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THE LADY OF FORT ST. JOHN

**BY
MARY HARTWELL CATHERWOOD**

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF DOLLARD"

**BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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This book I dedicate

TO

TWO ACADIANS OF THE PRESENT DAY;

NATIVES OF NOVA SCOTIA WHO REPRESENT THE LEARNING
AND GENTLE ATTAINMENTS OF THE
NEW ORDER:

DR. JOHN-GEORGE BOURINOT, C. M. G., ETC.
CLERK OF THE CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS, OF
OTTAWA; AND

DR. GEORGE STEWART,
OF QUEBEC.

PREFACE.

How can we care for shadows and types, when we may go back through history and live again with people who actually lived?

Sitting on the height which is now topped by a Martello tower, at St. John in the maritime province of New Brunswick, I saw—not the opposite city, not the lovely bay; but this tragedy of Marie de la Tour, the tragedy "which recalls" (says the Abbé Casgrain in his "Pèlerinage au pays d'Évangéline") "the romances of Walter Scott, and forces one to own that reality is stranger than fiction."

In "Papers relating to the rival chiefs, D'Aulnay and La Tour," of the Massachusetts Historical Collection, vol. vii., may be found these prefatory remarks:—

"There is a romance of History as well as a History of Romance. To the former class belong many incidents in the early periods of New England and its adjacent colonies. The following papers ... refer to two persons, D'Aulnay and La Tour, ... individuals of respectable intellect and education, of noble families and large fortune. While the first was a zealous and efficient supporter of the Roman Church, the second was less so, from his frequent connection with others of a different faith. The scene of their ... prominent actions, their exhibition of various passions and talents, their conquests and defeats, their career and end, as exerting an influence on their associates as well as themselves, on other communities as well as their own—was laid in Nova Scotia. This phrase then comprised a territory vastly more extensive than it does now as a British Province. It embraced not only its present boundaries, which were long termed Acadia, but also about two thirds of the State of Maine."

It startles the modern reader, in examining documents of the French archives relating to the colonies, to come upon a letter from Louis XIII. to his beloved D'Aulnay de Charnisay, thanking that governor of Acadia for his good service at Fort St. John. Thus was that great race who first trod down the wilderness on this continent continually and cruelly hampered by the man who sat on the throne in France.

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LADY OF FORT ST. JOHN.

PRELUDE.

[Pg 1]

AT THE HEAD OF THE BAY OF FUNDY.

The Atlantic rushed across a mile or two of misty beach, boring into all its channels in the neck of Acadia. Twilight and fog blurred the landscape, but the eye could trace a long swell of earth rising gradually from the bay, through marshes, to a summit with a small stockade on its southern slope. Sentinels pacing within the stockade felt the weird influence of that bald land. The guarded spot seemed an island in a sea of vapor and spring night was bringing darkness upon it.

The stockade inclosed a single building of rough logs clumsily put together, and chinked with the hard red soil. An unhewn wall divided the house into two rooms, and in one room were gathered less than a dozen men-at-arms. Their officer lay in one of the cupboard-like bunks, with his hands clasped under his head. Some of the men were already asleep; others sat by the hearth, rubbing their weapons or spreading some garment to dry. A door in the partition opened, and the wife of one of the men came from the inner room.

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"Good-night, madame," she said.

"Good-night, Zélie," answered a voice within.

"If you have further need of me, you will call me, madame?"

"Assuredly. Get to your rest. To-morrow we may have stormy weather for our voyage home."

The woman closed the door, and the face of the one who had hearkened to her turned again to the fireplace. It was a room repeating the men's barrack in hewed floor, loophole windows, and rough joists.

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This frontier outpost on the ridge since called Beausejour was merely a convenient halting-place for one of the lords of Acadia. It stood on a detached spot of his large seigniory, which he had received with other portions of western Acadia in exchange for his grant of Cape Sable.

Though in his early thirties, Charles de la Tour had seen long service in the New World. Seldom has a man from central France met the northern cold and sea air with so white a favor. His clean-shaven skin and the sunny undecided color of his hair were like a child's. Part of his armor had been unbuckled, and lay on the floor near him. He sat in a chair of twisted boughs, made of refuse from trees his men had dragged out of the neighboring forest for the building of the outpost. His wife sat on a pile of furs beside his knee. Her Huguenot cap lay on the shelf above the fire. She wore a black gown slashed in the sleeves with white, and a kerchief of lace pushed from her throat. Her black hair, which Zélie had braided, hung down in two ropes to the floor.

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"How soon, monsieur," she asked, "can you return to Fort St. John?"

"With all speed possible, Marie. Soon, if we can work the miracle of moving a peace-loving man like Denys to action."

"Nicholas Denys ought to take part with you."

"Yet he will scarce do it."

"The king-favored governor of Acadia will some time turn and push him as he now pushes you."

"D'Aulnay hath me at sore straits," confessed La Tour, staring at the flame, "since he has cut off from me the help of the Bostonnais."

"They were easily cut off," said Marie. "Monsieur, those Huguenots of the colonies were never loving friends of ours. Their policy hath been to weaken this province by helping the quarrel betwixt D'Aulnay and you. Now that D'Aulnay has strength at court, and has persuaded the king to declare you an outlaw, the Bostonnais think it wise to withdraw their hired soldiers from you. We have not offended the Bostonnais as allies; we have only gone down in the world."

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La Tour stirred uneasily.

"I dread that D'Aulnay may profit by this hasty journey I make to northern Acadia, and again attack the fort in my absence."

"He hath once found a woman there who could hold it," said Marie, checking a laugh.

La Tour moved his palm over her cheek. Within his mind the province of Acadia lay spread from Penobscot River to the Island of Sable, and from the southern tip of the peninsula now called Nova Scotia nearly to the mouth of the St. Lawrence. This domain had been parceled in grants: the north to Nicholas Denys; the centre and west to D'Aulnay de Charnisay; and the south, with posts on the western coast, to Charles de la Tour. Being Protestant in faith, La Tour had no influence at the court of Louis XIII. His grant had been confirmed to him from his father. He had held it against treason to France; and his loyal service, at least, was regarded until D'Aulnay de Charnisay became his enemy. Even in that year of grace 1645, before Acadia was diked by home-making Norman peasants or watered by their parting tears, contending forces had begun to trample it. Two feudal barons fought each other on the soil of the New World.

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"All things failing me"—La Tour held out his wrists, and looked at them with a sharp smile.

"Let D'Aulnay shake a warrant, monsieur. He must needs have you before he can carry you in chains to France."

She seized La Tour's hands, with a swift impulse of atoning to them for the thought of such indignity, and kissed his wrists. He set his teeth on a trembling lip.

"I should be a worthless, aimless vagrant without you, Marie. You are young, and I give you fatigue and heart-sickening peril instead of jewels and merry company."

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"The merriest company for us at present, monsieur, are the men of our honest garrison. If Edelwald, who came so lately, complains not of this New World life, I should endure it merrily enough. And you know I seldom now wear the jewels belonging to our house. Our chief jewel is buried in the ground."

She thought of a short grave wrapped in fogs near Fort St. John; of fair curls and sweet childish limbs, and a mouth shouting to send echoes through the river gorge; of scamperings on the flags of the hall; and of the erect and princely carriage of that diminutive presence the men had called "my little lord."

"But it is better for the boy that he died, Marie," murmured La Tour. "He has no part in these times. He might have survived us to see his inheritance stripped from him."

They were silent until Marie said, "You have a long march before you to-morrow, monsieur."

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"Yes; we ought to throw ourselves into these mangers," said La Tour.

One wall was lined with bunks like those in the outer room. In the lower row travelers' preparations were already made for sleeping.

"I am yet of the mind, monsieur," observed Marie, "that you should have made this journey entirely by sea."

"It would cost me too much in time to round Cape Sable twice. Nicholas Denys can furnish ship as well as men, if he be so minded. My lieutenant in arms next to Edelwald," said La Tour, smiling over her, "my equal partner in troubles, and my lady of Fort St. John will stand for my honor and prosperity until I return."

Marie smiled back.

"D'Aulnay has a fair wife, and her husband is rich, and favored by the king, and has got himself made governor of Acadia in your stead. She sits in her own hall at Port Royal: but poor Madame D'Aulnay! She has not thee!"

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At this La Tour laughed aloud. The ring of his voice, and the clang of his breastplate which fell over on the floor as he arose, woke an answering sound. It did not come from the outer room, where scarcely a voice stirred among the sleepy soldiery, but from the top row of bunks. Marie turned white at this child wail soothed by a woman's voice.

"What have we here?" exclaimed La Tour.

"Monsieur, it must be a baby!"

"Who has broken into this post with a baby? There may be men concealed overhead."

He grasped his pistols, but no men-at-arms appeared with the haggard woman who crept down from her hiding-place near the joists.

"Are you some spy sent from D'Aulnay?" inquired La Tour.

"Monsieur, how can you so accuse a poor outcast mother!" whispered Marie.

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The door in the partition was flung wide, and the young officer appeared with men at his back.

"Have you found an ambush, Sieur Charles?"

"We have here a listener, Edelwald," replied La Tour, "and there may be more in the loft above."

Several men sprang up the bunks and moved some puncheons overhead. A light was raised under the dark roof canopy, but nothing rewarded its search. The much-bedraggled woman was young,

with falling strands of silken hair, which she wound up with one hand while holding the baby. Marie took the poor wailer from her with a divine motion and carried it to the hearth.

"Who brought you here?" demanded La Tour of the girl.

She cowered before him, but answered nothing. Her presence seemed to him a sinister menace against even his obscurest holdings in Acadia. The stockade was easily entered, for La Tour was unable to maintain a garrison there. All that open country lay sodden with the breath of the sea. From whatever point she had approached, La Tour could scarcely believe her feet came tracking the moist red clay alone.

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"Will you give no account of yourself?"

"You must answer monsieur," encouraged Marie, turning, from her cares with the child. It lay unwound from its misery on Marie's knees, watching the new ministering power with accepting eyes. Feminine and piteous as the girl was, her dense resistance to command could only vex a soldier.

"Put her under guard," he said to his officer.

"And Zélie must look to her comfort," added Marie.

"Whoever she may be," declared La Tour, "she hath heard too much to go free of this place. She must be sent in the ship to Fort St. John, and guarded there."

"What else could be done, indeed?" asked Marie. "The child would die of exposure here."

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The prisoner was taken to the other hearth; and the young officer, as he closed the door, half smiled to hear his lady murmur over the wretched little outcast, as she always murmured to ailing creatures,—

"Let mother help you."

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I.

AN ACADIAN FORTRESS.

At the mouth of the river St. John an island was lashed with drift, and tide-terraces alongshore recorded how furiously the sea had driven upon the land. There had been a two days' storm on the Bay of Fundy, subsiding to the clearest of cool spring evenings. An amber light lay on the visible world. The forest on the west was yet too bare of leaf buds to shut away sunset.

A month later the headlands would be lined distinctly against a blue and quickening sky by freshened air and light and herbage. Two centuries and a half later, long streaks of electric light would ripple on that surface, and great ships stand at ease there, and ferry-boats rush back and forth. But in this closing dusk it reflected only the gray and yellow vaporous breath of April, and shaggy edges of a wilderness. The high shores sank their shadows farther and farther from the water's edge.

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Fort St. John was built upon a gradual ascent of rocks which rose to a small promontory on the south side of the river. There were four bastions guarded with cannon, the northeast bastion swelling above its fellows in a round turret topped with battlements. On this tower the flag of France hung down its staff against the evening sky, for there was scarcely any motion of the air. That coast lay silent like a pictured land, except a hint of falls above in the river. It was ebb tide; the current of the St. John set out toward the sea instead of rushing back on its own channel; and rocks swallowed at flood now broke the surface.

A plume of smoke sprang from one bastion, followed by the rolling thunder of a cannon shot. From a small ship in the bay a gun replied to this salute. She stood, gradually clear of a headland, her sails hanging torn and one mast broken, and sentinel and cannoneer in the bastion saw that she was lowering a boat. They called to people in the fortress, and all voices caught the news:—

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"Madame has come at last!"

Life stirred through the entire inclosure with a jar of closing doors and running feet.

Though not a large fortification, St. John was well and compactly built of cemented stone. A row of hewed log-barracks stood against the southern wall, ample for all the troops La Tour had been able to muster in prosperous times. There was a stone vault for ammunition. A well, a mill and great stone oven, and a storehouse for beaver and other skins were between the barracks and the commandant's tower built massively into the northeast bastion. This structure gave La Tour the advantage of a high lookout, though it was much smaller than a castle he had formerly held at La Hève. The interior accommodated itself to such compactness, the lower floor having only one entrance, and windows looking into the area of the fort, while the second floor was lighted through deep loopholes.

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A drum began to beat, a tall fellow gave the word of command, and the garrison of Fort St. John drew up in line facing the gate. A sentinel unbarred and set wide both inner and outer leaves,

and a cheer burst through the deep-throated gateway, and was thrown back from the opposite shore, from forest and river windings. Madame La Tour, with two women attendants, was seen coming up from the water's edge, while two men pushed off with the boat.

She waved her hand in reply to the shout.

The tall soldier went down to meet her, and paused, bareheaded, to make the salutation of a subaltern to his military superior. She responded with the same grave courtesy. But as he drew nearer she noticed him whitening through the dusk.

"All has gone well, Klussman, at Fort St. John, since your lord left?"

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"Madame," he said with a stammer, "the storm made us anxious about you."

"Have you seen D'Aulnay?"

"No, madame."

"You look haggard, Klussman."

"If I look haggard, madame, it must come from seeing two women follow you, when I should see only one."

He threw sharp glances behind her, as he took her hand to lead her up the steep path. Marie's attendant was carrying the baby, and she lifted it for him to look at, the hairs on her upper lip moved by a good-natured smile. Klussman's scowl darkened his mountain-born fairness.

"I would rather, indeed, be bringing more men to the fort instead of more women," said his lady, as they mounted the slope. "But this one might have perished in the stockade where we found her, and your lord not only disliked her, as you seem to do, but he held her in suspicion. In a manner, therefore, she is our prisoner, though never went prisoner so helplessly with her captors."

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"Yes, any one might take such a creature," said Klussman.

"Those are no fit words to speak, Klussman."

He was unready with his apology, however, and tramped on without again looking behind. Madame La Tour glanced at her ship, which would have to wait for wind and tide to reach the usual mooring.

"Did you tell me you had news?" she was reminded to ask him.

"Madame, I have some news, but nothing serious."

"If it be nothing serious, I will have a change of garments and my supper before I hear it. We have had a hard voyage."

"Did my lord send any new orders?"

"None, save to keep this poor girl about the fort; and that is easily obeyed, since we can scarce do otherwise with her."

"I meant to ask in the first breath how he fared in the outset of his expedition."

"With a lowering sky overhead, and wet red clay under-foot. But I thanked Heaven, while we were tossing with a broken mast, that he was at least on firm land and moving to his expectations."

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They entered the gateway, Madame La Tour's cheeks tingling richly from the effort of climbing. She saluted her garrison, and her garrison saluted her, each with a courteous pride in the other, born of the joint victory they had won over D'Aulnay de Charnisay when he attacked the fort. Not a man broke rank until she entered her hall. There was a tidiness about the inclosure peculiar to places inhabited by women. It added grace even to military appointments.

"You miss the swan, madame," noted Klussman. "Le Rossignol is out again."

"When did she go?"

"The night after my lord and you sailed northward. She goes each time in the night, madame."

"And she is still away?"

"Yes, madame."

"And this is all you know of her?"

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"Yes, madame. She went, and has not yet come back."

"But she always comes back safely. Though I fear," said Madame La Tour on the threshold, "the poor maid will some time fall into harm."

He opened the door, and stood aside, saying under his breath, "I would call a creature like that a witch instead of a maid."

"I will send for you, Klussman, when I have refreshed myself."

"Yes, madame."

The other women filed past him, and entered behind his lady.

The Swiss soldier folded his arms, staring hard at that crouching vagrant brought from Beausejour. She had a covering over her face, and she held it close, crowding on the heels in front of her as if she dared not meet his eye.

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II.

LE ROSSIGNOL.

A girlish woman was waiting for Marie within the hall, and the two exchanged kisses on the cheek with sedate and tender courtesy.

"Welcome home, madame."

"Home is more welcome to me because I find you in it, Antonia. Has anything unusual happened in the fortress while I have been setting monsieur on his way?"

"This morning, about dawn, I heard a great tramping of soldiers in the hall. One of the women told me prisoners had been brought in."

"Yes. The Swiss said he had news. And how has the Lady Dorinda fared?"

"Well, indeed. She has described to me three times the gorgeous pageant of her marriage."

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They had reached the fireplace, and Marie laughed as she warmed her hands before a pile of melting logs.

"Give our sea-tossed bundle and its mother a warm seat, Zélie," she said to her woman.

The unknown girl was placed near the hearth corner, and constrained to take upon her knees an object which she held indifferently. Antonia's eyes rested on her, detecting her half-concealed face, with silent disapproval.

"We found a child on this expedition."

"It hath a stiffened look, like a papoose," observed Antonia. "Is it well in health?"

"No; poor baby. Attend to the child," said Marie sternly to the mother; and she added, "Zélie must go directly with me to my chests before she waits on me, and bring down garments for it to this hearth."

"Let me this time be your maid," said Antonia.

"You may come with me and be my resolution, Antonia; for I have to set about the unlocking of boxes which hold some sacred clothes."

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"I never saw you lack courage, madame, since I have known you."

"Therein have I deceived you then," said Marie, throwing her cloak on Zélie's arm, "for I am a most cowardly creature in my affections, Madame Bronck."

They moved toward the stairs. Antonia was as perfect as a slim and blue-eyed stalk of flax. She wore the laced bodice and small cap of New Holland. Her exactly spoken French denoted all the neat appointments of her life. This Dutch gentlewoman had seen much of the world; having traveled from Fort Orange to New Amsterdam, from New Amsterdam to Boston, and from Boston with Madame La Tour to Fort St. John in Acadia. The three figures ascended in a line the narrow stairway which made a diagonal band from lower to upper corner of the remote hall end. Zélie walked last, carrying her lady's cloak. At the top a little light fell on them through a loophole.

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"Was Mynheer La Tour in good heart for his march?" inquired Antonia, turning from the waifs brought back to the expedition itself.

"Stout-hearted enough; but the man to whom he goes is scarce to be counted on. We Protestant French are all held alien by Catholics of our blood. Edelwald will move Denys to take arms with us, if any one can. My lord depends much upon Edelwald. This instant," said Marie with a laugh, "I find the worst of all my discomforts these disordered garments."

The stranger left by the fire gazed around the dim place, which was lighted only by high windows in front. The mighty hearth, inclosed by settles, was like a roseate side-chamber to the hall. Outside of this the stone-paved floor spread away unevenly. She turned her eyes from the arms of La Tour over the mantel to trace seamed and footworn flags, and noticed in the distant corner, at the bottom of the stairs, that they gave way to a trapdoor of timbers. This was fastened down with iron bars, and had a huge ring for its handle. Her eyes rested on it in fear, betwixt the separated settles.

