of the short companion-ladder and Amen Bolt entered the cabin. The

Governor turned a tortured glance upon him, but the girl paid no attention to him. He addressed them with an air of good-humoured tolerance.

"We are going upstream pleasantly and steadily," he said, "and I can promise you a speedy end to your anxieties. We have a little job of fighting ahead of us—the taking of a log fort—and after that I shall start you back to Martinique, in a sound vessel and with a safe commander. That is better than my agreement with you. The said trusty commander will be authorized to collect your ransom. You will see to it that the money is given to him and that he gets safely away."

"I will see to it," cried Charles de Montigny. "I swear it by my hope of eternal salvation!—on my honour as a gentleman!—by the soul of my saintly mother! May the wrath of Heaven strike me blind, now, here, if I do not promise in good faith!"

"Enough," said Amen Bolt. "I believe you. But why does mademoiselle sit all day with a face of stone and eyes of misery? She has been treated with respect, as I promised. No danger threatens her. I would take it as a fair omen if she would smile."

Charles de Montigny got unsteadily to his feet, approached the pirate, and laid two heavy, twitching hands on his shoulders.

“Do not think that the voyage has broken her spirit, my friend,” he whispered confidentially. “She trusts you and your brave fellows. It is an old grief that eats at her. She had a lover. There was a misunderstanding—a mistake. She—she caused his death—by discharging a pistol.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MEETING

CAPTAIN AMEN BOLT swore a blistering English oath and stared at the profile of Mademoiselle de Montigny's sad and beautiful face in astonishment.

"That woebegone miss? She shot her lover!" he exclaimed.

Anne's lips quivered. She crouched forward with a shuddering sigh and covered her face with her hands.

"There!" exclaimed her father petulantly. "See what you have done. You need not have shouted it at her. Ten thousand devils! She is in no danger of forgetting it. I thought you a man of breeding."

"You were wrong there," replied Amen, with a bellow of laughter. "I am not a man of breeding—but I am a man of blood."

The Governor did not laugh at the pirate's witticism—though he was a merry soul by nature.

"You have made her cry," he complained, re-seating himself heavily on the locker. "I thought

better of you, captain. And once she begins she keeps at it for hours. The saints only know how it is that she has a tear left in her. And no sound, mind you—no screaming and moaning and bellowing. Just that—tears and the quaking of her shoulders—hour after hour. Man, it is killing us both! If you had a father's heart in you, captain, you would feel for me. Get me another flask of brandy, for the love of Heaven!"

Before Amen Bolt could reply, the mate of the schooner thrust his head down the cabin hatch and bawled the information that a fleet of canoes was rounding the next bend of the river, and the topsails of a brig were in sight above the trees. The captain sprang to the deck and closed the scuttle behind him, leaving the Governor and the girl alone with their grief and their cravings.

Amen looked up river and saw the approaching canoes. He saw the canoe of Little Hawk meet and join the fleet. He saw the royal and topga'nts'ls of the brig floating against the blue of the sky above the budding trees. He called Louis de Lacourt to him.

"How is this?" he cried harshly. "How is this?"

“Jean Richard has been warned of your approach,” replied Lacourt. His voice was steady, but his eyes wavered uneasily. “Anchor across the channel and address him with a double broadside. He is weakly manned. You may be sure that he has lost a score of his fellows during the winter. You have more than double his strength in men, more and heavier guns, and plenty of powder and shot. After all, it may prove an easier matter to settle with him in his brig than it would have proved to take him in his fort.”

Amen Bolt eyed him suspiciously, then called in his boats, ordered a stern anchor to be let go, and, as the schooner drifted back and swung broadside to the current, he let a bow anchor follow. The schooner hung in midstream, at right angles to the strong sweep of the river, with her larboard side toward the approaching brig. Her larboard battery of big guns and culverins was strengthened from the starboard battery. The big bow-chaser was swung across the forecandle head.

The canoes hung back, just out of musket range of the schooner, scattered upon the broad highway of the river.

“The savages are against us,” said Captain Bolt menacingly.

"Not so," replied Lacourt, with composure. "They are afraid of strangers, that is all. They will join us when they see that I am here."

"Your friend, Little Hawk, has already told them that, I imagine."

Lacourt sneered at the mention of Little Hawk and sprang to the larboard rail. He waved his hat vigorously to the inmates of the canoes. Receiving no salutation in answer, he waved yet more vigorously and shouted his name at the top of his voice. At last, and with unexpected suddenness, every paddle was raised and flashed high. Lacourt felt a tingling wave of relief go through him. For several seconds he had been chilled by doubt. He returned to the deck and to the pirate's elbow.

"You see," he said. "I am their father, their brother, and their great white chief. I have been their master for five years."