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But it was easily lost sight of in the fire's warmth. She had been so chilled by salt air and spray as

to crowd close to the flame and court scorching. Her white face kindled with heat. She threw back her mufflers, and the comfort of the child occurring to her, she looked at its small face through a tunnel of clothing. Its exceeding stillness awoke but one wish, which she dared not let escape in words.

These stone walls readily echoed any sound. So scantily furnished was the great hall that it could not refrain from echoing. There were some chairs and tables not of colonial pattern, and a buffet holding silver tankards and china; but these seemed lost in space. Opposite the fireplace hung two portraits,—one of Charles La Tour's father, the other of a former maid of honor at the English court. The ceiling of wooden panels had been brought from La Tour's castle at Cape Sable; it answered the flicker of the fire with lines of faded gilding.

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The girl dropped her wrappings on the bench, and began to unroll the baby, as if curious about its state.

"I believe it *is* dead!" she whispered.

But the clank of a long iron latch which fastened the outer door was enough to deflect her interest from the matter. She cast her cloak over the baby, and held it loosely on her knees, with its head to the fire. When the door shut with a crash, and some small object scurried across the stone floor, the girl looked out of her retreat with fear. Her eyelids and lips fell wider apart. She saw a big-headed brownie coming to the hearth, clad, with the exception of its cap, in the dun tints of autumn woods. This creature, scarcely more than two feet high, had a woman's face, of beak-like formation, projecting forward. She was as bright-eyed and light of foot as any bird. Moving within the inclosure of the settles, she hopped up with a singular power of vaulting, and seated herself, stretching toward the fire a pair of spotted seal moccasins. These were so small that the feet on which they were laced seemed an infant's, and sorted strangely with the mature keen face above them. Youth, age, and wise sylvan life were brought to a focus in that countenance.

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To hear such a creature talk was like being startled by spoken words from a bird.

"I'm Le Rossignol," she piped out, when she had looked at the vagrant girl a few minutes, "and I can read your name on your face. It's Marguerite."

The girl stared helplessly at this midget seer.

"You're the same Marguerite that was left on the Island of Demons a hundred years ago. You may not know it, but you're the same. I know that downward look, and soft, crying way, and still tongue, and the very baby on your knees. You never bring any good, and words are wasted on you. Don't smile under your sly mouth, and think you are hiding anything from Le Rossignol."

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The girl crouched deeper into her clothes, until those unwinking eyes relieved her by turning with indifference toward the chimney.

"I have no pity for any Marguerite," Le Rossignol added, and she tossed from her head the entire subject with a cap made of white gull breasts. A brush of red hair stood up in thousands of tendrils, exaggerating by its nimbus the size of her upper person. Never had dwarf a sweeter voice. If she had been compressed in order to produce melody, her tones were compensation, enough. She made lilting sounds while dangling her feet to the blaze, as if she thought in music.

Le Rossignol was so positive a force that she seldom found herself overborne by the presence of large human beings. The only man in the fortress who saw her without superstition was Klussman. He inclined to complain of her antics, but not to find magic in her flights and returns. At that period deformity was the symbol of witchcraft. Blame fell upon this dwarf when toothache or rheumatic pains invaded the barracks, especially if the sufferer had spoken against her unseen excursions with her swan. Protected from childhood by the family of La Tour, she had grown an autocrat, and bent to nobody except her lady.

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"Where is my clavier?" exclaimed Le Rossignol. "I heard a tune in the woods which I must get out of my clavier,—a green tune, the color of quickening lichens; a dropping tune with sap in it; a tune like the wind across inland lakes."

She ran along the settle, and thrust her head around its high back.

Zélie, with white garments upon one arm, was setting solidly forth down the uncovered stairs, when the dwarf arrested her by a cry.

"Go back, heavy-foot,—go back and fetch me my clavier."

"Mademoiselle the nightingale has suddenly returned," muttered Zélie, ill pleased.

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"Am I not always here when my lady comes home? I demand the box wherein my instrument is kept."

"What doth your instrument concern me? Madame has sent me to dress the baby."

"Will you bring my clavier?"

The dwarf's scream was like the weird high note of a wind-harp. It had its effect on Zélie. She turned back, though muttering against the overruling of her lady's commands by a creature like a bat, who could probably send other powers than a decent maid to bring claviers.

"And where shall I find it?" she inquired aloud. "Here have I been in the fortress scarce half an hour, after all but shipwreck, and I must search out the belongings of people who do naught but idle."

"Find it where you will. No one hath the key but myself. The box may stand in Madame Marie's apartment, or it may be in my own chamber. Such matters are blown out of my head by the wind along the coast. Make haste to fetch it so I can play when Madame Marie appears."

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Le Rossignol drew herself up the back of the settle, and perched at ease on the angle farthest from the fire. She beat her heels lightly against her throne, and hummed, with her face turned from the listless girl, who watched all her antics.

Zélie brought the instrument case, unlocked it, and handed up a crook-necked mandolin and its small ivory plectrum to her tyrant. At once the hall was full of tinkling melody. The dwarf's threadlike fingers ran along the neck of the mandolin, and as she made the ivory disk quiver among its strings her head swayed in rapturous singing.

Zélie forgot the baby. The garments intended for its use were spread upon the settle near the fire. She folded her arms, and wagged her head with Le Rossignol's. But while the dwarf kept an eye on the stairway, watching like a lover for the appearance of Madame La Tour, the outer door again clanked, and Klussman stepped into the hall. His big presence had instant effect on Le Rossignol. Her music tinkled louder and faster. The playing sprite, sitting half on air, gamboled and made droll faces to catch his eye. Her vanity and self-satisfaction, her pliant gesture and skillful wild music, made her appear some soulless little being from the woods who mocked at man's tense sternness.

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Klussman took little notice of any one in the hall, but waited by the closed door so relentless a sentinel that Zélie was reminded of her duty. She made haste to bring perfumed water in a basin, and turned the linen on the settle. She then took the child from its mother's limp hands, and exclaimed and muttered under her breath as she turned it on her knees.

"What hast thou done to it since my lady left thee?" inquired Zélie sharply. But she got no answer from the girl.

Unrewarded for her minstrelsy by a single look from the Swiss, Le Rossignol quit playing, and made a fist of the curved instrument to shake at him, and let herself down the back of the settle. She sat on the mandolin box in shadow, vaguely sulking, until Madame La Tour, fresh from her swift attiring, stood at the top of the stairway. That instant the half-hid mandolin burst into quavering melodies.

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"Thou art back again, Nightingale?" called the lady, descending.

"Yes, Madame Marie."

"Madame!" exclaimed Klussman, and as his voice escaped repression it rang through the hall. He advanced, but his lady lifted her finger to hold him back.

"Presently, Klussman. The first matter in hand is to rebuke this runaway."

Marie's firm and polished chin, the contour of her glowing mouth, and the kindling beauty of her eyes were forever fresh delights to Le Rossignol. The dwarf watched the shapely and majestic woman moving down the hall.

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"Madame," besought Zélie, looking anxiously around the end of the settle. But she also was obliged to wait. Marie extended a hand to the claws of Le Rossignol, who touched it with her beak.

"Thou hast very greatly displeased me."

"Yes, Madame Marie," said the culprit, with resignation.

"How many times have you set all our people talking about these witch flights on the swan, and sudden returns after dark?"

"I forget, Madame Marie."

"In all seriousness thou shalt be well punished for this last," said the lady severely.

"I was punished before the offense. Your absence punished me, Madame Marie."

"A bit of adroit flattery will not turn aside discipline. The smallest vassal in the fort shall know that. A day in the turret, with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, may put thee in better liking to stay at home."

"Yes, Madame Marie," assented the dwarf, with smiles.

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"And I may yet find it in my heart to have that swan's neck wrung."

"Shubenacadie's neck! Oh, Madame Marie, wring mine! It would be the death of me if Shubenacadie died. Consider how long I have had him. And his looks, my lady! He is such a pretty bird."

"We must mend that dangerous beauty of his. If these flights stop not, I will have his wings

clipped."

"His satin wings,—his glistening, polished wings," mourned Le Rossignol, "tipped with angel-finger feathers! Oh, Madame Marie, my heart's blood would run out of his quills!"

"It is a serious breach in the discipline of this fortress for even you to disobey me constantly," said the lady, again severely, though she knew her lecture was wasted on the human brownie.

Le Rossignol poked and worried the mandolin with antennæ-like fingers, and made up a contrite face.

The dimness of the hall had not covered Klussman's large pallor. The emotions of the Swiss passed over the outside of his countenance, in bulk like himself. His lady often compared him to a noble young bullock or other well-conditioned animal. There was in Klussman much wholesomeness and excuse for existence. [Pg 36]

"Now, Klussman," said Marie, meeting her lieutenant with the intentness of one used to sudden military emergencies. He trod straight to the fireplace, and pointed at the strange girl, who hid her face.

"Madame, I have come in to speak of a thing you ought to know. Has that woman told you her name?"

"No, she hath not. She hath kept a close tongue ever since we found her at the outpost."

"She ever had a close tongue, madame, but she works her will in silence. It hath been no good will to me, and it will be no good will to the Fort of St. John."

"Who is she, Klussman?"

"I know not what name she bears now, but two years since she bore the name of Marguerite Klussman." [Pg 37]

"Surely she is not your sister?"

"No, madame. She is only my wife." He lifted his lip, and his blue eyes stared at the muffled culprit.

"We knew not you had a wife when you entered our service, Klussman."

"Nor had I, madame. D'Aulnay de Charnisay had already taken her."

"Then this woman does come from D'Aulnay de Charnisay?"

"Yes, madame! And if you would have my advice, I say put her out of the gate this instant, and let her find shelter with our Indians above the falls."

"Madame," exclaimed Zélie, lifting the half-nude infant, and thrusting it before her mistress with importunity which could wait no longer, "of your kindness look at this little creature. With all my chafing and sprinkling I cannot find any life in it. That girl hath let it die on her knees, and hath not made it known!" [Pg 38]

Klussman's glance rested on the body with that abashed hatred which a man condemns in himself when its object is helpless.

"It is D'Aulnay's child," he muttered, as if stating abundant reason for its taking off.

"I have brought an agent from D'Aulnay and D'Aulnay's child into our fortress," said Madame La Tour, speaking toward Marguerite's silent cover, under which the girl made no sign of being more than a hidden animal. Her stern face traveled from mother back to tiny body.

There is nothing more touching than the emaciation of a baby. Its sunken temples and evident cheekbones, the line of its jaw, the piteous parted lips and thin neck were all reflected in Marie's eyes. Her entire figure softened, and passionate motherhood filled her. She took the still pliant shape from Zélie, held it in her hands, and finally pressed it against her bosom. No sign of mourning came from the woman called its mother. [Pg 39]

"This baby is no enemy of ours," trembled Madame La Tour. "I will not have it even reproached with being the child of our enemy. It is my little dead lad come again to my bosom. How soft are his dear limbs! And this child died for lack of loving while I went with empty arms! Have you suffered, dear? It is all done now. Mother will give you kisses,—kisses. Oh, baby,—baby!"

Klussman turned away, and Zélie whimpered. But Le Rossignol thrust her head around the settle to see what manner of creature it was over which Madame Marie sobbed aloud. [Pg 40]

III.

FATHER ISAAC JOGUES.

The child abandoned by La Tour's enemy had been carried to the upper floor, and the woman

sent with a soldier's wife to the barracks; yet Madame La Tour continued to walk the stone flags, feeling that small skeleton on her bosom, and the pressure of death on the air.

Her Swiss lieutenant opened the door and uttered a call. Presently, with a clatter of hoofs on the pavement, and a mighty rasping of the half-tree which they dragged, in burst eight Sable Island ponies, shaggy fellows, smaller than mastiffs, yet with large heads. The settles were hastily cleared away for them, and they swept their load to the hearth. As soon as their chain was unhooked, these fairy horses shot out again, and their joyful neighing could be heard as they scampered around the fort to their stable. Two men rolled the log into place, set a table and three chairs, and one returned to the cook-house while the other spread the cloth.

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Claude La Tour and his wife, the maid of honor, seemed to palpitate in their frames, with the flickering expressions of firelight. The silent company of these two people was always enjoyed by Le Rossignol. She knew their disappointments, and liked to have them stir and sigh. In the daytime, the set courtier smile was sadder than a pine forest. But the chimney's huge throat drew in the hall's heavy influences, and when the log was fired not a corner escaped its glow. The man who laid the cloth lighted candles in a silver candelabrum and set it on the table, and carried a brand to waxlights which decorated the buffet.

These cheerful preparations for her evening meal recalled Madame La Tour to the garrison's affairs. Her Swiss lieutenant yet stood by, his arms and chin settled sullenly on his breast; reluctant to go out and pass the barrack door where his wife was sheltered.

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"Are sentinels set for the night, Klussman?" inquired the lady.

He stood erect, and answered, "Yes, madame."

"I will not wait for my supper before I hear your news. Discharge it now. I understand the grief you bear, my friend. Your lord will not forget the faithfulness you show toward us."

"Madame, if I may speak again, put that woman out of the gate. If she lingers around, I may do her some hurt when I have a loaded piece in my hand. She makes me less a man."

"But, Klussman, the Sieur de la Tour, whose suspicions of her you have justified, strictly charged that we restrain her here until his return. She has seen and heard too much of our condition."

"Our Indians would hold her safe enough, madame."

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"Yet she is a soft, feeble creature, and much exhausted. Could she bear their hard living?"

"Madame, she will requite whoever shelters her with shame and trouble. If D'Aulnay has turned her forth, she would willingly buy back his favor by opening this fortress to him. If he has not turned her forth, she is here by his command. I have thought out all these things; and, madame, I shall say nothing more, if you prefer to risk yourself in her hands instead of risking her with the savages."

The dwarf's mandolin trembled a mere whisper of sound. She leaned her large head against the settle and watched the Swiss denounce his wife.

"You speak good military sense," said the lady, "yet there is monsieur's command. And I cannot bring myself to drive that exhausted creature to a cold bed in the woods. We must venture—we cannot do less—to let her rest a few days under guard. Now let me hear your news."

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"It was only this, madame. Word was brought in that two priests from Montreal were wandering above the falls and trying to cross the St. John in order to make their way to D'Aulnay's fort at Penobscot. So I set after them and brought them in, and they are now in the keep, waiting your pleasure."

"Doubtless you did right," hesitated Madame La Tour. "Even priests may be working us harm, so hated are we of Papists. But have them out directly, Klussman. We must not be rigorous. Did they bear any papers?"

"No, madame; and they said they had naught to do with D'Aulnay, but were on a mission to the Abenakis around Penobscot, and had lost their course and wandered here. One of them is that Father Isaac Jogues who was maimed by the Mohawks, when he carried papistry among them, and the other his *donné*—a name these priests give to any man who of his own free will goes with them to be servant of the mission."

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"Bring them out of the keep," said Madame La Tour.

The Swiss walked with ringing foot toward the stairway, and dropped upon one knee to unbar the door in the pavement. He took a key from his pocket and turned it in the lock, and, as he lifted the heavy leaf of beams and crosspieces, his lady held over the darkness a candle, which she had taken from one of the buffet sconces. Out of the vault rose a chill breath from which the candle flame recoiled.

"Monsieur," she spoke downward, "will you have the goodness to come up with your companion?"

Her voice resounded in the hollow; and some movement occurred below as soft-spoken answer was made:—

"We come, madame."

A cassocked Jesuit appeared under the light, followed by a man wearing the ordinary dress of a French colonist. They ascended the stone steps, and Klussman replaced the door with a clank which echoed around the hall. Marie gave him the candle, and with clumsy touch he fitted it to the sconce while she led her prisoners to the fire. The Protestant was able to dwell with disapproval on the Jesuit's black gown, though it proved the hard service of a missionary priest; the face of Father Jogues none but a savage could resist.

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His downcast eyelids were like a woman's, and so was his delicate mouth. The cheeks, shading inward from their natural oval, testified to a life of hardship. His full and broad forehead, bordered by a fringe of hair left around his tonsure, must have overbalanced his lower face, had that not been covered by a short beard, parted on the upper lip and peaked at the end. His eyebrows were well marked, and the large-orbed eyes seemed so full of smiling meditation that Marie said to herself, "This lovely, woman-looking man hath the presence of an angel, and we have chilled him in our keep!"

"Peace be with you, madame," spoke Father Jogues.

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"Monsieur, I crave your pardon for the cold greeting you have had in this fortress. We are people who live in perils, and we may be over-suspicious."

"Madame, I have no complaint to bring against you."

Both men were shivering, and she directed them to places on the settle. They sat where the vagrant girl had huddled. Father Jogues warmed his hands, and she noticed how abruptly serrated by missing or maimed fingers was their tapered shape. The man who had gone out to the cook-house returned with platters, and in passing the Swiss lieutenant gave him a hurried word, on which the Swiss left the hall. The two men made space for Father Jogues at their lady's board, and brought forward another table for his *donné*.

"Good friends," said Marie, "this Huguenot fare is offered you heartily, and I hope you will as heartily take it, thereby excusing the hunger of a woman who has just come in from seafaring."

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"Madame," returned the priest, "we have scarcely seen civilized food since leaving Montreal, and we need no urging to enjoy this bounty. But, if you permit, I will sit here beside my brother Lalande."

"As you please," she answered, glancing at the plain young Frenchman in colonial dress with suspicion that he was made the excuse for separating Romanist and Protestant.

Father Jogues saw her glance and read her thought, and silently accused himself of cowardice for shrinking, in his maimed state, from her table with the instincts of a gentle-born man. He explained, resting his hand upon the chair which had been moved from the lady's to his servant's table:—

"We have no wish to be honored above our desert, madame. We are only humble missionaries, and often while carrying the truth have been thankful for a meal of roots or berries in the woods."

"Your humility hurts me, monsieur. On the Acadian borders we have bitter enmities, but the fort of La Tour shelters all faiths alike. We can hardly atone to so good a man for having thrust him into our keep."

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Father Jogues shook his head, and put aside this apology with a gesture. The queen of France had knelt and kissed his mutilated hands, and the courtiers of Louis had praised his martyrdom. But such ordeals of compliment were harder for him to endure than the teeth and knives of the Mohawks.

As soon as Le Rossignol saw the platters appearing, she carried her mandolin to the lowest stair step and sat down to play: a quaint minstrel, holding an instrument almost as large as herself. That part of the household who lingered in the rooms above owned this accustomed signal and appeared on the stairs: Antonia Bronck, still disturbed by the small skeleton she had seen Zélie dressing for its grave; and an elderly woman of great bulk and majesty, with sallow hair and face, who wore, enlarged, one of the court gowns which her sovereign, the queen of England, had often praised. Le Rossignol followed these two ladies across the hall, alternately aping the girlish motion of Antonia and her elder's massive progress. She considered the Dutch gentlewoman a sweet interloper who might, on occasions, be pardoned; but Lady Dorinda was the natural antagonist of the dwarf in Fort St. John. Marie herself seated her mother-in-law, with the graceful deference of youth to middle age and of present power to decayed grandeur. Lady Dorinda was not easy to make comfortable. The New World was hardly her sphere. In earlier life, she had learned in the school of the royal Stuarts that some people are, by divine right, immeasurably better than others,—and experience had thrust her down among those unfortunate others.

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Seeing there were strange men in the hall, Antonia divined that the prisoners from the keep had been brought up to supper. But Lady Dorinda settled her chin upon her necklace, and sighed a large sigh that priests and rough men-at-arms should weary eyes once used to revel in court pageantry. She looked up at the portrait of her dead husband, which hung on the wall. He had been created the first knight of Acadia; and though this honor came from her king, and his son refused to inherit it after him, Lady Dorinda believed that only the misfortunes of the La Tours had prevented her being a colonial queen.

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"Our chaplain being absent in the service of *Sieur de la Tour*," spoke Marie, "will monsieur, in his

own fashion, bless this meal?"

Father Jogues spread the remnant of his hands, but Antonia did not hear a word he breathed. She was again in Fort Orange. The Iroquois stalked up hilly paths and swarmed around the plank huts of Dutch traders. With the savages walked this very priest, their patient drudge until some of them blasphemed, when he sternly and fearlessly denounced the sinners.

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Supper was scarcely begun when the Swiss lieutenant came again into the hall and saluted his lady.

"What troubles us, Klussman?" she demanded.

"There is a stranger outside."

"What does he want?"

"Madame, he asks to be admitted to Fort St. John."

"Is he alone? Hath he a suspicious look?"

"No, madame. He bears himself openly and like a man of consequence."

"How many followers has he?"

"A dozen, counting Indians. But all of them he sends back to camp with our Etchemins."

"And well he may. We want no strange followers in the barracks. Have you questioned him? Whence does he come?"

"From Fort Orange, in the New Netherlands, madame."

"He is then Hollandais." Marie turned to Antonia Bronck, and was jarred by her blanching face.

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"What is it, Antonia? You have no enemy to follow you into Acadia?"

The flaxen head was shaken for reply.

"But what brings a man from Fort Orange here?"

"There be nearly a hundred men in Fort Orange," whispered Antonia.

"He says," announced the Swiss, "that he is cousin and agent of the seignior they call the patroon, and his name is Van Corlaer."

"Do you know him, Antonia?"

"Yes."

"And is he kindly disposed to you?"

"He was the friend of my husband, Jonas Bronck," trembled Antonia.

"Admit him," said Marie to her lieutenant.

"Alone, madame?"

"With all his followers, if he wills it. And bring him as quickly as you can to this table."

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"We need Edelwald to manage these affairs," added the lady of the fort, as her subaltern went out. "The Swiss is faithful, but he has manners as rugged as his mountains."

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IV.

THE WIDOW ANTONIA.

Antonia sat in tense quiet, though whitened even across the lips where all the color of her face usually appeared; and a stalwart and courtly man presented himself in the hall. Some of the best blood of the Dutch Republic had evidently gone to his making. He had the vital and reliable presence of a master in affairs, and his clean-shaven face had firm mouth-corners. Marie rose up without pause to meet him. He was freshly and carefully dressed in clothes carried for this purpose across the wilderness, and gained favor even with Lady Dorinda, as a man bearing around him in the New World the atmosphere of Europe. He made his greeting in French, and explained that he was passing through Acadia on a journey to Montreal.

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"We stand much beholden to monsieur," said Marie with a quizzical face, "that he should travel so many hundred leagues out of his way to visit this poor fort. I have heard that the usual route to Montreal is that short and direct one up the lake of Champlain."

Van Corlaer's smile rested openly on Antonia as he answered,—

"Madame, a man's most direct route is the one that leads to his object."

"Doubtless, monsieur. And you are very welcome to this fort. We have cause to love the New Netherlanders."

Marie turned to deliver Antonia her guest, but Antonia stood without word or look for him. She seemed a scared Dutch child, bending all her strength and all her inherited quiet on maintaining self-control. He approached her, searching her face with his near-sighted large eyes.

"Had Madame Bronck no expectation of seeing Arendt Van Corlaer in Acadia?"

"No, mynheer," whispered Antonia.

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"But since I have come have you nothing to say to me?"

"I hope I see you well, mynheer."

"You might see me well," reproached Van Corlaer, "if you would look at me."

She lifted her eyes and dropped them again.

"This Acadian air has given you a wan color," he noted.

"Did you leave Teunis and Marytje Harmentse well?" quavered Antonia, catching at any scrap. Van Corlaer stared, and answered that Teunis and Marytje were well, and would be grateful to her for inquiring.

"For they also helped to hide this priest from the Mohawks," added Antonia without coherence. Marie could hear her heart laboring.

"What priest?" inquired Van Corlaer, and as he looked around his eyes fell on the cassocked figure at the other table.

"Monsieur Corlaer," spoke Father Jogues, "I was but waiting fit opportunity to recall myself and your blessed charity to your memory."

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Van Corlaer's baffled look changed to instant glad recognition.

"That is Father Jogues!"

He met the priest with both hands, and stood head and shoulders taller while they held each other like brothers.

"I thought to find you in Montreal, Father Jogues, and not here, where in my dim fashion I could mistake you for the chaplain of the fort."

"Monsieur Corlaer, I have not forgot one look of yours. I was a great trouble to you with, my wounds, and my hiding and fever. And what pains you took to put me on board the ship in the night! It would be better indeed to see me at Montreal than ever in such plight again at Fort Orange, Monsieur Corlaer!"

"Glad would we be to have you at Fort Orange again, without pain to yourself, Father Jogues."

"And how is my friend who so much enjoyed disputing about religion?"

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"Our dominie is well, and sent by my hand his hearty greeting to that very learned scholar Father Jogues. We heard you had come back from France."

Van Corlaer dropped one hand on the donné's shoulder and leaned down to examine his smiling face.

"It is my brother Lalande, the donné of this present mission," said the priest.

"My young monsieur," said Van Corlaer, "keep Father Jogues out of the Mohawks' mouths henceforth. They have really no stomach for religion, though they will eat saints. It often puzzles a Dutchman to handle that Iroquois nation."

"Our lives are not our own," said the young Frenchman.

"We must bear the truth whether it be received or not," said Father Jogues.

"Whatever errand brought you into Acadia," said Van Corlaer, turning back to the priest, "I am glad to find you here, for I shall now have your company back to Montreal."

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"Impossible, Monsieur Corlaer. For I have set out to plant a mission among the Abenakis. They asked for a missionary. Our guides deserted us, and we have wandered off our course and been obliged to throw away nearly all the furniture of our mission. But we now hope to make our way along the coast."

"Father Jogues, the Abenakis are all gone northward. We passed through their towns on the Penobscot."

"But they will come back?"

"Some time, though no man at Penobscot would be able to say when."

Father Jogues' perplexed brows drew together. Wanderings, hunger, and imprisonment he could bear serenely as incidents of his journey. But to have his flock scattered before he could reach it

was real calamity.

"We must make shift to follow them," he said.

"How will you follow them without supplies, and without knowing where they may turn in the woods?"

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"I see we shall have to wait for them at Penobscot," said Father Jogues.

"Take a heretic's advice instead. For I speak not as the enemy of your religion when I urge you to journey with me back to Montreal. You can make another and better start to establish this mission."

The priest shook his head.

"I do not see my way. But my way will be shown to me, or word will come sending me back."

Some sign from the lady of the fortress recalled Van Corlaer to his duty as a guest. The supper grew cold while he parleyed. So he turned quickly to take the chair she had set for him, and saw that Antonia was gone.

"Madame Bronck will return," said Marie, pitying his chagrin, and searching her own mind for Antonia's excuse. "We brought a half-starved baby home from our last expedition, and it lies dead upstairs. Women have soft hearts, monsieur: they cannot see such sights unmoved. She hath lost command of herself to-night."

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Van Corlaer's face lightened with tenderness. Bachelor though he was, he had held infants in his hands for baptism, and not only the children of Fort Orange but dark broods of the Mohawks often rubbed about his knees.

"You brought your men into the fort, Monsieur Corlaer?"

"No, madame. I sent them back to camp by the falls. We are well provisioned. And there was no need for them to come within the walls."

"If you lack anything I hope you will command it of us."

"Madame, you are already too bounteous; and we lack nothing."

"The Sieur de la Tour being away, the conduct and honor of this fort are left in my hands. And he has himself ever been friendly to the people of the colonies."

"That is well known, madame."

Soft waxlight, the ample shine of the fire, trained service, and housing from the chill spring night, abundant food and flask, all failed to bring up the spirits of Van Corlaer. Antonia did not return to the table. The servingmen went and came betwixt hall and cook-house. Every time one of them opened the door, the world of darkness peered in, and over the night quiet of the fort could be heard the tidal up-rush of the river.

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"The men can now bring our ship to anchor," observed Marie. Father Jogues and his donné, eating with the habitual self-denial of men who must inure themselves to hunger, still spoke with Van Corlaer about their mission. But during all his talk he furtively watched the stairway.

The dwarf sat on her accustomed stool beside her lady, picking up bits from a well heaped silver platter on her knees; and she watched Van Corlaer's discomfiture when Lady Dorinda took him in hand and Antonia yet remained away.

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V.

JONAS BRONCK'S HAND.

The guests had deserted the hall fire and a sentinel was set for the night before Madame La Tour knocked at Antonia's door.

Antonia was slow to open it. But she finally let Marie into her chamber, where the fire had died on the hearth, and retired again behind the screen to continue dabbing her face with water. The candle was also behind the screen, and it threw out Antonia's shadow, and showed her disordered flax-white hair flung free of its cap and falling to its length. Marie sat down in the little world of shadow outside the screen. The joists directly above Antonia flickered with the flickering light. One window high in the wall showed the misty darkness which lay upon Fundy Bay. The room was chilly.

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"Monsieur Corlaer is gone, Antonia," said Marie.

Antonia's shadow leaped, magnifying the young Dutchwoman's start.

"Madame, you have not sent him off on his journey in the night?"

"I sent him not. I begged him to remain. But he had such cold welcome from his own

countrywoman that he chose the woods rather than the hospitality of Fort St. John."

Much as Antonia stirred and clinked flasks, her sobs grew audible behind the screen. She ran out with her arms extended and threw herself on the floor at Marie's knees, transformed by anguish. Marie in full compassion drew the girlish creature to her breast, repenting herself while Antonia wept and shook.

"I was cruel to say Monsieur Corlaer is gone. He has only left the fortress to camp with his men at the falls. He will be here two more days, and to-morrow you must urge him to stay our guest." [Pg 66]

"Madame, I dare not see him at all!"

"But why should you not see Monsieur Corlaer?"

Antonia settled to the floor and rested her head and arms on her friend's lap.

"For you love him."

"O madame! I did not show that I loved him? No. It would be horrible for me to love him."

"What has he done? And it is plain he has come to court you."

"He has long courted me, madame."

"And you met him as a stranger and fled from him as a wolf!—this Hollandais gentleman who hath saved our French people—even priests—from the savages!"

"All New Amsterdam and Fort Orange hold him in esteem," said Antonia, betraying pride. "I have heard he can do more with the Iroquois tribes than any other man of the New World." She uselessly wiped her eyes. She was weak from long crying. [Pg 67]

"Then why do you run from him?"

"Because he hath too witching a power on me, madame. I cannot spin or knit or sew when he is by; I must needs watch every motion of his if he once fastens my eyes."

"I have noticed he draws one's heart," laughed Marie.

"He does. It is like witchcraft. He sets me afloat so that I lose my feet and have scarce any will of my own. I never was so disturbed by my husband Jonas Bronck," complained Antonia.

"Did you love your husband?" inquired Marie.

"We always love our husbands, madame. Mynheer Bronck was very good to me."

"You have never told me much of Monsieur Bronck, Antonia."

"I don't like to speak of him now, madame. It makes me shiver."

"You are not afraid of the dead?"

"I was never afraid of him living. I regarded him as a father." [Pg 68]

"But one's husband is not to be regarded as a father."

"He was old enough to be my father, madame. I was not more than sixteen, besides being an orphan, and Mynheer Bronck was above fifty, yet he married me, and became the best husband in the colony. He was far from putting me in such states as Mynheer Van Corlaer does."

"The difference is that you love Monsieur Corlaer."

"Do not speak that word, madame."

"Would you have him marry another woman?"

"Yes," spoke Antonia in a stoical voice, "if that pleased him best. I should then be driven to no more voyages. He followed me to New Amsterdam; and I ventured on a long journey to Boston, where I had kinspeople, as you know. But there I must have broken down, madame, if I had not met you. It was fortunate for me that the English captain brought you out of your course. For mynheer set out to follow me there. And now he has come across the wilderness even to this fort!" [Pg 69]

"Confess," said Marie, giving her a little shake, "how pleased you are with such a determined lover!"

But instead of doing this, Antonia burst again into frenzied sobbing and hugged her comforter.

"O madame, you are the only person I dare love in the world!"

Marie smoothed the young widow's damp hair with the quieting stroke which calms children.

"Let mother help thee," she said; and neither of them remembered that she was scarcely as old as Antonia. In love and motherhood, in military peril, and contact with riper civilizations, to say nothing of inherited experience, the lady of St. John had lived far beyond Antonia Bronck.

"Your husband made you take an oath not to wed again,—is it so?"

"No, madame, he never did."

"Yet you told me he left you his money?"

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"Yes. He was very good to me. For I had neither father nor mother."

"And he bound you by no promise?"

"None at all, madame."

"What, then, can you find to break your heart upon in the suit of Monsieur Corlaer? You are free. Even as my lord—if I were dead—would be free to marry any one; not excepting D'Aulnay's widow."

Marie smiled at that improbable union.

"No, I do not feel free." Antonia shivered close to her friend's knees. "Madame, I cannot tell you. But I will show you the token."

"Show me the token, therefore. And a sound token it must be, to hold you wedded to a dead man whom in life you regarded as a father."

Antonia rose upon her feet, but stood dreading the task before her.

"I have to look at it once every month," she explained, "and I have looked at it once this month already."

The dim chill room with its one eye fixed on darkness was an eddy in which a single human mind resisted that century's current of superstition. Marie sat ready to judge and destroy whatever spell the cunning old Hollandais had left on a girl to whom he represented law and family.

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Antonia beckoned her behind the screen, and took from some ready hiding-place a small oak box studded with nails, which Marie had never before seen. How alien to the simple and open life of the Dutch widow was this secret coffer! Her face changed while she looked at it; grieved girlhood passed into sunken age. Her lips turned wax-white, and drooped at the corners. She set the box on a dressing-table beside the candle, unlocked it and turned back the lid. Marie was repelled by a faint odor aside from its breath of dead spices.

Antonia unfolded a linen cloth and showed a pallid human hand, its stump concealed by a napkin. It was cunningly preserved, and shrunken only by the countless lines which denote approaching age. It was the right hand of a man who must have had imagination. The fingers were sensitively slim, with shapely blue nails, and without knobs or swollen joints. It was a crafty, firm-possessing hand, ready to spring from its nest to seize and eternally hold you.

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The lady of St. John had seen human fragments scattered by cannon, and sword and bullet had done their work before her sight. But a faintness beyond the touch of peril made her grasp the table and turn from that ghastly hand.

"It cannot be, Antonia"—

"Yes, it is Mynheer Bronck's hand," whispered Antonia, subduing herself to take admonition from the grim digits.

"Lock it up; and come directly away from it. Come out of this room. You have opened a grave here."

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VI.

THE MENDING.

But Antonia delayed to set in order her hair and cap and all her methodical habits of life. When Jonas Bronck's hand was snugly locked in its case and no longer obliged her to look at it, she took a pensive pleasure in the relic, bred of usage to its company. She came out of her chamber erect and calm. Marie was at the stairs speaking to the soldier stationed in the hall below. He had just piled up his fire, and its homely splendor sent back to remoteness all human dreads. He hurried up the stairway to his lady.

"Go knock at the door of the priest, Father Jogues, and demand his cassock," she said.

The man halted, and asked,—

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"What shall I do with it?"

"Bring it hither to me."

"But if he refuses to have it brought?"

"The good man will not refuse. Yet if he asks why," said Madame La Tour smiling, "tell him it is the custom of the house to take away at night the cassock of any priest who stays here."

"Yes, madame."

The soldier kept to himself his opinion of meddling with black gowns, and after some parleying at the door of Father Jogues' apartment, received the garment and brought it to his lady.

"We will take our needles, and sit by the hall fire," said Marie to Antonia. "Did you note the raggedness of Father Jogues' cassock? I am an enemy to papists, especially D'Aulnay de Charnisay; but who can harden her heart against a saint because he patters prayers on a rosary? Thou and I will mend his black gown. I cannot see even a transient member of my household uncomfortable."

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The soldier put two waxlights on the table by the hearth, and withdrew to the stairway. He was there to guard as prisoner the priest for whom his lady set herself to work. She drew her chair to Antonia's and they spread the cassock between them. It had been neatly beaten and picked clear of burrs, but the rents in it were astonishing. Even within sumptuous fireshine the black cloth taxed sight; and Marie paused sometimes to curtain her eyes with her hand, but Antonia worked on with Dutch steadiness. The touch of a needle within a woman's fingers cools all her fevers. She stitches herself fast to the race. There is safety and saneness in needlework.

"This spot wants a patch," said Antonia.

"Weave it together with stitches," said Marie. "Daughter of presumption! would you add to the gown of a Roman priest?"

"Priest or dominie," commented Antonia, biting a fresh thread, "he would be none the worse for a stout piece of cloth to his garment."

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"But we have naught to match with it. I would like to set in a little heresy cut from one of the Sieur de la Tour's good Huguenot doublets."

The girlish faces, bent opposite, grew placid with domestic interest. Marie's cheeks ripened by the fire, but the whiter Hollandaise warmed only through the lips. This hall's glow made more enduring the image of Jonas Bronck's hand. "When was it cut off, Antonia?" murmured Marie, stopping to thread a needle.

The perceptible blight again fell over Antonia's face as she replied,—

"After he had been one day dead."

"Then he did not grimly lop it off himself?"

"Oh, no," whispered Antonia with deep sighing. "Mynheer the doctor did that, on his oath to my husband. He was the most learned cunning man in medicine that ever came to our colony. He kept the hand a month in his furnace before it was ready to send to me."

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"Did Monsieur Bronck, before he died, tell you his intention to do this?" pressed Marie, feeling less interest in the Dutch embalmer's method than in the sinuous motive of a man who could leave such a bequest.

"Yes, madame."

"I do marvel at such an act!" murmured the lady of St. John, challenging Jonas Bronck's loyal widow to take up his instant defense.

"Madame, he was obliged to do it by a dream he had."

"He dreamed that his hand would keep off intruders?" smiled Marie.