"But where are the hundreds you promised me?" asked the pirate.

"In the woods; behind the bushes; everywhere," replied Lacourt confidently. "You do not understand my people, captain. They fight in their own way. You will see them when the battle has joined."

The canoes were drifting down upon the schooner

now, with friendly cries and friendly flourishes of paddles. The brig was not yet around the bend. Aboard the schooner the gunners had their pieces loaded and lighted matches in their hands. Amen Bolt and Louis de Lacourt ascended to the narrow poop. The canoes drifted close about the schooner. The pirates gazed down at them curiously over the rail. Friendly signals were exchanged between the red men and the white. The canoes veered to the right and left and slipped away from the schooner.

"Look! Here she comes!" said Lacourt, pointing upstream at the headsails of the brig.

Captain Bolt looked; but at the same moment a cry from the deck caused both men to bring their glances nearer home. They saw that one of the canoes had suffered an accident close to the straining cable of the schooner's bow anchor. The canoe lay upon the water within a few feet of the cable, bottom upward. Its recent occupants were not to be seen. The other savages continued to move away without paying any attention to their unfortunate companions.

The brig drew swiftly down toward the schooner.

The straining cable near which the overturned canoe floated suddenly whipped into the air like a

thing alive, and the bow of the schooner began to swing down the current. The cable had been cut. The upturned canoe moved shoreward across the current, without visible means of propulsion. An exultant yell went up from the savages in the other canoes. Shouts of rage, consternation, and defiance rang along the schooner's deck. A musket was discharged at the upturned canoe.

The schooner now lay with the course of the river, held only by one anchor, her bows pointed away from the approaching brig, her bristling broadside trained uselessly upon an empty shore. Amen Bolt ordered the remaining cable to be cut. Then he stooped and plucked a knife with his left hand from the leather pocket below his right knee. He straightened himself swiftly and, without a word, plunged the knife to its haft into Lacourt's side.

Louis de Lacourt's scream of horror and agony rang high above the hubbub of the deck and the cries of the savages.

Amen Bolt turned coolly away from the dying Frenchman and shouted to his men to drag three culverins aft to the taffrail. The schooner was gliding downstream by this time, with a little wind in her sails and the current along her keel. A glance told the pirate that he had the heels of the brig.

Lacourt raised himself upon an elbow with a desperate effort, only to fall back instantly and stare aloft with glazing eyes and a sagging jaw. His limbs twitched, then stiffened; and that was the end of his abominable existence in the world of men. Fate had even denied him the dignity of a just death. Little Hawk, D'Armour, Jean Richard, and Claude le Moyne were seeking him even now with blades of justice; but his life had gone out under the hand of Amen Bolt, and for a deed of which he was innocent.

A big gun in the bows of the brig banged furiously, shot out a tongue of orange flame, and rolled white smoke upon the sliding water. The round shot passed harmlessly through the schooner's mainsail. A second shot from the same piece sent splinters flying from the schooner's taffrail and laid the helmsman beside the corpse of Louis de Lacourt. Amen Bolt replied with his culverins, with no apparent result.

The schooner ran blindly down the swollen river, pushed along by the current below and the wind aloft. She had no pilot, for Walking Moose had sprung overboard at the instant of his master's wounding and swum safely away to one of the canoes. Every minute increased the distance between her

scarred taffrail and the brig's headsails. The canoes kept abreast of her on both sides, at long musket range. Irregular and harmless firing took place between the canoes and the schooner. The brig brought another gun into her bows and doubled her cannonading. The schooner's men hoisted a fourth culverin to the poop deck and ran it aft to the taffrail. Each vessel moved in a veil of bitter smoke which clung low to the sliding surface of the river. These veils were pierced frequently by darts of orange flame. The slim canoes glided along beyond the ragged, crawling fringes of the smoke.

Amen Bolt kept the schooner to the middle of the river, in the belief that this was the same thing as keeping her to the middle of the channel. When the vessel drove her keel into the hidden sand bar with a groan of timbers, a creak of spars, and a clatter of gear and guns, he knew his mistake. But he did not make an outcry against fate or chance or luck. He had enough physical courage for ten ordinary men and a high opinion of his schooner, his crew, and his own powers as a fighter and commander. He kicked the cold clay of Lacourt, then informed his ruffians cheerfully that the engagement with the brig could not be postponed.

The brig swung across the current and poured a broadside over the schooner's taffrail. The legs of one of Amen's gunners were crushed by an overturned culverin. Splinters flew from planks and spars. Wood and flesh and bone were smashed and torn by the hurtling iron. Choking smoke filled the cabin where Anne de Montigny still crouched on the locker with her face in her hands, and the Governor raged like a trapped animal.

The brig swung her bow with the current again and passed down the safe channel within twenty feet of the schooner's unarmed starboard rail; and as she passed she swept the decks across with another broadside. But she had let go two big grappling anchors in line with the stranded schooner's stern; and upon these she was winched upstream, stern first, until she lay beside her enemy. Her yards were squared and her headsails flattened. The wind swung her high against the schooner's rail, just aft of amidships—and at the moment of contact the guns drove another blast of flame and iron across that fated deck.

Roger de Belot was the first of the boarders to jump down upon the schooner's rail. Before he could gain his balance, a pirate slashed at his legs with a cutlass. In dodging that blow, his feet

slipped on the teak rail. His sword flew from his grasp before the shock of the cutlass stroke. He fell into the river between the two vessels, unscathed but discomfited.

The alert pirate had not recovered from the effort of that stroke before Jean Richard's sword bit him. Le Moyne was at Richard's elbow, Harwood and Da Santo were at his heels. Close behind this devastating vanguard swept the select of the brig's selected company, slashing and stabbing. The grim music of the battle changed from the crash and bang of great guns and muskets to the rasp and clang of iron against iron; but the undertone of moans and curses was unchanged.

The struggle receded from the rail, leaving blood in the scuppers and sprawled and huddled shapes of dead flesh that had not yet lost the glow of the riven life. Jean Richard's men were the better swordsmen; but Bolt's desperate fellows outnumbered them.

Half a dozen Maliseets appeared suddenly on the larboard rail, let fly half a dozen arrows into the backs of the pirates, and instantly dropped out of sight. Though this unexpected attack wounded only four men, it struck a new terror into the hearts of more than thirty. Half a score of the pirates turned

and ran to the bulwarks above which this last menace had appeared. They looked down into the canoes of the savages, which clung close to the schooner's side. But they had discarded their muskets and pistols, and before they could think of a way of destroying the frail canoes, dozens of arrows leaped up in their face like striking adders. The pirates fell back from that rail in disorder.

Roger de Belot was dragged over the gunwale of one of the canoes. He decided to attempt an entrance into the schooner by way of the after-windows of the cabin, and so strike the pirates from an unexpected quarter. His canoe, followed by one other, slid close under the schooner's stern. He looked up and beheld the face of Charles de Montigny staring down at him.

De Montigny's face was twisted and blanched with horror. It was the face of a madman.

"*You*, sir? Are *you* there?" cried Roger, chilled with a fear that his eyes and brain were failing him.

The face was withdrawn. Roger leaped upward, overturning the canoe under his feet, found a grip for his fingers, and managed to hoist himself into the window with a desperate effort. He had lost his sword, and his pistols were useless; but he drew his

knife. Across the gloom of the smoky cabin he saw the man who had looked down upon him with that face of terrific horror—Charles de Montigny, if you will—beating upward with his fists at the scuttle of the hatch. He could not believe that it was the Governor of Martinique ; but his blood thrilled with the hope and fear that it should prove to be no other. Had the wrecker turned pirate ? Or had his own eyes gone wrong ? Was he mad—or was the whole world mad ? His thoughts and his emotions were alike violently confused.

Roger ran forward toward the man on the short ladder who was so violently and vainly trying to escape to the deck. The man turned at Roger's approach, uttered a cry of despair, and sprang aft. It was Charles de Montigny beyond a shadow of doubt—a haggard, wild-eyed De Montigny. Roger dropped his knife and clutched at the Governor ; but he was hurled aside. The Governor vanished through the low window.

Roger ran to the window and shouted to the Maliseets to rescue the madman. He turned then at a sudden, terrified scream and saw Anne de Montigny on the locker. Her head was raised. She regarded him with indescribable eyes and a face as white as a candle.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MADMAN

AMEN BOLT lay flat on the poop deck beside the corpse of Louis de Lacourt, the hilt of his wet sword gripped in his left hand and his breast as red as a rose. He, too, was dead. Other corpses lay around him, some sprawled, some huddled. The smoke had cleared from the ships and the sliding surface of the river. Men of the brig's company sloshed water over the schooner's decks. The soft, river water frothed in the red scuppers, and the schooner's sides were stained with a brighter red than that of rusty iron. Charles de Montigny sat limply with his back against the carriage of a culverin, faint from the stress of his emotions and his struggles against the depths of the river and the hands of the rescuing Maliseets. The body of John Harwood lay at the foot of the mainmast, raised upon a grating and covered with a red ensign. Claude le Moyne stood beside it, his right arm in a bandage of blood-stained linen. The fight was over

Jean Richard descended into the cabin under the

low poop, where Roger de Belot still knelt beside the locker with the head of the unconscious girl on his arm. Roger poured water on her face and breast and cried to her in a voice of distraction to awake, to open her eyes, to look at him, to put her fingers on the scar above his temple and know that he was her lover—her living lover, alive not only in the spirit.