"Yes," responded Antonia innocently, "and all manner of evil fortune. I have to look at it once a month as long as I live, and carry it with me everywhere. If it should be lost or destroyed trouble and ruin would fall not only on me but on every one who loved me."

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The woman of larger knowledge did not argue against this credulity. Antonia was of the provinces, bred out of their darkest hours of superstition and savage danger. But it was easy to see how Jonas Bronck's hand must hold his widow from second marriage. What lover could she ask to share her monthly gaze upon it, and thus half realize the continued fleshly existence of Jonas Bronck? The rite was in its nature a secret one. Shame, gratitude, the former usages of her life, and a thousand other influences, were yet in the grip of that rigid hand. And if she lost or destroyed it, nameless and weird calamity, foreseen by a dying man, must light upon the very lover who undertook to separate her from her ghastly company.

"The crafty old Hollandais!" thought Marie. "He was cunning in his knowledge of Antonia. But he hath made up this fist at a younger Hollandais who will scarce stop for dead hands."

The Dutch gentlewoman snuffed both waxlights. Her lips were drawn in grieved lines. Marie glanced up at one of the portraits on the wall, and said:—

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"The agonies which men inflict on the beings they love best, must work perpetual astonishment in heaven. Look at the Sieur Claude de la Tour, a noble of France who could stoop to become the first English knight of Acadia, forcing his own son to take up arms against him."

The elder La Tour frowned and flickered in his frame.

"Yet he had a gracious presence," said Antonia. "Lady Dorinda says he was the handsomest man at the English court."

"I doubt it not; the La Tours are a beautiful race. And it was that very graciousness which made him a weak prisoner in the hands of the English. They married him to one of the queen's ladies, and granted him all Acadia, which he had only to demand from his son, if he would turn it over to England and declare himself an English subject I can yet see his ships as they rounded Cape Sable; and the face of my lord when he read his father's summons to surrender the claims of France. We were to be loaded with honors. France had driven us out on account of our faith; England opened her arms. We should be enriched, and live forever a happy and united family, sole lords of Acadia."

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Marie broke off another thread.

"The king of France, who has outlawed my husband and delivered him to his enemy, should have seen him then, Antonia. Sieur Claude La Tour put both arms around him and pleaded. It was, 'My little Charles, do not disgrace me by refusal;' and 'My father, I love you, but here I represent the rights of France.' 'The king of France is no friend of ours,' says Sieur Claude. 'Whether he rewards or punishes me,' says Charles, 'this province belongs to my country, and I will hold it while I have life to defend it.' And he was obliged to turn his cannon against His own father; and the ships were disabled and driven off."

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"Was the old mynheer killed?"

"His pride was killed. He could never hold up his head in England again, and he had betrayed France. My lord built him a house outside our fort, yet neither could he endure Acadia. He died in England. You know I brought his widow thence with me last year. She should have her dower of lands here, if we can hold them against D'Aulnay de Charnisay."

The lady of the fort shook out Father Jogues' cassock and rose from the mending. Antonia picked up their tools and flicked bits of thread from her skirt.

"I am glad it is done, madame, for you look heavy-eyed, as any one ought, after tossing two nights on Fundy Bay and sewing on a black gown until midnight cock-crow of the third."

"I am not now fit to face a siege," owned Marie. "We must get to bed. Though first I crave one more look at the dead baby Zélie hath in charge. There is a soft weakness in me which mothers even the outcast young of my enemy."

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VII.

A FRONTIER GRAVEYARD.

The next morning was gray and transparent: a hemisphere of mist filled with light; a world of vapor palpitating with some indwelling spirit. That lonesome lap of country opposite Fort St. John could scarcely be defined. Scraps of its dawning spring color showed through the mobile winding and ascending veil. Trees rose out of the lowlands between the fort and the falls.

Van Corlaer was in the gorge, watching that miracle worked every day in St. John River. The tide was racing inland. The steep rapids within their throat of rock were clear of fog. Foam is the flower of water; and white petal after white petal was swept under by the driving waves. As the tide rose the tumult of falls ceased. The channel filled. All rocks were drowned. For a brief time another ship could have passed up that natural lock, as La Tour's ship had passed on the cream-smooth current at flood tide the day before.

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Van Corlaer could not see its ragged sails around the breast of rock, but the hammering of its repairers had been in his ears since dawn; and through the subsiding wash of water he now heard men's voices.

The Indians whose village he had joined were that morning breaking up camp to begin their spring pilgrimage down the coast along various fishing haunts; for agriculture was a thing unknown to these savages. They were a seafaring people in canoes. At that time even invading Europeans had gained little mastery of the soil. Camp and fortress were on the same side of the river. Lounging braves watched indifferently some figures wading fog from the fort, perhaps bringing them a farewell word, perhaps forbidding their departure. The Indian often humored his invader's feudal airs, but he never owned the mastery of any white man. Squaws took down cone-shaped tents, while their half-naked babies sprawled in play upon the ashes of last winter's fires. Van Corlaer's men sauntered through the vanishing town, trying at times to strike some spark of information from Dutch and Etchemin jargon.

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Near the river bank, between camp and fort, was an alluvial spot in which the shovel found no rock. A rough line of piled stones severed it from surrounding lands, and a few trees stood there, promising summer shade, though, darkly moist along every budded twig, they now swayed in tuneless nakedness. Here the dead of Fort St. John were buried; and those approaching figures entered a gap of the inclosure instead of going on to the camp. Three of La Tour's soldiers, with Father Jogues and his *donné*, had come to bury the outcast baby. One of the men was Zélie's

husband, and she walked beside him. Marguerite lay sulking in the barracks. The lady had asked Father Jogues to consecrate with the rites of his church the burial of this little victim probably born into his faith. But he would have followed it in any case, with that instinct which drove him to baptize dying Indian children with rain-drops and attempt to pluck converts from the tortures of the stake.

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"Has this child been baptized?" he inquired of Zélie on the path down from the fort.

She answered, shedding tears of resentment against Marguerite, and with fervor she could not restrain,—

"I'll warrant me it never had so much as a drop of water on its head, and but little to its body, before my lady took it."

"But hath it not believing parents?"

"Our Swiss says," stated Zélie, with a respectful heretic's sparing of this priest, "that it is the child of D'Aulnay de Charnisay." And she added no comment. The soldiers set their spades to last year's sod, cut an oblong wound, and soon had the earth heaped out and a grave made. Father Jogues, perplexed, and heavy of heart for the sins of his enlightened as well as his savage children, concluded to consecrate the baby's bed. The Huguenot soldiers stood sullenly by while a Romish service went on. They or their fathers had been driven out of France by the bitterness of that very religion which Father Jogues expressed in sweetness. They had not the broad sympathy of their lady, who could excuse and even stoop to mend a priest's cassock; and they made their pause as brief as possible.

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While the spat and clink of spades built up one child's hillock, Zélie was on her knees beside another some distance from it, scraping away dead leaves. Her lady had bid her look how this grave fared, and she noticed fondly that fern was beginning to curl above the buried lad's head. The heir of the La Tours lay with his feet toward the outcast of the Charnisays, but this was a chance arrangement. Soldiers and servants of the house were scattered about the frontier burial ground, and Zélie noted to report to her lady that winter had partly effaced and driven below the surface some recent graves. Instead of being marked by a cross, each earthen door had a narrow frame of river stones built around it.

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Van Corlaer left the drowned falls and passed his own tents, and waited outside the knee-high inclosure for Father Jogues. The missionary, in his usual halo of prayer, dwelt upon the open breviary. Many a tree along the Mohawk valley yet bore the name of Jesu which he had carved in its bark, as well as rude crosses. Such marks helped him to turn the woods into one wide oratory. But unconverted savages, tearing with their teeth the hands lifted up in supplication for them, had scarcely taxed his heart as heretics and sinful believers taxed it now. The soldiers, having finished, took up their tools, and Van Corlaer joined Father Jogues as the party came out of the cemetery.

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The day was brightening. Some sea-birds were spreading their white breasts and wing-linings like flashes of silver against shifting vapor. The party descended to a wrinkle in the land which would be dry at ebb-tide. Now it held a stream flowing inland upon grass—unshriveled long grass bowed flat and sleeked to this daily service. It gave beholders a delicious sensation to see the clean water rushing up so verdant a course. A log which would seem a misplaced and useless foot-bridge when the tide was out, was crossed by one after another; and as Van Corlaer fell back to step beside Father Jogues, he said:—

"The Abenakis take to the woods and desert their fishing, and these Etchemins leave the woods and take to the coast. You never know where to have your savage. Did you note that the village was moving?"

"Yes, I saw that, Monsieur Corlaer; and I must now take leave of the lady of the fort and join myself to them."

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"If you do you will give deep offense to La Tour," said the Dutchman, pushing back some strands of light hair which had fallen over his forehead, and turning his great near-sighted eyes on his friend. "These Indians are called Protestant. They are in La Tour's grant. Thou knowest that he and D'Aulnay de Charnisay have enough to quarrel about without drawing churchmen into their broil."

Father Jogues trod on gently. He knew he could not travel with any benighted soul and not try to convert it. These poor Etchemins appealed to his conscience; but so did the gracious lady of the fort.

"If I could mend the rents in her faith," he sighed, "as she hath mended the rents in my cassock!"

Two of the soldiers turned aside with their spades to a slope behind the fortress, where there was a stable for the ponies and horned cattle, and where last year's garden beds lay blackened under last year's refuse growth. Having planted the immortal seed, their next duty was to prepare for the trivial resurrections of the summer. Frenchmen love green messes in their soup. The garden might be trampled by besiegers, but there were other chances that it would yield something. Zélie's husband climbed the height to escort the priest and report to his lady, but he had his wife to chatter beside him. Father Jogues' *donné* walked behind Van Corlaer, and he alone overheard the Dutchman's talk.

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"This lady of Fort St. John, Father Jogues, so housed, and so ground between the millstones of La Tour and D'Aulnay—she hath wrought up my mind until I could not forbear this journey. It is well known through the colonies that La Tour can no longer get help, and is outlawed by his king. This fortress will be sacked. La Tour would best stay at home to defend his own. But what can any other man do? I am here to defend my own, and I will take it and defend it."

Van Corlaer looked up at the walls, and his chest swelled with a large breath of regret.

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"God He knoweth why so sweet a lady is set here to bear the brunts of a frontier fortress, where no man can aid her without espousing her husband's quarrel!—while hundreds of evil women degrade the courts of Europe. But I can only do mine errand and go. And you will best mend your own expedition at this time by a new start from Montreal, Father Jogues."

The priest turned around on the ascent and looked toward the vanishing Indian camp. He was examining as self-indulgence his strong and gentlemanly desire not to involve Madame La Tour in further troubles by proselyting her people.

"Whatever way is pointed out to me, Monsieur Corlaer," he answered, "that way I must take. For the mending of an expedition rests not in the hands of the poor instrument that attempts it."

Their soldier signaled for the gates to be opened, and they entered the fort. Marie was on her morning round of inspection. She had just given back to a guard the key of the powder magazine. Well, storehouse, fuel-house, barracks, were in military readiness. But refuse stuff had been thrown in spots which her people were now severely cleaning. She greeted her returning guests, and heard the report of Zélie's husband. A lace mantle was drawn over her head and fastened under the chin, throwing out from its blackness the warm brown beauty of her face.

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"So our Indians are leaving the falls already?" she repeated, fixing Zélie's husband with a serious eye.

"Yes, madame," witnessed Zélie. "I myself saw women packing tents."

"Have they heard any rumor which scared them off early,—our good lazy Etchemins, who hate fighting?"

"No, madame," Van Corlaer answered, being the only person who came directly from the camp, "I think not, though their language is not clear to me like our western tongues. It is simply an early spring, calling them out."

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"They have always waited until Pâques week heretofore," she remembered. But the wandering forth of an irresponsible village had little to do with the state of her fort. She was going upon the walls to look at the cannon, and asked her guests to go with her.

The priest and his *donné* and Van Corlaer ascended a ladder, and Madame La Tour followed.

"I do not often climb like a sailor," she said, when Van Corlaer gave her his hand at the top. "There is a flight of steps from mine own chamber to the level of the walls. And here Madame Bronck and I have taken the air on winter days when we felt sure of its not blowing us away. But you need not look sad over our pleasures, monsieur. We have had many a sally out of this fort, and monsieur the priest will tell you there is great freedom on snowshoes."

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"Madame Bronck has allowed herself little freedom since I came to Fort St. John," observed Van Corlaer.

They all walked the walls from bastion to bastion, and Marie examined the guns, and spoke with her soldiers. On the way back Father Jogues and Lalande paused to watch the Etchemins trail away, and to commune on what their duty directed them to do. Marie walked on with Van Corlaer toward the towered bastion, talking quickly, and ungloving her right hand to help his imagination with it. A bar of sunlight rested with a long slant through vapor on the fortress. Far blue distances were opened on the bay. The rippling full river had already begun to subside and sink line by line from its island.

Van Corlaer gave no attention to the beautiful world. He listened to Madame La Tour with a broadening humorous face and the invincible port of a man who knows nothing of defeat. The sentinel trod back and forth without disturbing this intent conference, but other feet came rushing up the stone steps which led from Marie's room to the level of the wall.

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"Madame—madame!" exclaimed Antonia Bronck; but her flaxen head was arrested in ascent beside Van Corlaer's feet, and her distressed eyes met in his a whimsical look which stung her through with suspicion and resentment.

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VIII.

VAN CORLAER.

"What is it, Antonia?" demanded Marie.

"Madame, it is nothing."

Antonia owned her suitor's baring of his head, and turned upon the stairs.

"But some alarm drove you out."

Marie leaned over the cell inclosing the stone steps. It was not easy to judge from Antonia's erect bearing what had so startled her. Her friend followed her to the door below, and the voices of the two women hummed indistinctly in that vault-like hollow.

"You have told him," accused Antonia directly. "He is laughing about Mynheer Bronck's hand!"

"He does take a cheerful view of the matter," conceded the lady of the fort. Antonia looked at her with all the asperity which could be expressed in a fair Dutch face. [Pg 97]

"As long as I kept my trouble to myself I could bear it. But I show it to another, and the worst befalls me."

"Is that hand lost, Antonia?"

"I cannot find it, or even the box which held it."

"Never accuse me with your eye," said Marie with droll pathos. "If it were lost or destroyed by accident, I could bear without a groan to see you so bereaved. But the slightest thing shall not be filched in Fort St. John. When did you first miss it?"

"A half hour since. I left the box on my table last night instead of replacing it in my chest;—being so disturbed."

"Every room shall be searched," said Marie. "Where is Le Rossignol?"

"She went after breakfast to call her swan in the fort." [Pg 98]

"I saw her not. And I have neglected to send her to the turret for her punishment. That little creature has a magpie's fondness for plunder. Perhaps she has carried off your box. I will send for her."

Marie left the room. Antonia lingered to glance through a small square pane in the door—an eye which the commandants of the fort kept on their battlements. It had an inner tapestry, but this remained as Marie had pushed it aside that morning to take her early look at the walls. Van Corlaer was waiting on the steps, and as he detected Antonia in the guilty act of peeping at him, his compelling voice reached her in Dutch. She returned into the small stone cell formed by the stairs, and closed the door, submitting defiantly to the interview.

"Will you sit here?" suggested Van Corlaer, taking off his cloak and making for her a cushion upon the stone. Antonia reflected that he would be chilly and therefore hold brief talk, so she made no objection, and sat down on one end of the step while he sat down on the other. They spoke Dutch: with their formal French fell away the formal phases of this meeting in Acadia. The sentinel's walk moved almost overhead, and died away along the wall and returned again, but noises within the fort scarcely intruded to their rocky cell. They did not hear even the voices of Lalande and Father Jagues descending the ladder. [Pg 99]

"We have never had any satisfactory talk together, Antonia," began Van Corlaer.

"No, mynheer," breathed the girlish relict of Bronck, feeling her heart labor as she faced his eyes.

"It is hard for a man to speak his mind to you."

"It hath seemed easy enough for Mynheer Van Corlaer, seeing how many times he hath done so," observed Antonia, drawing her mufflings around her neck.

"No. I speak always with such folly that you will not hear me. It is not so when I talk among men or work on the minds of savages. Let us now begin reasonably. I do believe you like me, Antonia." [Pg 100]

"A most reasonable beginning," noted Antonia, biting her lips.

"Now I am a man in the stress and fury of mid-life, hard to turn from my purpose, and you well know my purpose. Your denials and puttings-off and flights have pleased me. But your own safety may waste no more good time in further play. I have not come into Acadia to tinkle a song under your window, but to wed you and carry you back to Fort Orange with me."

Antonia stirred, to hide her trembling.

"Are you cold?" inquired Van Corlaer.

"No, mynheer."

"If the air chills you I will warm your hands in mine."

"My hands are well muffled, mynheer."

He adjusted his back against the wall and again opened the conversation.

"I brought a young dominie with me. He wished to see Montreal. And I took care to have with him such papers as might be necessary to the marriage." [Pg 101]

"He had best get my leave," observed Madame Bronck.

"That is no part of his duty. But set your mind at rest; he is a young dominie of credit. When I was in Boston I saw a rich sedan chair made for the viceroy of Mexico, but brought to the colonies for sale. It put a thought in my head, and I set skilled fellows to work, and they made and we have carried through the woods the smallest, most cunning-fashioned sedan chair that woman ever stepped into. I brought it for the comfortable journeying of Madame Van Corlaer."

"That unknown lady will have much satisfaction in it," murmured Antonia.

"I hope so. And be better known than she was as Jonas Bronck's wife."

She colored, but hid a smile within her muffling. Her good-humored suitor leaned toward her, resting his arms upon his knees.

"Touching a matter which has never been mentioned between us;—was the curing of Bronck's hand well approved by you?"

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"Mynheer, I am angry at Madame La Tour. Or did he," gasped Antonia, not daring to accuse by name the colonial doctor who had managed her dark secret, "did he show that to you?"

"Would the boldest chemist out of Amsterdam cut off and salt the member of any honest burgher without leave of the patroon?" suggested Van Corlaer. "Besides, my skill was needed, for I was once learned in chemistry."

It was so surprising to see this man over-ride her terror that Antonia stared at him.

"Mynheer, had you no dread of the sight?"

"No; and had I known you would dread it the hand had spoiled in the curing. I thought less of Jonas Bronck, that he could bequeath a morsel of himself like dried venison."

"Mynheer Bronck was a very good man," asserted Antonia severely.

"But thou knowest in thy heart that I am a better one," laughed Van Corlaer.

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"He was the best of husbands," she insisted, trembling with a woman's anxiety to be loyal to affection which she has not too well rewarded. "It was on my account that he had his hand cut off."

"I will outdo Bronck," determined Van Corlaer. "I will have myself skinned at my death and spread out as a rug to your feet. So good a housekeeper as Antonia will beat my pelt full often, and so be obliged to think on me."

Afloat in his large personality as she always was in his presence, she yet tried to resist him.

"The relic that you joke about, Mynheer Van Corlaer, I have done worse with; I have lost it."