Jean Richard forced brandy between the girl's lips. He chafed her wrists with the brandy. His hands were quick and tender, his eyes were compassionate. He spoke words of encouragement to Roger.

"She will recover," he said. "Her heart beats. The shock was terrific, for she thought that you were your own ghost."

The girl's eyelids fluttered. Her lips fluttered and a sigh escaped her. Her eyelids lifted.

"You see!" cried Jean Richard, "it is Roger de Belot, mademoiselle. Do you feel his tears on your hands? One cannot feel the tears of a ghost. You did not kill him; but feel here—the scar above his temple. Ah! Did I not tell you?"

Anne de Montigny permitted herself to be drawn to Roger's breast. Suddenly she slipped her arms

around his neck and drew his head down to her face. She felt the scar above his temple with her lips and knew that this was her lover in flesh and blood. She whispered in his ear, and his eyes brightened and softened.

“ May the saints preserve you, my dear children,” said Jean Richard. “ May you live long to enjoy your love in this life—for it is a bitter thing for lovers to await a reunion in the life to come.”

The lovers did not hear him. He glanced down at his own person and saw blood on his arm and on his clothing—blood of men whom he had slain joyously only a few minutes before. The sight seemed to depress him and to turn his mind from thoughts of the lovers. He retired noiselessly from the cabin and closed the scuttle behind him. He called to several of his men to bring water and throw it over him, to wash the blood of his slaughtered enemies from his skin and his garments.

Charles de Montigny, who continued to recline limply against the culverin, called for brandy in a voice of despair, as a man dying in a desert might call for water. Brandy was given him, and he drank it gluttonously.

“ I think he is demented,” said Da Santo to Jean

Richard. "Something has overturned his brain—trouble, fear, or brandy. He talks to himself like a madman—and, as you see, he drinks like a beast."

"The poor devil!" replied the captain. "He has tasted hell aboard this schooner, I doubt not, though I have not yet heard the story."

Then he set every living and unwounded man to work. The schooner was lightened of her guns and towed off the sand bar, stern first, by the boats. The dead pirates and Louis de Lacourt were thrown to the eels and fishes. The two vessels were anchored side by side above the sand bar. Jean Richard spent half the night with his wounded, redressing their injuries and doing everything in his power to relieve their torments. Claude le Moyne, whose wounds were slight, held the lantern for him. When the round was completed they left the forecastle and went on deck. The night was chilly and starlit. They found Charles de Montigny asleep beside the culverin and muttering in his sleep. He had refused to enter the cabin. As they stood gazing down at the Governor, Roger de Belot came to them.

"She is sleeping peacefully," he whispered. "She drank some wine and ate something an hour ago. She—did not mean to wound me—that day."

Then he told them what Anne had told him of the voyage. Jean Richard and Le Moyne congratulated him warmly.

"De Montigny cannot be left here all night," said the captain. "He might catch a chill and die of it in his enfeebled condition."

So they lifted him gently and carried him to the cabin. He groaned and muttered and squirmed in their arms, but he did not awake. They laid him in one of the narrow berths which opened off the cabin. His daughter occupied another of these; and all three paused for a moment beside the girl's sleeping place and listened to her peaceful breathing. They returned to the deck. Roger took his stand beside the half-open hatch and the others went aft to the taffrail. For a little while they gazed in silence across the narrow strip of black water at the black hulk of their beloved brig and the yellow blur of the riding light in her rigging.

"I told Jeanne of my love, before we left the fort—and she loves me in return," said Claude le Moyne. "Have we your consent to marry, sir? She made me promise to ask you, at the earliest opportunity. She seems to look upon you as her lawful guardian, sir—as that, at least. We both knew that—that she

would be free of—of him—after to-day's engagement. He is dead. She is free."

"You need not tell me that she loves you," said Jean Richard, laying a hand on the other's shoulder. "I have seen it. I have watched its birth and growth. But what of your love for her, lad? Is it stronger than pride, than ambition, than love of wealth and place? You know nothing of her history but sorrow and shame; and I have heard that you come of a proud family, lad."

His voice was kind and grave, but there was a faint note of tender raillery in it that escaped the ears of Le Moyne.

"I love her more than life itself," replied the Canadian. "The mystery that veils her past does not cause me a moment's anxiety. You will notice, sir, that I do not question you about your friend, her father. It is Jeanne I love. She is beautiful, she is good, she possesses my heart and soul and brain. If such as she was born of ignoble parents, then do I love her all the more for that additional miracle."

Jean Richard embraced him.

"I am her father," he said.

"You?" exclaimed Claude, in amazement.

"Even I, Jean Richard," returned the captain. "I am known to you, at least. Is it worse than you feared?"

Le Moyne recovered himself and grasped the other's hand.

"You are my friend and my captain," he said.

"Men have called me a pirate. France, the land of my birth and my happiness, is forbidden ground to me."

"What of that? I know you for an honourable man—and the bravest I have known."

"But I was an outlaw once; and if not now, it is because I am thought to be dead."

"I care nothing for that, sir. If you committed a crime in the past, I feel satisfied that you were driven to it. If you were ever a pirate, then it was before I had the honour of sailing with you. I have never seen you slay innocent people. You have taken toll of armed ships and despoiled the spoilers."

"The crime for which I was driven from France was not of piracy or bloodshed, but of love. My love, my marriage, my happiness were all in defiance of the King."

"You!" exclaimed Le Moyne, incredulous.

"Even so," returned Jean Richard calmly. "I have not always commanded a brig."

They heard a muffled scream and a wild cry beneath the deck under their feet, then a heavy splash in the black water under the schooner's stern.

"The madman!" cried the voice of Roger, below them. "He has jumped into the river, with his daughter in his arms."

Then they heard the splash of young De Belot's dive into the black water. They kicked off their boots and threw aside their cloaks.

"Not you!" cried Jean Richard. "Your wound! I order you to remain here, for Jeanne's sake. Give the alarm and send a boat for us."

He sprang from the taffrail into the river and struck out swiftly toward the faint sounds of disturbed water. He found Roger de Belot struggling desperately with De Montigny and the girl. The governor was insane, beyond a doubt—or possessed of a devil. He gripped the girl chokingly and tried to sink with her. Roger fought furiously to drag Anne from her father and at the same time to keep them both afloat.

Jean Richard felt for the madman's throat and found it. The girl was torn free from her father's arm.

"Get her away," gasped Jean Richard. "The boat is coming. Shout!"

He held on to the madman, determined to save him in spite of his madness. He heard Roger's cry for assistance, and an answering shout of encouragement from the approaching boat. He gripped De Montigny by the throat and left wrist.

The madman had a knife in the bosom of his shirt. He had found it on the schooner's deck and hidden it. And now he found the hilt of it with his right hand. It was his wild belief that he was struggling in a lake of flames with a devil. Again and again he sank the long blade into the side of the man who was trying to save him. They went down together, without a sound, within oar's length of the boat which had already taken in Roger and the girl.

CHAPTER XXV

UNITED

THE Maliseets recovered the body of Jean Richard before dawn. It was placed in state on the high poop-deck of the brig *Rose*, shrouded in the lily flag of France. The body of John Harwood was carried across from the schooner in its red pall, and laid beside it. Lighted candles were placed at the head and feet of the dead fighters. Frenchmen and Englishmen, Spaniards and Portuguese and Maliseets knelt in prayer. The flames of the candles wavered in the breath of dawn.

In the first clear wash of day the two vessels began to move slowly upstream across a light wind. Le Moyne commanded the brig and Da Santo the schooner. Francis d'Armour and three chieftains of the Maliseets formed a guard on the brig's poop, standing like statues at the head and feet of the dead adventurers. The wind extinguished the flaming candles. The brig's bell tolled continually and minute guns boomed from both vessels.

Roger de Belot paced the cabin of the schooner.

Anne de Montigny lay in one of the narrow berths. A Maliseet woman, who had been brought aboard to attend to her, was with her. The clear light from the east entered by the square windows in the stern and flooded the cabin fore and aft. The Maliseet woman left the berth and came to Roger. She touched his arm and pointed to the berth.

"She wants you," she said.

Roger stooped low over Anne de Montigny, where she lay in her blankets. Her eyes were clear and tender. There was colour in her thin cheeks. She put up her white arms and clasped her hands behind Roger's neck. He stooped lower. Well, what would you! His arms enfolded her, blankets and all.

"I remember," she whispered, her lips against his cheek. "This blessed awakening! It is heaven—after hell! I remember all now—so clearly, so happily. There is no fear in my memories now. Those days of horror and despair grow dim as dreams. I know only that you saved me and that we are both alive—and that you saved me yet again—you and the kind captain. I heard your voices and knew them, though the black water was in my ears and a monster was strangling me."

Roger pressed her to his breast in a paroxysm of

tenderness, of yearning, of gratitude and protection that seemed to rend his heart like agony.

"The past is dead!" he cried.

"It holds no terrors for me—now that I know whence it was leading us," she whispered, with her lips against the scar above his temple. "Even the memories of that terrible struggle in the black waters, in the arms of that monster, do not frighten me now. But who was it? Why did he try to drown me?"

Roger shivered, even in her arms. For a moment he did not answer; but that the colour had slipped from his face she was not aware, for his cheek was against her own.