"Bronck's hand?"

"Yes. It hath been stolen."

"Why, I commend the taste of the thief!"

"And misfortune is sure to follow."

"Well, let misfortune and the hand go together."

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"It was not so said." She looked furtively at Bronck's powerful rival, loath to reveal to him the sick old man's prophecies.

"I have heard of the hearts of heroes being sealed in coffers and treasured in the cities from which they sprung," said Van Corlaer, taking his hat from the step and holding it to shield his eyes from mounting light. "But Jonas was no hero. And I have heard of papists venerating little pieces of saints' bones. Father Jogues might do so, and I could behold him without smiling. But a Protestant woman should have no superstition for relics."

"What I cannot help dreading," confessed Antonia, moving her hands nervously in their wrapping, "is what may follow this loss."

"Why, let the hand go! What should follow its loss?"

"Some trouble might befall the people who are kindest to me."

"Because Bronck's hand has been mislaid?" inquired Van Corlaer with shrewd light in his eyes.

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"Yes, mynheer," hesitated Antonia. He burst into laughter and Antonia looked at him as if he had spoken against religion.

She sighed.

"It was my duty to open the box once every month."

Van Corlaer threw his hat down again on the step above.

"Are you cold, mynheer?" inquired Antonia considerately.

"No. I am fired like a man in mid-battle. Will nothing move you to show me a little love, madame?"

Why, look you, there were French women among captives ransomed from the Mohawks who shed tears on these hands of mine. Strangers and alien people have some movement of feeling, but you have none."

"Mynheer," pleaded Antonia, goaded to inconsistent and trembling asperity, "you make my case very hard. I could not tell you why I dare not wed again, but since you know, why do you cruelly blame me? A woman does not weep the night away without some movement of feeling. Yes, mynheer, you have taunted me, and I will tell you the worst. I have thought of you more than of any other person in the world, and felt such satisfaction in your presence that I could hardly forego it. Yet holding me thus bound to you, you are by no means satisfied," sobbed Antonia.

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Van Corlaer glowed over her a moment with some smiling compunction, and irresistibly took her in his arms. From the instant that Antonia found herself there unstartled, her point of view was changed. She looked at her limitations no longer alone, but through Van Corlaer's eyes, and saw them vanishing. The sentinel, glancing down from time to time with a furtive cast of his eye, saw Antonia nodding or shaking her flaxen head in complete unison with Van Corlaer's nods and negations, and caught the sweet monotone of her voice repeating over and over:—

"Yes, mynheer. Yes, mynheer."

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IX.

THE TURRET.

While Antonia continued her conference on the stone steps leading to the wall, the dwarf was mounting a flight which led to the turret. Klussman walked ahead, carrying her instrument and her ration for the day. There was not a loophole to throw glimmers upon the blackness. The ascent wound about as if carved through the heart of rock, and the tall Swiss stooped to its slope. Such a mountain of unseen terraces made Le Rossignol pant. She lifted herself from step to step, growing dizzy with the turns and holding to the wall.

"Wait for me," she called up the gloom, and shook her fist at the unseen soldier because he gave her no reply. Klussman stepped out on the turret floor and set down his load. Stretching himself from the cramp of the stairway, he stood looking over bay and forest and coast. The battlemented wall was quite as high as his shoulder. One small cannon, brought up with enormous labor, was here trained through an embrasure to command the mouth of the river.

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Le Rossignol emerged into the unroofed light and the sea air like a potentate, dragging a warm furred robe. She had fastened great hoops of gold in her ears, and they gave her peaked face a barbaric look. It was her policy to go in state to punishment. The little sovereign stalked with long steps and threw out her arm in command.

"Monsieur the Swiss, stoop over and give me thy back until I mount the battlement."

Klussman, full of his own bitter and confused thinking, looked blankly down at her heated countenance.

"Give me thy back!" sang the dwarf in the melodious scream which anger never made harsh in her.

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"Faith, yes, and my entire carcass," muttered the Swiss. "I care not what becomes of me now."

"Madame Marie sent you to escort me to this turret. You have the honor because you are an officer. Now do your duty as lieutenant of this fortress, and make me a comfortable prisoner."

Klussman set his hands upon his sides and smiled down upon his prisoner.

"What is your will?"

"Twice have I told you to stoop and give me your back, that I may mount from the cannon to the battlements. Am I to be shut up here without an outlook?"

"May I be hanged if I do that," exclaimed Klussman. "Make a footstool of myself for a spoiled puppet like thee?"

Le Rossignol ran towards him and kicked his boots with the heel of her moccasin. The Swiss, remonstrating and laughing, moved back before her.

"Have some care—thou wilt break a deer-hoof on my stout leather. And why mount the battlements? A fall from this turret edge would spread thee out like a raindrop. Though the fewer women there are in the world the better," added Klussman bitterly.

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"Presume not to call me a woman!"

"Why, what art thou?"

"I am the nightingale."

"By thy red head thou art the woodpecker. Here is my back, clatterbill. Why should I not crawl

the ground to be walked over? I have been worse used than that."

He grinned fiercely as he bent down with his hands upon his knees. Le Rossignol mounted the cannon, and with a couple of light bounds, making him a perch midway, reached an embrasure and sat arranging her robes.

"Now you may hand me my clavier," she said, "and then you shall have my thanks and my pardon."

The Swiss handed her the instrument. His contempt was ruder than he knew. Le Rossignol pulled her gull-skin cap well down upon her ears, for though the day was now bright overhead, a raw wind came across the bay. She leaned over and looked down into the fortress to call her swan. The cook was drawing water from the well, and that soft sad note lifted his eyes to the turret. Le Rossignol squinted at him, and the man went into the barracks and told his wife that he felt shooting pains in his limbs that instant.

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"Come hither, gentle Swiss," said the dwarf striking the plectrum into her mandolin strings, "and I will reward thee for thy back and all thy courtly services."

Klussman stepped to the wall and looked with her into the fort.

"Take that sweet sight for my thanks," said Le Rossignol, pointing to Marguerite below. The miserable girl had come out of the barracks and was sitting in the sun beside the oven. She rested her head against it and met the sky light with half-shut eyes, lovely in silken hair and pallid flesh through all her sullenness and dejection. As Klussman saw her he uttered an oath under his breath, which the dwarf's hand on the mandolin echoed with a bang. He turned his back on the sight and betook himself to the stairway, the dwarf's laughter following him. She felt high in the world and played with a good spirit. The sentinel below heard her, but he took care to keep a steady and level eye. When the swan rose past him, spreading its wings almost against his face, he prudently trod the wall without turning his head.

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"Hé, Shubenacadie," said the human morsel to her familiar as the wide wings composed themselves beside her. "We had scarce said good-morning when I must be haled before my lady for that box of the Hollandaise." The swan was a huge white creature of his kind, with fiery eyes. There was satin texture delightful to the touch in the firm and glistening plumage of his swelling breast. Le Rossignol smoothed it.

"They have few trinkets in that barbarous Fort Orange in the west. I detest that Hollandaise more since she carries about such a casket. Let us be cozy. Kiss me, Shubenacadie."

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The swan's attachment and obedience to her were struggling against some swan-like instinct which made him rear a lofty head and twist it riverward.

"Kiss me, I say! Shall I have to beat thee over the head with my clavier to teach thee manners?"

Shubenacadie darted his snake neck downward and touched bills with her. She patted his coral nostrils.

"Not yet. Before you take to the water we must have some talk. I am shut up here to stay this whole day. And for what? Not because of the casket, for they know not what I have done with it. But because thou and I sometimes go out without the password. Stick out thy toes and let me polish them."

Shubenacadie resisted this mandate, and his autocrat promptly dragged one foot from under him, causing him to topple on the parapet. He hissed at her. Le Rossignol looked up at the threatening flat head and hissed back.

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"You are as bad as that Swiss," she laughed. "I will put a yoke on you. I will tie you to the settle in the hall. Why have all man creatures such tempers? Thank heaven I was not born to hose and doublet. Never did I see a mild man in my life except Edelwald. As for this Swiss, I am done with him. He hath a wife, Shubenacadie. She sits down there by the oven now; a miserable thing turned off by D'Aulnay de Charnisay. Have I told thee the Swiss had a soul above a common soldier and I picked him out to pay court to me? Beat me for it. Pull the red hair he condemned. I would have had him sighing for me that I might pity him. The populace is beneath us, but we must amuse ourselves. Beat me, I demand. Punish me well for abasing my eyes to that Swiss."

Shubenacadie understood the challenge and the tone. He was used to rendering such service when his mistress repented of her sins. Yet he gave his tail feathers a slight flirt and quavered some guttural to sustain his part in the conversation, and to beg that he might be excused from holding the sword this time. As she continued to prod him, however, he struck her with his beak. Le Rossignol was human in never finding herself able to bear the punishment she courted. She flew at the swan, he spread his wings for ardent warfare, and they both dropped to the stone floor in a whirlwind of mandolin, arms, and feathers. The dwarf kept her hold on him until he cowered and lay with his neck along the pavement.

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"Thou art a Turk, a rascal, a horned beast!" panted Le Rossignol. Shubenacadie quavered plaintively, and all her wrath was gone. She spread out one of his wings and smoothed the plumes. She nursed his head in her lap and sung to him. Two of his feathers, plucked out in the contest, she put in her bosom. He flirted his tail and gathered himself again to his feet, and she broke her loaf and fed him and poured water into her palm for his bill.

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Le Rossignol esteemed the military dignity given to her imprisonment, and she was a hardy midget who could bear untold exposure when wandering at her own will. She therefore received with disgust her lady's summons to come down long before the day was spent, the messenger being only Zélie.

"Ah—h, mademoiselle," warned the maid, stumping ponderously out of the stone stairway, "are you about to mount that swan again?"

"Who has ever seen me mount him?"

"I would be sworn there are a dozen men in the fort that have."

"But you never have."

"No. I have been absent with my lady."

"Well, you shall see me now."

The dwarf flung herself on Shubenacadie's back, and thrust her feet down under his wings. He began to rise, and expanded, stretching his neck forward, and Zélie uttered a yell of terror. The weird little woman leaped off and turned her laughing beak toward the terrified maid. Her ear-hoops swung as she rolled her mocking head. [Pg 117]

"Oh, if it frightens you I will not ride to-day," she said. Shubenacadie sailed across the battlements, and though they could no longer see him they knew he had taken to the river.

"If I tell my lady this," shivered Zélie, "she will never let you out of the turret. And she but this moment sent me to call you down out of the chill east wind."

"Tell Madame Marie," urged the dwarf insolently.

"And do you ride that way over bush and brier, through mirk and daylight?"

"I was at Penobscot this week," answered Le Rossignol.

Zélie gazed with a bristling of even the hairs upon her lip.

"It goeth past belief," she observed, setting her hands upon her sides. "And the swan, what else can he do besides carry thee like a dragon?" [Pg 118]

"He sings to me," boldly asserted Le Rossignol. "And many a good bit of advice have I taken from his bill."

"It would be well if he turned his mind more to thinking and less to roving," respectfully hinted Zélie. "I will go before you downstairs and leave the key in the turret door," she suggested.

"Take up these things and go when you please, and mind that I do not hear my clavier striking the wall."

"Have you not felt the wind in this open donjon?"

"The wind and I take no note of each other," answered the dwarf, lifting her chilled nose skyward. "But the cold water and bread have worked me most discomfort in this imprisonment. Go down and tell the cook for me that he is to make a hot bowl of the broth I like."

"He will do it," said Zélie. [Pg 119]

"Yes, he will do it," said the dwarf, "and the sooner he does it the better."

"Will you eat it in the hall?"

"I will eat it wherever Madame Marie is."

"But that you cannot do. There is great business going forward and she is shut with Madame Bronck in our other lady's room."

"I like it when you presume to know better than I do what is going forward in this fort!" exclaimed the dwarf jealously, a flush mounting her slender cheeks.

"I should best know what has happened since you left the hall," contended Zélie.

"Do you think so, poor heavy-foot? You can only hearken to what is whispered past your ear; but I can sit here on the battlements and read all the secrets below me."

"Can you, Mademoiselle Nightingale? For instance, where is Madame Bronck's box?"

The maid drew a deep breath at her own daring.

"It is not about Madame Bronck's box that they confer. It is about the marriage of the Hollandaise," answered Le Rossignol with a bold guess. "I could have told you that when you entered the turret." [Pg 120]

Zélie experienced a chill through her flesh which was not caused by the damp breath of Fundy Bay.

"How doth she find out things done behind her back—this clever little witch? And perhaps you

will name the bridegroom, mademoiselle?"

"Who could that be except the big Hollandais who hath come out of the west after her? Could she marry a priest or a common soldier?"

"That is true," admitted Zélie, feeling her superstition allayed.

"There must be as few women as trinkets in that wilderness Fort of Orange from which he came," added the dwarf.

"Why?" inquired Zélie, wrinkling her nose and squinting in the sunlight.

But Le Rossignol took no further trouble than to give her a look of contempt, and lifted the furred garment to descend the stairs.

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X.

AN ACADIAN POET.

"The woman who dispenses with any dignity which should attend her marriage, doth cheapen herself to her husband," said Lady Dorinda to Antonia Bronck, leaning back in the easiest chair of the fortress. It was large and stiff, but filled with cushions. Lady Dorinda's chamber was the most comfortable one in Fort St. John. It was over the front of the great hall, and was intended for a drawing-room, being spacious, well warmed by a fireplace and lighted by windows looking into the fort. A stately curtained bed, a toilet table with swinging mirror, bearing many of the ornaments and beauty-helpers of an elderly belle, and countless accumulations which spoke her former state in the world, made this an English bower in a French fort.

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Her dull yellow hair was coifed in the fashion of the early Stuarts. She held a hand-screen betwixt her face and the fire, but the flush which touched its usual sallowness was not caused by heat. A wedding was a diversion of her exile which Lady Dorinda had never hoped for. There had been some mating in the fort below among soldiers and peasant women, to which she did not lower her thoughts. The noise of resulting merrymakings sufficiently sought out and annoyed her ear. But the wedding of the guest to a man of consequence in the Dutch colony was something to which she might unbend herself.

Antonia had been brought against her will to consult with this faded authority by Marie, who sat by, supporting her through the ordeal. There was never any familiar chat between the lady of the fort and the widow of Claude La Tour. Neither forgot their first meeting behind cannon, and the tragedy of a divided house. Lady Dorinda lived in Acadia because she could not well live elsewhere. And she secretly nursed a hope that in her day the province would fall into English hands, her knight be vindicated, and his son obliged to submit to a power he had defied to the extremity of warring with a father.

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If the two women had no love for each other they at least stinted no ceremony. Marie presented the smallest surface of herself to her mother-in-law. It is true they had been of the same household only a few months; but months and years are the same betwixt us and the people who solve not for us this riddle of ourselves. Antonia thought little of Lady Dorinda's opinions, but her saying about the dignity of marriage rites had the force of unexpected truth. Arendt Van Corlaer had used up his patience in courtship. He was now bent on wedding Antonia and setting out to Montreal without the loss of another day. His route was planned up St. John River and across-country to the St. Lawrence.

"I would therefore give all possible state to this occasion," added Lady Dorinda. "Did you not tell me this Sir Van Corlaer is an officer?"

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"He is the real patroon of Fort Orange, my lady."

"He should then have military honors paid him on his marriage," observed Lady Dorinda, to whom patroon suggested the barbarous but splendid vision of a western pasha. "Salutes should be fired and drums sounded. In thus recommending I hope I have not overstepped my authority, Madame La Tour?"

"Certainly not, your ladyship," murmured Marie.

"The marriage ceremony hath length and solemnity, but I would have it longer, and more solemn. A woman in giving herself away should greatly impress a man with the charge he hath undertaken. There be not many bridegrooms like Sir Claude de la Tour, who fasted an entire day before his marriage with me. The ceremonial of that marriage hath scarce been forgotten at court to this hour."

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Lady Dorinda folded her hands and closed her eyes to sigh. Her voice had rolled the last words in her throat. At such moments she looked very superior. Her double chins and dull light eyes held great reserves of self-respect. A small box of aromatic seeds lay in her lap, and as her hands encountered it she was reminded to put a seed in her mouth and find pensive comfort in chewing it.

"Edelwald should be here to give the proper grace to this event," added Lady Dorinda.

"I thought of him," said Marie. "Edelwald has so much the nature of a troubadour."

"The studies which adorn a man were well thought of when I was at court," said Lady Dorinda. "Edelwald is really thrown away upon this wilderness."

Antonia was too intent on Van Corlaer and his fell determination to turn her mind upon Edelwald. She had, indeed, seen very little of La Tour's second in command, for he had been away with La Tour on expeditions much of the time she had spent in Acadia. Edelwald was the only man of the fortress called by his baptismal name, yet it was spoken with respect and deference like a title. He was of the family of De Born. In an age when religion made political ties stronger than the ties of nature, the La Tours and De Borns had fought side by side through Huguenot wars. When a later generation of La Tours were struggling for foothold in the New World, it was not strange that a son of the De Borns, full of songcraft and spirit inherited from some troubadour soldier of the twelfth century, should turn his face to the same land. From his mother Edelwald took Norman and Saxon strains of blood. He had left France the previous year and made his voyage in the same ship with Madame La Tour and her mother-in-law, and he was now La Tour's trusted officer.

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Edelwald could take up any stringed instrument, strike melody out of it and sing songs he had himself made. But such pastimes were brief in Acadia. There was other business on the frontier; sailing, hunting, fighting, persuading or defying men, exploring unyielded depths of wilderness. The joyous science had long fallen out of practice. But while the grim and bloody records of our early colonies were being made, here was an unrecorded poet in Acadia. La Tour held this gift of Edelwald's in light esteem. He was a man so full of action and of schemes for establishing power that he touched only the martial side of the young man's nature, though in that contact was strong comradeship. Every inmate of the fortress liked Edelwald. He mediated between commandant and men, and jealousies and bickerings disappeared before him.

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"It would be better," murmured Antonia, breaking the stately silence by Lady Dorinda's fire, "if Mynheer Van Corlaer journeyed on to Montreal and returned here before any marriage takes place."

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"Think of the labor you will thereby put upon him," exclaimed Marie. "I speak for Monsieur Corlaer and not for myself," she added; "for by that delay I should happily keep you until summer. Besides, the priest we have here with us himself admits that the town of Montreal is little to look upon. Ville-Marie though it be named by the papists, what is it but a cluster of huts in the wilderness?"

"I was six months preparing to be wedded to Mynheer Bronck," remembered Antonia.

"And will Monsieur Corlaer return here from Montreal?"

"No, madame. He will carry me with him."

"I like him better for it," said Marie smiling, "though it pleases me ill enough."

This was Antonia's last weak revolt against the determination of her stalwart suitor. She gained a three days' delay from him by submitting to the other conditions of his journey. It amused Marie to note the varying phases of Antonia's surrender. She was already resigned to the loss of Jonas Bronck's hand, and in no slavish terror of the consequences.

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"And it is true I am provided with all I need," she mused on, in the line of removing objections from Van Corlaer's way.

"I have often promised to show you the gown I wore at my marriage," said Lady Dorinda, roused from her rumination on the aromatic seed, and leaving her chair to pay this gracious compliment to the Dutch widow. "It hath faded, and been discolored by the sea air, but you will not find a prettier fashion of lace in anything made since."

She had no maid, for the women of the garrison had all been found too rude for her service. When she first came to Acadia with Claude La Tour, an English gentlewoman gladly waited on her. But now only Zélie gave her constrained and half-hearted attention, rating her as "my other lady," and plainly deploring her presence. Lady Dorinda had one large box bound with iron, hidden in a nook beyond her bed. She took the key from its usual secret place and busied herself opening the box. Marie and Antonia heard her speak a word of surprise, but the curtained bed hid her from them. The raised lid of her box let out sweet scents of England, but that breath of old times, though she always dreaded its sweep across her resignation, had not made her cry out.

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She found a strange small coffer on the top of her own treasures. Its key stood in its lock, and Lady Dorinda at once turned that key, as a duty to herself. Antonia's loss of some precious casket had been proclaimed to her, but she recollected that in her second thought, when she had already laid aside the napkin and discovered Jonas Bronck's hand. Lady Dorinda snapped the lid down and closed her own chest. She rose from her place and stretched both arms toward the couch at the foot of her bed. Having reached the couch she sank down, her head meeting a cushion with nice calculation.

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"I am about to faint," said Lady Dorinda, and having parted with her breath in one puff, she sincerely lost consciousness and lay in extreme calm, her clay-colored eyelids shut on a clay-

colored face. Marie was used to these quiet lapses of her mother-in-law, for Lady Dorinda had not been a good sailor on their voyage; but Antonia was alarmed. They bathed her face with a few inches of towel dipped in scented water, and rubbed her hands and fanned her. She caught life in again with a gasp, and opened her eyes to their young faces.

"Your ladyship attempted too much in opening that box," said Marie. "It is not good to go back through old sorrows."

"Madame La Tour may be right," gasped Claude's widow.

"I could not now look at that gown, Lady Dorinda," protested Antonia. When her ladyship was able to sit again by the fire, she asked both of them to leave her; and being alone, she quieted her anxiety about her treasures in the chest by a forced search. Nothing had been disturbed. The coals burned down red while Lady Dorinda tried to understand this happening. She dismissed all thought of the casket's belonging to Antonia Bronck;—a mild and stiff-mannered young provincial who had nothing to do with ghastly tokens of war. That hand was a political hint, mysteriously sent to Lady Dorinda and embodying some important message.

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D'Aulnay de Charnisay may have sent it as a pledge that he intended to do justice to the elder La Tour while chastising the younger. There was a strange girl in the fort, accused of coming from D'Aulnay. Lady Dorinda could feel no enmity towards D'Aulnay. Her mind swarmed with foolish thoughts, harmless because ineffectual. She felt her importance grow, and was sure that the seed of a deep political intrigue lay hidden in her chest.

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XI.

MARGUERITE.

The days which elapsed before Antonia Bronck's marriage were lived joyfully by a people who lost care in any festival. Van Corlaer brought the sleek-faced young dominie from camp and exhibited him in all his potency as the means of a Protestant marriage service. He could not speak a word of French, but only Dutch was required of him. All religious rites were celebrated in the hall, there being no chapel in Fort St. John, and this marriage was to be witnessed by the garrison.

During this cheerful time a burning unrest, which she concealed from her people, drove Marie about her domain. She fled up the turret stairs and stood on the cannon to look over the bay. Her husband had been away but eight days. "Yet he often makes swift journeys," she thought. The load of his misfortunes settled more heavily upon her as she drew nearer to the end of woman companionship.

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In former times, before such bitterness had grown in the feud between D'Aulnay and La Tour, she had made frequent voyages from Cape Sable up Fundy Bay to Port Royal. The winters were then merry among noble Acadians, and the lady of Fort St. Louis at Cape Sable was hostess of a rich seigniory. Now she had the sickness of suspense, and the wasting of life in waiting. Frequently during the day she met Father Jogues, who also wandered about disturbed by the evident necessity of his return to Montreal.

"Monsieur," said Marie once, "can you on your conscience bless a heretic?"

"Madame," said Father Jogues, "heaven itself blesses a good and excellent woman."

"Well, monsieur, if you could lift up your hand, even with the sign which my house holds idolatrous, and say a few words of prayer, I should then feel consecrated to whatever is before me."

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Perhaps Father Jogues was tempted to have recourse to his vial of holy water and make the baptismal signs. Many a soul he truly believed he had saved from burning by such secret administration. And if savages could be thus reclaimed, should he hold back from the only opportunity ever given by this beautiful soul? His face shone. But with that gracious instinct to refrain from intermeddling which was beyond his times, he only lifted his stumps of fingers and spoke the words which she craved. A maimed priest is deprived of his sacred offices, but the pope had made a special dispensation for Father Jogues.

"Thanks, monsieur," said Marie. "Though it be sin to declare it, I will say your religion hath mother-comfort in it. Perhaps you have felt, in the woods among Iroquois, that sometime need of mother-comfort which a civilized woman may feel who has long outgrown her childhood."

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The mandolin was heard in the barracks once during those days, for Le Rossignol had come out of the house determined to seek out Marguerite. She found the Swiss girl beside the powder magazine, for Marguerite had brought out a stool, and seemed trying to cure her sick spirit in the sun. The dwarf stood still and looked at her with insolent eyes. Soldiers' wives hid themselves within their doors, cautiously watching, or thrusting out their heads to shake at one another or squall at any child venturing too near the encounter. They did not like the strange girl, and besides, she was in their way. But they liked the Nightingale less, and pitied any one singled out for her attack.

"Good day to madame the former Madame Klussman," said the dwarf. Marguerite gathered herself in defense to arise and leave her stool. But Le Rossignol gathered her mandolin in equal readiness to give pursuit. And not one woman in the barracks would have invited her quarry.

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"I was in Penobscot last week," announced Le Rossignol, and heads popped out of all the doors to lift eyebrows and open mouths at each other. The swan-riding witch! She confessed to that impossible journey!

"I was in Penobscot last week," repeated Le Rossignol, holding up her mandolin and tinkling an accompaniment to her words, "and there I saw the house of D'Aulnay de Charnisay, and a very good house it is; but my lord should burn it. It is indeed of rough logs, and the windows are so high that one must have wings to look through them; but quite good enough for a woman of your rank, seeing that D'Aulnay hath a palace for his wife in Port Royal."

"I know naught about the house," spoke Marguerite, a yellow sheen of anger appearing in her eyes.

"Do you know naught about the Island of Demons, then?"

The Swiss girl muttered a negative and looked sidewise at her antagonist.

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"I will tell you that story," said Le Rossignol.

She played a weird prelude. Marguerite sat still to be baited, like a hare which has no covert. The instrument being heavy for the dwarf, she propped it by resting one foot on the abutting foundation of the powder-house, and all through her recital made the mandolin's effects act upon her listener.

"The Sieur de Roberval sailed to this New World, having with him among a shipload of righteous people one Marguerite." She slammed her emphasis on the mandolin.

"There have ever been too many such women, and so the Sieur de Roberval found, though this one was his niece. Like all her kind, madame, she had a lover to her scandal. The Sieur de Roberval whipped her, and prayed over her, and shut her up in irons in the hold; yet live a godly life she would not. So what could he do but set her ashore on the Island of Demons?"

"I do not want to hear it," was Marguerite's muttered protest.

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But Le Rossignol advanced closer to her face.

"And what does the lover do but jump overboard and swim after her? And well was he repaid." Bang! went the mandolin. "So they went up the rocky island together, and there they built a hut. What a horrible land was that!

"All day long fiends twisted themselves in mist. The waves made a sadder moaning there than anywhere else on earth. Monsters crept out of the sea and grinned with dull eyes and clammy lips. No fruit, no flower, scarcely a blade of grass dared thrust itself toward the sky on that scaly island. Daylight was half dusk there forever. But the nights, the nights, madame, were full of howls, of contending beasts—the nights were storms of demons let loose to beat on that island!

"All the two people had to eat were the stores set ashore by the Sieur de Roberval. Now a child was born in their hut, and the very next night a bear knocked at the door and demanded the child. Marguerite full freely gave it to him."

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The girl shrunk back, and Le Rossignol was delighted until she herself noticed that Klussman had come in from some duty outside the gates. His eye detected her employment, and he sauntered not far off with his shoulder turned to the powder-house.

"Next night, madame," continued Le Rossignol, and her tone and the accent of the mandolin made an insult of that unsuitable title, "a horned lion and two dragons knocked at the door and asked for the lover, and Marguerite full freely gave him to them. Kind soul, she would do anything to save herself!"

"Go away!" burst out the girl.

"And from that time until a ship took her off, the demons of Demon Island tried in vain to get Marguerite. They howled around her house every night, and gaped down her chimney, and whispered through the cracks and sat on the roof. But thou knowest, madame, that a woman of her kind, so soft and silent and downward-looking, is more than a match for any demon; sure to live full easily and to die a fat saint."

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"Have done with this," said Klussman behind the dwarf, who turned her grotesque beak and explained,—

"I am but telling the story of the Island of Demons to Madame Klussman."

As soon as she had spoken the name the Swiss caught her in his hand, mandolin and all, and walked across the esplanade, holding her at arm's length, as he might have carried an eel. Le Rossignol ineffectually squirmed and kicked, raging at the spectacle she made for laughing women and soldiers. She tried to beat the Swiss with her mandolin, but he twisted her in another direction, a cat's weight of fury. Giving her no chance to turn upon him, he opened the entrance and shut her inside the hall, and stalked back to make his explanation to his wife. Klussman had

avoided any glimpse of Marguerite until this instant of taking up her defense.

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"I pulled that witch-midget off thee," he said, speaking for the fortress to hear, "because I will not have her raising tumults in the fort. Her place is in the hall to amuse her ladies."

Marguerite's chin rested on her breast.

"Go in the house," said Klussman roughly. "Why do you show yourself out here to be mocked at?"

The poor girl raised her swimming eyes and looked at him in the fashion he remembered when she was ill; when he had nursed her with agonies of fear that she might die. The old relations between them were thus suggested in one blinding flash. Klussman turned away so sick that the walls danced around him. He went outside the fort again, and wandered around the stony height, turning at every few steps to gaze and strain his eyes at that new clay in the graveyard.

"When she lies beside that," muttered the soldier, "then I can be soft to her," though he knew he was already soft to her, and that her look had driven through him.

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XII.

D'AULNAY.

The swelling spring was chilled by cold rain, driving in from the bay and sweeping through the half budded woods. The tide went up St. John River with an impulse which flooded undiked lowlands, yet there was no storm dangerous to shipping. Some sails hung out there in the whirl of vapors with evident intention of making port.

Marie took a glass up to the turret and stood on the cannon to watch them. Rain fine as driven stings beat her face, and accumulated upon her muffling to run down and drip on the wet floor. She could make out nothing of the vessels. There were three of them, each by its sails a ship. They could not be the ships of Nicholas Denys carrying La Tour's recruits. She was not foolish enough, however great her husband's prosperity with Denys, to expect of him such a miraculous voyage around Cape Sable.

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Sails were a rare sight on that side of the bay. The venturesome seamen of the Massachusetts colony chose other courses. Fundy Bay was aside from the great sea paths. Port Royal sent out no ships except D'Aulnay's, and on La Tour's side of Acadia his was the only vessel.

Certain of nothing except that these unknown comers intended to enter St. John River, Madame La Tour went downstairs and met Klussman on the wall. He turned from his outlook and said directly,—

"Madame, I believe it is D'Aulnay."

"You may be right," she answered. "Is any one outside the gates?"

"Two men went early to the garden, but the rain drove them back. Fortunately, the day being bad, no one is hunting beyond the falls."

"And is our vessel well moored?"

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"Her repairing was finished some days ago, you remember, madame, and she sits safe and comfortable. But D'Aulnay may burn her. When he was here before, my lord was away with the ship."

"Bar the gates and make everything secure at once," said Marie. "And salute these vessels presently. If it be D'Aulnay, we sent him back to his seigniory with fair speed once before, and we are no worse equipped now."

She returned down the stone steps where Van Corlaer's courtship had succeeded, and threw off her wet cloak to dry herself before the fire in her room. She kneeled by the hearth; the log had burned nearly away. Her mass of hair was twisted back in the plain fashion of the Greeks—that old sweet fashion created with the nature of woman, to which the world periodically returns when it has exhausted new devices. The smallest curves, which were tendrils rather than curls of hair, were blown out of her fleece over forehead and ears. A dark woman's beauty is independent of wind and light. When she is buffeted by weather the rich inner color comes through her skin, and the brightest dayshine can do nothing against the dusk of her eyes.

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If D'Aulnay was about to attack the fort, Marie was glad that Monsieur Corlaer had taken his bride, the missionaries, and his people and set out in the opposite direction. Barely had they escaped a siege, for they were on their way less than twenty-four hours. She had regretted their first day in a chill rain. But chill rain in boundless woods is better than sunlight in an invested fortress. Father Jogues' happy face with its forward droop and musing eyelids came before Marie's vision.

"I need another of his benedictions," she said in undertone, when a knock on her door and a struggle with its latch disturbed her.

"Enter, Le Rossignol," said Madame La Tour. And Le Rossignol entered, and approached the hearth, standing at full length scarcely as high as her lady kneeling. The room was a dim one, for all apartments looking out of the fort had windows little larger than portholes, set high in the walls. Two or three screens hid its uses as bedchamber and dressing-room, and a few pieces of tapestry were hung, making occasional panels of grotesque figures. A couch stood near the fireplace. The dwarf's prominent features were gravely fixed, and her bushy hair stood in a huge auburn halo around them. She wet her lips with that sudden motion by which a toad may be seen to catch flies.

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"Madame Marie, every one is running around below and saying that D'Aulnay de Charnisay is coming again to attack the fort."

"Your pretty voice has always been a pleasure to me, Nightingale."

"But is it so, madame?"

"There are three ships standing in."

Le Rossignol's russet-colored gown moved nearer to the fire. She stretched her claws to warm and then lifted one of them near her lady's nose.

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"Madame Marie, if D'Aulnay de Charnisay be coming, put no faith in that Swiss!"

"In Klussman?"

"Yes, madame."

"Klussman is the best soldier now in the fort," said Madame La Tour laughing. "If I put no faith in him, whom shall I trust?"

"Madame Marie, you remember that woman you brought back with you?"

"I have not seen her or spoken with her," said Marie self-reproachfully, "since she vexed me so sorely about her child. She is a poor creature. But they feed and house her well in the barracks."

"Madame Marie, Klussman hath been talking with that woman every day this week."

The dwarf's lady looked keenly at her.

"Oh, no. There could be no talk between those two."

"But there hath been. I have watched him. Madame Marie, he took me up when I went into the fort before Madame Bronck's marriage—when I was but playing my clavier before that sulky knave to amuse her—he took me up in his big common-soldier fingers, gripping me around the waist, and flung me into the hall."

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"Did he so?" laughed Marie. "I can well see that my Nightingale can put no more faith in the Swiss. But hearken to me, thou bird-child. There! Hear our salute!"

The cannon leaped almost over their heads, and the walls shook with its boom and rebound. Marie kept her finger up and waited for a reply. Minute succeeded minute. The drip of accumulated rain-drops from the door could be heard, but nothing else. Those sullen vessels paid no attention to the inquiry of Fort St. John.

"Our enemy has come."

She relaxed from her tense listening and with a deep breath looked at Le Rossignol.

"Do not undermine the faith of one in another in this fortress. We must all hold together now. The Swiss may have a tenderness for his wretched wife which thou canst not understand. But he is not therefore faithless to his lord."

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Taking the glass and throwing on her wet cloak, Marie again ran up to the wall. But Le Rossignol sat down cross-legged by the fire, wise and brooding.

"If I could see that Swiss hung," she observed, "it would scratch in my soul a long-felt itch."

When calamity threatens, we turn back to our peaceful days with astonishment that they ever seemed monotonous. Marie watched the ships, and thought of the woman days with Antonia before Van Corlaer came; of embroidery, and teaching the Etchemins, and bringing sweet plunder from the woods for the child's grave; of paddling on the twilight river when the tide was up, brimming and bubble-tinted; of her lord's coming home to the autumn-night hearth; of the little wheels and spinning, and Edelwald's songs—of all the common joys of that past life. The clumsy glass lately brought from France to master distances in the New World, wearied her hands before it assured her eyes.

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D'Aulnay de Charnisay was actually coming to attack Fort St. John a second time. He warily anchored his vessels out of the fort's range; and hour after hour boats moved back and forth landing men and artillery on the cape at the mouth of the river, a position which gave as little scope as possible to St. John's guns. All that afternoon tents and earthworks were rising, and detail by detail appeared the deliberate and careful preparations of an enemy who was sitting down to a siege.

At dusk camp-fires began to flame on the distant low cape, and voices moved along air made

sensitively vibrant by falling damp. There was the suggested hum of a disciplined small army settling itself for the night and for early action.

Madame La Tour came out to the esplanade of the fort, and the Swiss met her, carrying a torch which ineffectual rain-drops irritated to constant hissing. He stood, tall and careworn, holding it up that his lady might see her soldiers. Everything in the fort was ready for the siege. The sentinels were about to be doubled, and sheltered by their positions. [Pg 152]

"I have had you called together, my men," she spoke, "to say a word to you before this affair begins."

The torch flared its limited circle of shine, smoke wavering in a half-seen plume at its tip, and showed their erect figures in line, none very distinct, but all keenly suggestive of life. Some were black-bearded and tawny, and others had tints of the sun in flesh and hair. One was grizzled about the temples, and one was a smooth-cheeked youth. The roster of their familiar names seemed to her as precious as a rosary. They watched her, feeling her beauty as keenly as if it were a pain, and answering every lambent motion of her spirit. [Pg 153]

All the buildings were hinted through falling mist, and glowing hearths in the barracks showed like forge lights; for the wives of the half dozen married soldiers had come out, one having a child in her arms. They stood behind their lady, troubled, but reliant on her. She had with them the prestige of success; she had led the soldiers once before, and to a successful defense of the fort.

"My men," said Marie, "when the Sieur de la Tour set out to northern Acadia he dreaded such a move as this on D'Aulnay's part. But I assured him he need not fear for us."

The soldiers murmured their joy and looked at one another smiling.

"The Sieur de la Tour will soon return, with help or without it. And D'Aulnay has no means of learning how small our garrison is. Bind yourselves afresh to me as you bound yourselves before the other attack."

"My lady, we do!" [Pg 154]

Out leaped every right hand, Klussman's with the torch, which lost and caught its flame again with the sudden sweep.

"That is all: and I thank you," said Marie. "We will do our best."