"It was a madman," he said. "A poor devil who knew not what he was doing."

She was satisfied with that.

"Why is the little bell tolling? Why are the guns firing?" she asked.

"For the brave dead," he whispered against her cheek. "For our great captain and our great comrades."

"Your captain?"

"Jean Richard is dead."

"But I heard his voice, and yours, while I struggled in the river with the madman,"

“ The madman killed him. They sank together—the great Richard and that inglorious fool ! ”

“ May the saints intercede for him before the Throne of Mercy ! ”

“ He was a brave and good man. ”

“ And my father ? Where is he ? ”

“ He, too, is dead. He, too, died fighting. ”

“ Fighting ? ” she breathed faintly. “ My father ! The poor soul ! I did not know he would fight. I thought him a coward—Heaven forgive me ! Yet he fought, you say ? He fought to the death. The poor soul ! ”

“ He fought, yes. He struck without fear. But—he has not been found. It is thought that—he was lost in the river—that he fell overboard in the struggle. ”

“ And I feared that he was losing his reason. And for long I have thought him a coward. It is better that he should die so, fighting the enemies of France, than that he should have lived and gone mad. ”

She wept ; and her tears wet her lover's face.

CHAPTER XXVI

FATHER PONTIN

JEAN RICHARD and his men were buried under the eastern wall of Fort Nashwaak, facing the rising suns, the spent sea-winds, their dear and distant homelands and their hope of resurrection.

Father Pontin, an elderly missionary, arrived at the fort three days after the burial, from his latest field of labour far up beyond the great falls. He was accompanied only by his two red paddlers. His face was thin, daring and weather-beaten. His glance was keen, fearless, yet kindly. He wore moccasins on his feet. His weather-stained cassock was girded about the waist with a stout leather belt from which hung a great cross of iron in leather slings. The cross lay along his left thigh, like a cavalier's sword or a sailor's cutlass. It was a heavy cross—and Father Pontin was of frail physique; but he carried it always aswing at his thin hip, as a fighting man carried his weapon. It was his custom to raise it with both hands to his breast, sometimes to his lips, in moments of danger and perplexity.

The new garrison of Fort Nashwaak had never before been visited by this good priest, but they had heard much of him and his work from the Maliseets. He was known and loved throughout that wilderness. His physical courage, they said, was as high as his virtue. He had once saved an Indian child from the resounding pool below the great falls, at risk of his own life. He had once swum in the icy flood to rescue an old squaw from a floating pan of ice. He had once confronted a big chief who was mad with strong drink, plucked him by the nose and slapped his face. He was a mighty hunter, too, when the cooking-pots of his people were empty.

Now Father Pontin blessed the people of the fort, white and red, and closeted himself with old Geoffrey Devine and Francis d'Armour. From them he heard the full story of Lacourt's treacheries, infamies and death with a grim countenance. His thin face twitched now and again as he listened. Once his right hand went across his body to the top of the cross at his hip as if to the hilt of a sword. But he made no comments.

When the story was finished, Father Pontin went straightway to D'Armour's hut and remained there for several hours with Madame d'Armour and Ysabel,

He left that hut at last with a grey face and downcast eyes. He walked slowly and wearily, as if the weight of the iron on his thigh was almost more than he could carry. He summoned his canoemen with a gesture of the hand ; and they followed him in silence down to the river and took him aboard the brig.

Father Pontin entered the brig's cabin and sent a member of the crew to bring Da Santo, Le Moyne and Roger de Belot to him. The gentlemen obeyed instantly. They found the old man seated with his elbows on the cabin-table and his face between his hands ; but on the moment of their entrance he straightened himself and smiled a greeting.

From Da Santo he heard all that the Spaniard knew of Jean Richard. It was a song of praise and an epic of valour in one. His eyes softened and glowed at the recital and colour returned to his cheeks. In the eyes of Le Moyne and De Belot he read the truth of their comrade's words. He thanked the Spanish adventurer, dismissed him with his blessing and turned to Roger de Belot.

Roger told the good priest of himself—of his parentage, his post in Martinique, his quarrel with Charles de Montigny—everything. His friendship with Jean Richard ; his adventures on the Oromocto ;

the battle with the King's ship in the river ; the winter attack on the Oromocto fort ; the recent engagement with the pirate schooner ; the discovery of De Montigny and his daughter aboard the schooner—all were described swiftly and clearly.

Then Father Pontin blessed and dismissed Roger de Belot.

Claude le Moyne unbosomed himself of the history of his love for Jeanne de Lacourt, who was the daughter of Jean Richard. He, too, received the blessing of the good priest.

An altar was built in the shadows of the high pines, outside the log walls of the fort. It was illuminated by candles set in silver sticks from the lazaret of the pirate schooner. It was decorated with branches of flowering willows. Father Pontin unslung his cross from his side and stood it on the woodland altar. The worshippers knelt on the dry needles of the pines—the women, the soldiers and sailors, the dusky warriors. The song of the birds trilled through and over the trembling accents of the good priest. The souls of the dead were prayed for. For an hour after the worshippers had dispersed, the priest continued to kneel in prayer. His grey face was pressed upon the backs of his hands, his hands clung

to the edge of the woodland altar. At last he raised his head, reached his hands across the altar, and drew the heavy cross to him. With an effort he lifted it, lowered it to his side, and hung it there where a fighting man wears his sword. Then he staggered to his feet.

After two hours with Jeanne, the widow of Louis de Lacourt, Father Pontin sent for Claude le Moyne and walked into the woods with the young Canadian.

"Am I to understand that you are determined to marry this young woman, Jeanne de Lacourt?" he asked.

"She loves me," replied Le Moyne. "Death only can stay me."

"Are you strong, my son? Are you strong in friends and worldly place?"

"Why do you ask, sir?"

"I ask. It is for you to answer, my son."

"I am a Le Moyne, of Quebec. My father is Le Moyne de Trois Isles. My mother, in her own right, is the mistress of five manors. I have six brothers. I am Le Moyne de Sainte Monique, the youngest and least."

"I have heard of your distinguished family, my

son—of your sire's power and your brothers' valour. You are strong, yes; but are you strong enough to make an enemy of the King of France?"

"If need be. I do not understand your reference to His Majesty; but I know my own heart."

"Jeanne's father was the exiled Count de Blois. Her mother was the King's cousin. Are you Le Moyne, of Canada, strong enough to keep the heiress of Blois and Tour and Mount Richard from the clutches of her cousin and guardian, the King of France?"

Claude le Moyne stared at the priest in awed bewilderment.

"But she is the daughter of Jean Richard. He told me so, on the very night that he died by the hands of the madman—and she has told me so many times."

"That is so. Your captain was the exiled count."

"Ah! He told me he was an exile. The Count de Blois!"

"Yes, the great count. They loved well, those two—De Blois and his dear lady. He was great even then, your captain—and true love knoweth no fear. But the King had intended his cousin for a greater even than Jean de Blois—for a greater in

name and lands, at least—for a prince of Spain. But your captain had great friends and great wealth in those days. Fear of these stayed the King's hand for a time. It was not until after Madame's death that the King struck."

"So be it," said Claude le Moyne. "Let the King keep the lands and houses of Blois and Tour and Mount Richard. We, too, love without fear—and my wife will not lack for lands, though they be new, wild lands. Great names! Yes—but the Le Moynes do not shy at names great or small, good or bad. No blood is so high or so low that a Le Moyne cannot match it in his own veins."

"It is well," said the priest. "This wild country is the land of promise and fulfilment for the clean and fearless of heart. Had I my choice, and youth and love on my side, I would be a Le Moyne of New France rather than the King of Old France."

CHAPTER XXVII

HOMEWARD-BOUND

FATHER PONTIN married the lovers in the morning, in the hall of the fort, with windows and doors standing wide open to the wind and sunshine and songs of birds. All the garrison of the fort and all its hangers-on were there, red and white, to see Claude Le Moyne join hands with the widow of Lacourt and Roger de Belot with Anne de Montigny—save Madame d' Armour and Ysabel. A feast followed the weddings, during which the white men drank too much red wine and the red men ate too much meat and white pastry ; but, despite the feast, the brig and the schooner were manned before mid-afternoon. Then Monsieur and Madame Le Moyne de Sainte Monique went aboard the brig, of which Da Santo was now in command, and Monsieur and Madame de Belot went aboard the schooner. A minute before the anchors were lifted from the mud of the river, Father Pontin climbed over the schooner's rail. The cross of dull iron no longer hung on his

thigh. In its place he wore a long rapier with a silver hilt.

"I am for France with you," he said to Roger. "I have left my cross at the fort with Francis d' Armour and my dusky converts. I am too old and too frail a man to struggle longer in this bitter wilderness. I have toiled here manfully—and my reward is a broken heart. And though death even cannot heal my hurt I shall spend my few remaining years of mortal life in physical comfort at least."

Le Moyne was feverishly anxious to get back to his own country far to the north and west, up the great river Saint Lawrence, before any word of his marriage with the King's ward should reach the King.

Roger de Belot and his bride were bound for France and his parents. De Montigny's death had relieved him of all fear of the law.