She turned back to the tower under the torch's escort, her soldiers giving her a full cheer which might further have deceived D'Aulnay in the strength of the garrison. [Pg 155]

XIII.

THE SECOND DAY.

The exhilaration of fighting quickened every pulse in the fort. By next dawn the cannon began to speak. D'Aulnay had succeeded in planting batteries on a height eastward, and his guns had immediate effect. The barracks were set on fire and put out several times during the day. All the inmates gathered in the stone hall, and at its fireplace the cook prepared and distributed rations. Great balls plowed up the esplanade, and the oven was shattered into a storm of stone and mortar, its adjoining mill being left with a gap in the side.

Responsive tremors from its own artillery ran through the fortress' walls. The pieces, except that one in the turret, were all brought into two bastions, those in the southeast bastion being trained on D'Aulnay's batteries, and the others on his camp. The gunner in the turret also dropped shot with effect among the tents, and attempted to reach the ships. But he was obliged to use nice care, for the iron pellets heaped on the stone floor behind him represented the heavy labor of one soldier who tramped at intervals up the turret stair, carrying ammunition. [Pg 156]

The day had dawned rainless but sullen. It was Good Friday. The women huddling in the hall out of their usual haunts noticed Marguerite's refusal even of the broth the cook offered her. She was restless, like a leopard, and seemed full of electrical currents which found no discharge except in the flicker of her eyes. Leaving the group of settles by the fireplace where these simple families felt more at home and least intrusive on the grandeur of the hall, she put herself on a distant chair with her face turned from them. This gave the women a chance to backbite her, to note her roused mood, and to accuse her among themselves of wishing evil to the fort and consequently to their husbands. [Pg 157]

"She hath the closest mouth in Acadia," murmured one. "Doth anybody in these walls certainly know that she came from D'Aulnay?"

"The Swiss, her husband, told it."

"And if she find means to go back to D'Aulnay, it will appear where she came from," suggested Zélie.

"I would he had her now," said the first woman. "I have that feeling for her that I have for a cat

with its hairs on end."

Madame La Tour came to the hall and sat briefly and alone at her own table to take her dinner and supper. Later in the siege she stood and merely took food from the cook's hands, talking with and comforting her women while she ate. The surgeon of the fort was away with La Tour. She laid bandages ready, and felt obliged to dress not only the first but every wound received.

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Pierre Doucett was brought from one of the bastions stunned and bleeding, and his wife rose up with her baby in her arms, filling the hall with her cries. The baby and her neighbors' children were moved to join her. But the eye of her lady was as awful as Pierre's wound. Her outcry sunk to a whimper; she hushed the children, and swept them off the settle so Pierre could lie there, and even paid out the roll of bandage with one hand while her lady used it. Marie controlled her own faintness; for a woman on whom a man's labors are imposed must bear them.

The four little children stood with fingers in their mouths, looking at these grim tokens of war. All day long they heard the crashing or thumping of balls, and felt the leap and rebound of cannon. The cook, when he came down from a bastion to attend to his kettles, gave them nice bits to eat, and in spite of solemnity, they counted it a holiday to be in the hall. Pierre Doucett groaned upon his settle, and Madame La Tour being on the lookout in the turret, Pierre Doucett's wife again took to wailing over him. The other women comforted her with their ignorant sympathy, and Marguerite sat with her back to it all. But the children adapted themselves to the situation, and trooped across to the foot of the stairway to play war. On that grim pavement door which led down into the keep they shot each other with merry cannonading and were laid out in turn on the steps.

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Le Rossignol passed hours of that day sitting on the broad door-sill of the tower. She loved to watch the fiery rain; but she was also waiting for a lull in the cannonading that she might release her swan. He was always forbidden the rooms in the tower by her lady; for he was a pugnacious creature, quick to strike with beak or wings any one who irritated him. Especially did he seem tutored in the dwarf's dislike of Lady Dorinda. In peaceful times when she descended to the ground and took a sylvan excursion outside the fort, he ruffled all his feathers and pursued her even from the river. Le Rossignol had a forked branch with which she yoked him as soon as D'Aulnay's vessels alarmed the fort. She also tied him by one leg under his usual shelter, the pent-house of the mill. He always sulked at restraint, but Le Rossignol maintained discipline. In the destruction of the oven and the reeling of the mill, Shubenacadie leaped upward and fell back flattened upon the ground. The fragments had scarcely settled before his mistress had him in her arms. At the risk of her life she dragged him across to the entrance, and sat desolately crumbling away between her fingers such feathers as were singed upon him, and sleeking his long gasping neck. She swallowed piteously with suspense, but could not bring herself to examine his body. He had his feet; he had his wings; and finally he sat up of his own accord, and quavered some slight remark about the explosion.

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"What ails thee?" exclaimed the dwarf indignantly. "Thou great coward! To lie down and gasp and sicken my heart for the singeing of a few feathers!"

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She boxed the place where a swan's ear should be, and Shubenacadie bit her. It was a serene and happy moment for both of them. Le Rossignol opened the door and pushed him in. Shubenacadie stood awkwardly with his feet sprawled on the hall pavement, and looked at the scenes to which his mistress introduced him. He noticed Marguerite, and hissed at her.

"Be still, madman," admonished the dwarf. "Thou art an intruder here. The peasants will drive thee up chimney. Low-born people, when they get into good quarters, always try to put their betters out."

Shubenacadie waddled on, scarcely recovered from the prostration of his fright, and inclined to hold the inmates of the tower accountable for it. Marie had just left Pierre Doucett, and his nurses were so busy with him that the swan was not detected until he scattered the children from the stairs.

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"Now, Mademoiselle Nightingale," said Zélie, coming heavily across the flags, "have we not enough strange cattle in this tower, that you must bring that creature in against my lady's orders?"

"He shall not stand out there under D'Aulnay's guns. Besides, Madame Marie hath need of him," declared Le Rossignol impudently. "She would have me ride to D'Aulnay's camp and bring her word how many men have fallen there to-day."

Zélie shivered through her indignation.

"Do you tell me such a tale, when you were shut in the turret for that very sin?"

"Sin that is sin in peace is virtue in war," responded Le Rossignol. "Mount, Shubenacadie."

"My lady will have his neck, wrung," threatened Zélie.

"She dare not. The chimney will tumble in. The fort will be taken."

"Art thou working against us?" demanded the maid wrathfully.

"Why should I work for you? You should, indeed, work for me. Pick me up this swan and carry him to the top of the stairs."

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"I will not do it!" cried Zélie, revolting through every atom of her ample bulk. "Do I want to be lifted over the turret like thistle-down?"

The dwarf laughed, and caught her swan by the back of his neck. With webbed toes and beating wings he fought every step; but she pulled herself up by the balustrade and dragged him along. His bristling plumage scraped the upper floor until he and his wrath were shut within the dwarf's chamber.

"Naught but muscle and bone and fire and flax went to the making of that stunted wight," mused Zélie, setting her knuckles in her hips. "What a pity that she escapes powder and ball, when poor Pierre Doucett is shot down!—a man with wife and child, and useful to my lady besides."

It was easy for Claude La Tour's widow to fill her idleness with visions of political alliance, but when D'Aulnay de Charnisay began to batter the walls round her ears, her common sense resumed sway. She could be of no use outside her apartment, so she took her meals there, trembling, but in her fashion resolute and courageous. The crash of cannon-shot was forever associated with her first reception in Acadia. Therefore this siege was a torture to her memory as well as a peril to her body. The tower had no more sheltered place, however, than Lady Dorinda's room. Zélie had orders to wait upon her with strict attention. The cannonading dying away as darkness lifted its wall between the opposed forces, she hoped for such sleep as could be had in a besieged place, and waited Zélie's knock. War, like a deluge, may drive people who detest each other into endurable contact; and when, without even a warning stroke on the panel, Le Rossignol slipped in as nimbly as a spider, Lady Dorinda felt no such indignation as she would have felt in ordinary times.

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"May I sit by your fire, your highness?" sweetly asked the dwarf. Lady Dorinda held out a finger to indicate the chimney-side and to stay further progress. The fallow and corpulent woman gazed at the beak-faced atom.

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"It hath been repeated a thousand times, but I will say again I am no highness."

Le Rossignol took the rebuke as a bird might have taken it, her bright round eyes reflecting steadily the overblown mortal opposite. She had never called Lady Dorinda anything except "her highness." The dullest soldier grinned at the apt sarcastic title. When Marie brought her to account for this annoyance, she explained that she could not call Lady Dorinda anything else. Was a poor dwarf to be punished because people made light of every word she used? Yet this innocent creature took a pleasure of her own in laying the term like an occasional lash on the woman who so despised her. Le Rossignol sat with arms around her knees, on the hearth corner. Lady Dorinda in her cushioned chair chewed aromatic seeds.

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The room, like a flower garden, exhaled all its perfumes at evening. Bottles of essences and pots of pomade and small bags of powders were set out, for the luxurious use of its inmate when Zélie prepared her for the night. Le Rossignol enjoyed these scents. The sweet-odored atmosphere which clung about Lady Dorinda was her one attribute approved by the dwarf. Madame Marie never in any way appealed to the nose. Madame Marie's garments were scentless as outdoor air, and the freshness of outdoor air seemed to belong to them. Le Rossignol liked to have her senses stimulated, and she counted it a lucky thing to sit by that deep fire and smell the heavy fragrance, of the room. A branched silver candlestick held two lighted tapers on the dressing-table. The bed curtains were parted, revealing a huge expanse of resting-place within; and heavy folds shut the starlit-world from the windows. One could here forget that the oven was blown up, and the ground of the fort plowed with shot and sown with mortar.

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"Is there no fire in the hall?" inquired Lady Dorinda.

"It hath all the common herd from the barracks around it," explained Le Rossignol. "And Pierre Doucett is stretched there, groaning over the loss of half his face."

"Where is Madame La Tour?"

"She hath gone out on the walls since the firing stopped. Our gunner in the turret told me that two guns are to be moved back before moonrise into the bastions they were taken from. Madame Marie is afraid D'Aulnay will try to encompass the fort to-night."

"And what business took thee into the turret?"

"Your highness"—

"Ladyship," corrected Lady Dorinda.

—"I like to see D'Aulnay's torches," proceeded the dwarf, without accepting correction. "His soldiers are burying the dead over there. He needs a stone tower with walls seven feet thick like ours, does D'Aulnay."

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Lady Dorinda put another seed in her mouth, and reflected that Zélie's attendance was tardier than usual. She inquired with shadings of disapproval,—

"Is Madame La Tour's woman also on the walls?"

"Not Zélie, your highness"—

"Ladyship," insisted Lady Dorinda.

"That heavy-foot Zélie," chuckled the dwarf, deaf to correction, "a fine bit of thistledown would she be to blow around the walls. Zélie is laying beds for the children, and she hath come to words with the cook through trying to steal eggs to roast for them. We have but few wild fowl eggs in store."

"Tell her that I require her," said Lady Dorinda, fretted by the irregularities of life in a siege. "Madame La Tour will account with her if she neglects her rightful duties."

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Le Rossignol crawled reluctantly up to stand in her dots of moccasins.

"Yes, your highness"—

"Ladyship," repeated Claude La Tour's widow, to whom the sting was forever fresh, reminding her of a once possible regency.

"But have you heard about the woman that was brought into the fortress before Madame Bronck went away?"

"What of her?"

"The Swiss says she comes from D'Aulnay."

"It is Zélie that I require," said Lady Dorinda with discouraging brevity. Le Rossignol dropped her face, appearing to give round-eyed speculation to the fire.

"It is believed that D'Aulnay sent by that strange woman a box of poison into the fort to work secret mischief. But," added the dwarf, looking up in open perplexity, "that box cannot now be found."

"Perhaps you can tell what manner of box it was," said Lady Dorinda with irony, though a dull red was startled into her cheeks.

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"Madame Marie says it was a tiny box of oak, thick set with nails. She would not alarm the fort, so she had search made for it in Madame Bronck's name."

Lady Dorinda, incredulous, but trembling, divined at once that the dwarf had hid that coffer in her chest. Perhaps the dwarf had procured the hand and replaced some valuable of Madame Bronck's with it. She longed to have the little beast shaken and made to confess. While she was considering what she could do with dignity, Zélie rapped and was admitted, and Le Rossignol escaped into outside darkness.

Hours passed, however, before Shubenacadie's mistress sought his society. She undressed in her black cell which had but one loophole looking toward the north, and taking the swan upon her bed tried to reconcile him to blankets. But Shubenacadie protested with both wings against a woolly covering which was not in his experience. The times were disjointed for him. He took no interest in Lady Dorinda and the box of Madame Bronck, and scratched the pallet with his toes and the nail at the end of his bill. But Le Rossignol pushed him down and pressed her confidences upon this familiar.

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"So her highness threw that box out into the fort. I had to shiver and wait until Zélie left her, but I knew she would choose to rid herself of it through a window, for she would scarce burn it, she hath not adroitness to drop it in the hall, show it to Madame Marie she would not, and keep it longer to poison her court gowns she dare not. She hath found it before this. Her looking-glass was the only place apter than that chest. I would give much to know what her yellow highness thought of that hand. Here, mine own Shubenacadie, I have brought thee this sweet biscuit moistened with water. Eat, and scratch me not.

"And little did its studding of nails avail the box, for the fall split it in three pieces; and I hid them under rubbish, for mortar and stones are plentiful down there. You should have seen my shade stretch under the moon like a tall hobgoblin. The nearest sentinel on the wall challenges me. 'Who is there?' 'Le Rossignol.' 'What are you doing?' 'Looking: for my swan's yoke.' Then he laughs—little knowing how I meant to serve his officer. The Hollandais mummy hath been of more use to me than trinkets. I frightened her highness with it, and now it is set to torment the Swiss. Let me tell thee, Shubenacadie: punishment comes even on a swan who would stretch up his neck and stand taller than his mistress. Wert thou not blown up with the oven? Hide thy head and take warning."

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XIV.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN POWERS.

The dwarf's report about Klussman forced Madame La Tour to watch the strange girl; but Marguerite seemed to take no notice of any soldier who came and went in the hall. As for the Swiss, he carried trouble on his self-revealing face, but not treachery. Klussman camped at night on the floor with other soldiers off guard; screens and the tall settles being placed in a row between this military bivouac and women and children of the household protected near the stairs. He awoke as often as the guard was changed, and when dawn-light instead of moonlight

appeared with the last relief, he sprang up, and took the breastplate which had been laid aside for his better rest. Out of its hollow fell Jonas Bronck's hand, bare and crouching with stiff fingers on the pavement. The soldiers about to lie down laughed at themselves and Klussman for recoiling from it, and fury succeeded pallor in his blond face.

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"Did you do that?" he demanded of the men, but before they could utter denials, his suspicion leaped the settles. Spurning Jonas Bronck's treasured fragment with his boot in a manner which Antonia could never have forgiven, Klussman sent it to the hearth and strode after it. He had not far to look for Marguerite. As his eye traveled recklessly into the women's camp, he encountered her beside him, sitting on the floor behind a settle and matching the red of a burning tree trunk with the red of her bruised eyelids.

"Did you put that in my breastplate?" said Klussman, pointing to the hand as it lay palm upwards. Marguerite shuddered and burst out crying. This had been her employment much of the night, but the nervous fit of childish weeping swept away all of Klussman's self-control.

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"No; no;" she repeated. "You think I do everything that is horrible." And she sobbed upon her hands.

Klussman stooped down and tossed the hand like an escaped coal behind the log. As he stooped he said,—

"I don't think that. Don't cry. If you cry I will shoot myself."

Marguerite looked up and saw his helplessness in his face. He had sought her before, but only with reproaches. Now his resentment was broken. Twice had the dwarfs mischief thrown Marguerite on his compassion, and thereby diminished his resistance to her. Jonas Bronck's hand, in its red-hot seclusion behind the log, writhed and smoked, discharging its grosser parts up the chimney's shaft. Unseen, it lay a wire-like outline of bone; unseen, it became a hand of fairy ashes, trembling in every filmy atom; finally an ember fell upon it, and where a hand had been some bits of lime lay in a white glow.

Klussman went out and mounted one of the bastions, where the gunners were already preparing for work. The weather had changed in the night, and the sky seemed immeasurably lifted while yet filled with the uncertainties of dawn. Fundy Bay revealed more and more of its clean blue-emerald level, and far eastward the glassy water shaded up to a flushing of pink. Smoke rose from the mess fires in D'Aulnay's camp. The first light puff of burnt powder sprung from his batteries, and the artillery duel again began.

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"If we had but enough soldiers to make a sally," said Madame La Tour to her officer, as she also came for an instant to the bastion, "we might take his batteries. Oh, for monsieur to appear on the bay with a stout shipload of men."

"It is time he came," said the Swiss.

"Yes, we shall see him or have news of him soon."

In the tumult of Klussman's mind Jonas Bronck's hand never again came uppermost. He cared nothing and thought nothing about that weird fragment, in the midst of living disaster. It had merely been the occasion of his surrendering to Marguerite. He determined that when La Tour returned and the siege was raised, if he survived he would take his wife and go to some new colony. Live without her he could not. Yet neither could he reëspouse her in Fort St. John, where he had himself openly denounced her.

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Spring that day leaped forward to a semblance of June. The sun poured warmth; the very air renewed life. But to Klussman it was the brilliancy of passing delirium. He did not feel when gun-metal touched his hands. The sound of the incoming tide, which could be heard betwixt artillery boomings, and the hint of birds which that sky gave, were mute against his thoughts.

Though D'Aulnay's loss was visibly heavy, it proved also an ill day for the fort. The southeast bastion was raked by a fire which disabled the guns and killed three men. Five others were wounded at various posts. The long spring twilight sunk through an orange horizon rim and filled up the measure which makes night, before firing reluctantly stopped. Marie had ground opened near the powder magazine to make a temporary grave for her three dead. They had no families. She held a taper in her hand and read a service over them. One bastion and so many men being disabled, a sentinel was posted in the turret after the gunners descended. The Swiss took this duty on himself, and felt his way up the pitch-black stairs. He had not seen Marguerite in the hall when he hurriedly took food, but she was safe in the tower. No woman ventured out in the storm of shot. The barracks were charred and battered.

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As Klussman reached the turret door he exclaimed against some human touch, but caught his breath and surrendered himself to Marguerite's arms, holding her soft body and smoothing her silk-stranded hair.

"I heard you say you would come up here," murmured Marguerite. "And the door was unlocked."

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"Where have you been since morning?"

"Behind a screen in the great hall. The women are cruel."

Klussman hated the women. He kissed his wife with the first kiss since their separation, and all

the toils of war failed to unman him like that kiss.

"But there was that child!" he groaned.

"That was not my child," said Marguerite.

"The baby brought here with you!"

"It was not mine."

"Whose was it?"

"It was a drunken soldier's. His wife died. They made me take care of it," said Marguerite resentfully.

"Why didn't you tell me that?" exclaimed Klussman. "You made me lie to my lady!"

Marguerite had no answer. He understood her reticence, and the degradation which could not be excused.