The two vessels reached the mouth of the river without accident and let go their anchors off the little fort. Both Le Moyne and Roger went ashore. They found Henri Reignault enjoying blissful ignorance of all the tragedies that had transpired up-river in the vicinities of the Oromocto and the Nashwaak. They enlightened him fully concerning these matters and offered him a passage to Quebec or to France.

Henri Reignault was a slow thinker. He sat for several minutes after the tale was told with his chin in one square hand and his gaze fixed straight before him. Then he thrilled to sudden, violent life. The red blood swam to his face and neck and the shadow of it flamed in his eyes. He roared an oath and struck the table a resounding blow with his fist.

"Fooled!" he cried furiously. "That liar, that fine gentleman, has made a fool of me. I have toiled for him—I have toiled for the King—and from the one I receive insult and from the other neglect."

The others tried to calm him; but he silenced them angrily.

"I have been an honest man," he continued. "That was my mistake. I have worked for France and my masters—there was my blunder. I am a poor soldier—kept poor by my honesty. It seems that I have served the King and his fine gentlemen too long. Now I shall serve myself—myself, Henri Reignault. If this country is not for the Maliseets then who has a better right to it than Reignault? Answer me that. You are silent. You are gentlemen—accustomed to being given great possessions—women, loyalty, honour and lands—accustomed to taking what is not given. Go your ways to Quebec

and France without me. This river and these woods are enough for me—and I shall be master here. You have left d'Armour on the Nashwaak? Good! He shall be my lieutenant. That fine gentleman will take orders from me."

"A dangerous game," remarked Le Moyne.

"Dangerous!" retorted the commandant of the fort. "Do you think that I fear danger? Have I not endangered my life a score of times in the service of others? It is so. I have bled for the King. I have bled for Lacourt. Now I serve myself, I bleed for myself; and Monsieur Francis d'Armour, who was Lacourt's tool, shall now be my tool. He will be glad to have an honest master who will not rob him of his daughter's honour."

"The King will send a ship against you," said Roger.

"Do you mean to run to the King with news of this matter?" cried Reignault, glaring.

"No I, my friend," answered Roger, smiling. "He shall hear nothing of your ambitions from me, for I believe you to be the right man to govern this land. You are welcome to every acre of it, as far as I am concerned."

Henri Reignault became calmer at that. He

produced wine for his guests. He patted them on the backs and wished them luck. They left him seated with a great jack in his fist, in a brown study, the eyes of his honest spirit visioning that fine future which, a few months later, he missed realizing by no more than the stroke of a New Englander's cutlass.

The brig and the schooner weighed anchor at dawn and sailed out on to the rolling breast of the great bay. Roger and Anne de Belot stood on the schooner's low poop and watched the barren shores recede and fade.

"I love that wild land, for there I found you and life again," she whispered. "But I fear it—the mystery of it—and the silent gliding of the black river at night."

Roger pressed her hand against his side but did not speak. He too, thought of that gliding river and of the things it hid from the white sun.

Father Pontin came to them there, a frail old man with the long rapier at his side. He laid a hand on Roger's shoulder.

"I have changed my mind," he said, "I must go back. I need my cross, and my dusky children have need of me."

He removed his rapier, scabbard and all, from his belt and gave it to Roger.

"It is a flawless and honest blade," he said. "Take it, my son, with an old man's blessing—and give me the little boat that I may return to my humble work."

Roger accepted the rapier and ordered the schooner's gig to be swung over the side.

Father Pontin thanked him

"I, too, have loved a woman," he said. "I, too, have had a wife. I was a soldier in those days, adventurous, proud and an unreasoning fool. And I had a friend. I quarrelled with my friend and killed him—no, not with that blade. And my wife died. I gave my lands and my son into my brother's keeping and sought forgetfulness in the bosom of Mother Church. I wore a cross where I had worn a sword. In time I was sent to the heathen in this wilderness. I toiled faithfully among the Maliseets for years and my work was blessed. I won their love and trust. I won their souls to Christ. And in time a new Governor came to this country. I watched him covertly. I taught the savages to obey him, for I believed in him. And always I carried the cross, for there was peace in the weight of it on my hip where the gleaming hilt of a sword

had hung so light in the old days. And now I must go back to my cross and my dusky children. Already I have been away from them too long.

The lovers had listened to him with puzzled ears and hearts. Now they went with him to the schooner's side and helped him over the rail into the little boat.

Father Pontin took up the oars and pulled away from the gliding schooner. After a dozen strokes he stood up and raised his right hand high above his head.

"I return to my cross and my children and my son's grave," he cried. "In the old days I was called Robert de Lacourt!"

Then he reseated himself on the thwart and bent to the oars.

Roger de Belot clasped his wife to his side.

"Did you hear?" he cried. "My God! Is there no end to the horrors of that accursed land!"

"But I love it," she answered. "You came to me there—from the land of the dead."