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"Who made you take care of it?"

"He did."

"D'Aulnay?" Klussman uttered through his teeth.

"Yes; I don't like him."

"I like him!" said the savage Swiss.

"He is cruel," complained Marguerite, "and selfish."

The Swiss pressed his cheek to her soft cheek.

"I never was selfish and cruel to thee," he said, weakly.

"No, you never were."

"Then why," burst out the husband afresh, "did you leave me to follow that beast of prey?"

Marguerite brought a sob from her breast which was like a sword through Klussman. He smoothed and smoothed her hair.

"But what did I ever do to thee, Marguerite?"

"I always liked you best," she said. "But he was a great lord. The women in barracks are so hateful, and a common soldier is naught."

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"You would be the lady of a seignior," hissed Klussman.

"Thou knowest I was fit for that," retorted Marguerite with spirit.

"I know thou wert. It is marrying me that has been thy ruin." He groaned with his head hanging.

"We are not ruined yet," she said, "if you care for me."

"That was a stranger child?" he repeated.

"All the train knew it to be a motherless child. He had no right to thrust it on me."

"I demand no testimony of D'Aulnay's followers," said Klussman roughly.

He let her go from his arms, and stepped to the battlements. His gaze moved over the square of the fortress, and eastward to that blur of whiteness which hinted the enemy's tents, the hint being verified by a light or two.

"I have a word to tell you," said Marguerite, leaning beside her husband.

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"I have this to tell thee," said the Swiss. "We must leave Acadia." His arm again fondled her, and he comforted his sore spirit with an instant's thought of home and peace somewhere.

"Yes. We can go to Penobscot," she said.

"Penobscot?" he repeated with suspicion.

"The king will give you a grant of Penobscot."

"The king will give it to—me?"

"Yes. And it is a great seigniory."

"How do you know the king will do that?"

"He told me to tell you; he promised it."

"The king? You never saw the king."

"No."

"D'Aulnay?"

"Yes."

"I would I had him by the throat!" burst out Klussman. Marguerite leaned her cheek on the stone and sighed. The bay seemed full of salty spice. It was a night in which the human soul must beat against casements to break free and roam the blessed dark. All of spring was in the air. Directly overhead stood the north star, with slow constellations wheeling in review before him.

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"So D'Aulnay sent you to spy on my lord, as my lord believed?"

"You shall not call me a spy. I came to my husband. I hate him," she added in a resentful burst. "He made me walk the marshes, miles and miles alone, carrying that child."

"Why the child?"

"Because the people from St. John would be sure to pity it."

"And what word did he send you to tell me?" demanded Klussman. "Give me that word."

Marguerite waited with her face downcast.

"It was kind of him to think of me," said the Swiss; "and to send you with the message!"

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She felt mocked, and drooped against the wall. And in the midst of his scorn he took her face in his hands with a softness he could not master.

"Give me the word," he repeated. Marguerite drew his neck down and whispered, but before she finished whispering Klussman flung her against the cannon with an oath.

"I thought it would be, betray my lord's fortress to D'Aulnay de Charnisay! Go down stairs, Marguerite Klussman. When I have less matter in hand, I will flog thee! Hast thou no wit at all? To come from a man who broke faith with thee, and offer his faith to me! Bribe me with Penobscot to betray St. John to him!"

Marguerite sat on the floor. She whispered, gasping,—

"Tell not the whole fortress."

Klussman ceased to talk, but his heels rung on the stone as he paced the turret. He felt himself grow old as silence became massive betwixt his wife and him. The moon rose, piercing the cannon embrasure, and showed Marguerite weeping against the wall. The mass of silence drove him resistless before her will. That soft and childlike shape did not propose treason to him. He understood that she thought only of herself and him. It was her method of bringing profit out of the times. He heard his relief stumble at the foot of the turret stairs, and went down the winding darkness to stop and send the soldier back to bed.

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"I am not sleepy," said Klussman. "I slept last night. Go and rest till daybreak." And the man willingly went. Marguerite had not moved a fold of her gown when her husband again came into the lighted tower. The Swiss lifted her up and made her stand beside him while he stanchd her tears.

"You hurt me when you threw me against the cannon," she said.

"I was rough. But I am too foolish fond to hold anger. It has worn me out to be hard on thee. I am not the man I was."

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Marguerite clung around him. He dumbly felt his misfortune in being thralld by a nature of greater moral crudity than his own. But she was his portion in the world.

"You flung me against the cannon because I wanted you made a seignior."

"It was because D'Aulnay wanted me made a traitor."

"What is there to do, indeed?" murmured Marguerite. "He said if you would take the sentinels off the wall on the entrance side of the fort, at daybreak any morning, he will be ready to scale that wall."

"But how will he know I have taken the sentinels off?"

"You must hold up a ladder in your hands."

"The tower is between that side of the fort and D'Aulnay's camp. No one would see me standing with a ladder in my hands."

"When you set the ladder against the outside wall, it is all you have to do, except to take me with you as you climb down. It is their affair to see the signal."

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"So D'Aulnay plans an ambush between us and the river? And suppose I did all that and the enemy failed to see the signal? I should go down there to be hung, or my lady would have me thrown into the keep here, and perhaps shot. I ought to be shot."

"They will see the signal," insisted Marguerite. "I know all that is to be done. He made me say it over until I tired of it. You must mount the wall where the gate is: that side of the fort toward the river, the camp being on another side."

Klussman again smoothed her hair and argued with her as with a child.

"I cannot betray my lady. You see how madame trusts me."

She grieved against his hard breastplate with insistence which pierced even that.

"I am indeed not fit to be thought on beside the lady!"

"I would do anything for thee but betray my lady."

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"And when you have held her fort for her will she advance you by so much as a handful of land?"

"I was made lieutenant since the last siege."

"But now you may be a seignior with a holding of your own," repeated Marguerite. So they talked the night away. She showed him on one hand a future of honor and plenty which he ought not to withhold from her; and on the other, a wandering forth to endless hardships. D'Aulnay had worked them harm; but this was in her mind an argument that he should now work them good. Being a selfish lord, powerful and cruel, he could demand this service as the condition of making her husband master of Penobscot; and the service itself she regarded as a small one compared to her lone tramping of the marshes to La Tour's stockade. D'Aulnay was certain to take Fort St. John some time. He had the king and all France behind him; the La Tours had nobody. Marguerite was a woman who could see no harm in advancing her husband by the downfall of his mere employers. Her husband must be advanced. She saw herself lady of Penobscot.

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The Easter dawn began to grow over the world. Klussman remembered what day it was, and lifted her up to look over the battlements at light breaking from the east.

Marguerite turned her head from point to point of the dewy world once more rising out of chaos. She showed her husband a new trench and a line of breastworks between the fort and the river. These had been made in the night, and might have been detected by him if he had guarded his post. The jutting of rocks probably hid them from sentinels below.

"D'Aulnay is coming nearer," said the Swiss, looking with haggard indifferent eyes at these preparations, and an occasional head venturing above the fresh ridge. Marguerite threw her arms around her husband's neck, and hung on him with kisses.

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"Come on, then," he said, speaking with the desperate conviction of a man who has lost himself. "I have to do it. You will see me hang for this, but I'll do it for you."

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XV.

A SOLDIER.

Marie felt herself called through the deepest depths of sleep, and sat up in the robe of fur which she had wrapped around her for her night bivouac. There was some alarm at her door. The enemy might be on the walls. She tingled with the intense return of life, and was opening the door without conscious motion. Nobody stood outside in the hall except the dwarf, whose aureole of foxy hair surrounded features pinched by anxiety.

"Madame Marie—Madame Marie! The Swiss has gone to give up the fort to D'Aulnay."

"Has gone?"

"He came down from the turret with his wife, who persuaded him. I listened all night on the stairs. D'Aulnay is ready to mount the wall when he gives the signal. I had to hide me until the woman and the Swiss passed below. They are now going to the wall to give the signal."

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Through Marie passed that worst shock of all human experience. To see your trusted ally transmuted into your secret most deadly foe, sickens the heart as death surely cannot sicken it. Like many a pierced wretch who has collapsed suddenly into the dust while the stab yet held the knife, she whispered feebly,—

"He could not do that!"

The stern blackness of her eyes seemed to annihilate all the rest of her face. Was rock itself stable under-foot? Why should one care to prolong life, when life only proved how cruel and worthless are the people for whom we labor?

"Madame Marie, he is now doing it. He was to hold up a ladder on the wall."

"Which wall?"

"This one—where the gate is."

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Marie looked through the glass in her door which opened toward the battlements, rubbed aside moisture, and looked again. While one breath could be drawn Klussman was standing in the dawn-light with a ladder raised overhead. She caught up a pair of long pistols which had lain beside her all night.

"Rouse the men below—quick!" she said to Le Rossignol, and ran up the steps to the wall. No

sentinels were there. The Swiss had already dropped down the ladder outside and was out of sight, and she heard the running, climbing feet of D'Aulnay's men coming to take the advantage afforded them. Sentinels in the other two bastions turned with surprise at her cry. They had seen Klussman relieving the guard, but his subtle action escaped their watch-worn eyes. They only noticed that he had the strange woman with him.

D'Aulnay's men were at the foot of the wall planting ladders. They were swarming up. Marie met them with the sentinels joining her and the soldiers rushing from below. The discharge of firearms, the clash of opposing metals, the thuds of falling bodies, cries, breathless struggling, clubbed weapons sweeping the battlements—filled one vast minute. Ladders were thrown back to the stones, and D'Aulnay's repulsed men were obliged to take once more to their trench, carrying the stunned and wounded. A cannon was trained on their breastworks, and St. John belched thunder and fire down the path of retreat. The Swiss's treason had been useless to the enemy. The people of the fort saw him hurried more like a prisoner than an ally towards D'Aulnay's camp, his wife beside him.

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"Oh, Klussman," thought the lady of St. John, as she turned to station guards at every exposed point and to continue that day's fight, "you knew in another way what it is to be betrayed. How could you put this anguish upon me?"

The furious and powder-grimed men, her faithful soldiers, hooted at the Swiss from their bastions, not knowing what a heart he carried with him. He turned once and made them a gesture of defiance, more pathetic than any wail for pardon, but they saw only the treason of the man, and shot at him with a good will. Through smoke and ball-plowed earth, D'Aulnay's soldiers ran into camp, and his batteries answered. Artillery echoes were scattered far through the woods, into the very depths of which that untarnished Easter weather seemed to stoop, coaxing growths from the swelling ground.

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Advancing and pausing with equal caution, a man came out of the northern forest toward St. John River. No part of his person was covered with armor. And instead of the rich and formal dress then worn by the Huguenots even in the wilderness, he wore a complete suit of hunter's buckskin which gave his supple muscles a freedom beautiful to see. His young face was freshly shaved, showing the clean fine texture of the skin. For having nearly finished his journey from the head of Fundy Bay, he had that morning prepared himself to appear what he was in Fort St. John—a man of good birth and nurture. His portables were rolled tightly in a blanket and strapped to his shoulders. A hunting-knife and two long pistols armed him. His head was covered with a cap of beaver skin, and he wore moccasins. Not an ounce of unnecessary weight hampered him.

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The booming of cannon had met him so far off on that day's march that he understood well the state of siege in which St. John would be found; and long before there was any glimpse of D'Aulnay's tents and earthworks, the problem of getting into the fort occupied his mind. For D'Aulnay's guards might be extended in every direction. But the first task in hand was to cross the river. One or two old canoes could be seen on the other side; cast-off property of the Etchemin Indians who had broken camp. Being on the wrong bank these were as useless to him as dream canoes. But had a ferryman stood in waiting, it was perilous to cross in open day, within possible sight of the enemy. So the soldier moved carefully down to a shelter of rocks below the falls, opposite that place where Van Corlaer had watched the tide sweep up and drown the rapids. From this post he got a view of La Tour's small ship, yet anchored and safe at its usual moorings. No human life was visible about it.

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"The ship would afford me good quarters," said the soldier to himself, "had I naught to do but rest. But I must get into the fort this night; and how is it to be done?"

All the thunders of war, and all the effort and danger to be undertaken, could not put his late companions out of his mind. He lay with hands clasped under his head, and looked back at the trees visibly leafing in the warm Easter air. They were much to this man in all their differences and habits, their whisperings and silences. They had marched with him through countless lone long reaches, passing him from one to another with friendly recommendation. It hurt him to notice a broken or deformed one among them; but one full and nobly equipped from root to top crown was Nature's most triumphant shout. There is a glory of the sun and a glory of the moon, but to one who loves them there is another glory of the trees.

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"In autumn," thought the soldier, "I have seen light desert the skies and take to the trees and finally spread itself beneath them, a material glow, flake on flake. But in the spring, before their secret is spoken, when they throb, and restrain the force driving through them, then have I most comfort with them, for they live as I live."

Shadows grew on the river, and ripples were arrested and turned back to flow up stream. There was but one way for him to cross the river, and that was to swim. And the best time to swim was when the tide brimmed over the current and trembled at its turn, a broad and limpid expanse of water, cold, dangerous, repellent to the chilled plunging body; but safer and more easily paddled through than when the current, angular as a skeleton, sought the bay at its lowest ebb.

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Fortunately tide and twilight favored the young soldier together. He stripped himself and bound his weapons and clothes in one tight packet on his head. At first it was easy to tread water: the salt brine upheld him. But in the middle of the river it was wise to sink close to the surface and carry as small a ripple as possible; for D'Aulnay's guards might be posted nearer than he knew. The water, deceptive at its outer edges in iridescent reflection of warm clouds, was cold as

glacier drippings in midstream. He swam with desperate calmness, guarding himself by every stroke against cramp. The bundle oppressed him. He would have cast it off, but dared not change by a thought of variation the routine of his struggle. Hardy and experienced woodsman as he was, he staggered out on the other side and lay a space in the sand, too exhausted to move.

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The tide began to recede, leaving stranded seaweed in green or brown streaks, the color of which could be determined only by the dullness or vividness of its shine through the dusk. As soon as he was able, the soldier sat up, shook out his blanket and rolled himself in it. The first large stars were trembling out. He lay and smelled gunpowder mingling with the saltiness of the bay and the evening incense of the earth.

There was a moose's lip in his wallet, the last spoil of his wilderness march, taken from game shot the night before and cooked at his morning fire. He ate it, still lying in the sand. Lights began to appear in the direction of D'Aulnay's camp, but the fort held itself dark and close. He thought of the grassy meadow rivulet which was always empty at low tide, and that it might afford him some shelter in his nearer approach to the fort. He dressed and put on his weapons, but left everything else except the blanket lying where he had landed. In this venture little could be carried except the man and his life. The frontier graveyard outlined itself dimly against the expanse of landscape. The new-turned clay therein gave him a start. He crept over the border of stones, went close, and leaned down to measure the length of the fresh grave with his outstretched hands. A sigh of relief which was as strong as a sob burst from the soldier.

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"It is only that child we found at the stockade," he murmured, and stepped on among the older mounds and leaped the opposite boundary, to descend that dip of land which the tide invaded. Water yet shone there on the grass. Too impatient to wait until the tide ran low, he found the log, and moved carefully forward, through increasing dusk, on hands and knees within closer range of the fort. Remembering that his buckskin might make an inviting spot on the slope, he wrapped his dark blanket around him. The chorus of insect life and of water creatures, which had scarcely been tuned for the season, began to raise experimental notes. And now a splash like the leap of a fish came from the river. The moon would be late; he thought of that with satisfaction. There was a little mist blown aloft over the stars, yet the night did not promise to be cloudy.

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The whole environment of Fort St. John was so familiar to the young soldier that he found no unusual stone in his way. That side toward the garden might be the side least exposed to D'Aulnay's forces at night. If he could reach the southwest bastion unseen, he could ask for a ladder. There was every likelihood of his being shot before the sentinels recognized him, yet he might be more fortunate. Balancing these chances, he moved toward that angle of shadow which the fortress lifted against the southern sky. Long rays of light within the walls were thrown up and moved on darkness like the pulsing motions of the aurora.

"Who goes there?" said a voice.

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The soldier lay flat against the earth. He had imagined the browsing sound of cattle near him. But a standing figure now condensed itself from the general dusk, some distance up the slope betwixt him and the bastion. The challenger was entirely apart from the fort. As he flattened himself in breathless waiting for a shot which might follow, a clatter began at his very ears, some animal bounded over him with a glancing cut of its hoof, and galloped toward the trench below St. John's gate. He heard another exclamation,—this rapid traveler had probably startled another sentinel. The man who had challenged him laughed softly in the darkness. All the Sable Island ponies must be loose upon the slope. D'Aulnay's men had taken possession of the stable and cattle, and the wild and frightened ponies were scattered. As his ear lay so near the ground the soldier heard other little hoofs startled to action, and a snort or two from suspicious nostrils. He crept away from the sentinel without further challenge. It was evident that D'Aulnay had encompassed the fort with guards.

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The young soldier crept slowly down the rocky hillock, avoided another sentinel, and, after long caution and self-restraint and polishing the earth with his buckskin, crawled into the empty trench. The Sable Island ponies continually helped him. They were so nervous and so agile that the sentinels ceased to watch moving shadows.

The soldier looked up at St. John and its tower, knowing that he must enter in some manner before the moon rose. He dreaded the red brightness of moon-dawn, when guards whom he could discern against the stony ascent might detect his forehead above the breastwork. Behind him stretched an alluvial flat to the river's sands. The tide was running swiftly out, and under starlight its swirls and long muscular sweeps could be followed by a practiced eye.

As the soldier glanced warily in every direction, two lights left D'Aulnay's camp and approached him, jerking and flaring in the hands of men who were evidently walking over irregular ground. They might be coming directly to take possession of the trench. But why should they proclaim their intention with torches to the batteries of Fort St. John? He looked around for some refuge from the advancing circle of smoky shine, and moved backwards along the bottom of the trench. The light stretched over and bridged him, leaving him in a stream of deep shadow, protected by the breastwork from sentinels above. He could therefore lift a cautious eye at the back of the trench, and scan the group now moving betwixt him and the river. There were seven persons, only one of whom strode the stones with reckless feet. This man's hands were tied behind his back, and a rope was noosed around his neck and held at the other end by a soldier.

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"It is Klussman, our Swiss!" flashed through the soldier in the trench, with a mighty throb of rage

and shame, and anxiety for the lady in the fort. If Klussman had been taken prisoner, the guns of St. John would surely speak in his behalf when he was about to be hanged before its very gate. Such a parade of the act must be discovered on the walls. It was plain that Klussman had deserted to D'Aulnay, and was now enjoying D'Aulnay's gratitude. [Pg 206]

"The tree that doth best front the gates," said one of the men, pointing with his torch to an elm in the alluvial soil: "my lord said the tree that doth best front the gates."

"That hath no fit limbs," objected another.

"He said the tree that doth best front the gates," insisted the first man. "Besides this one, what shrub hereabouts is tall enough for our use?"

They moved down towards the elm. A stool carried by one man showed its long legs grotesquely behind his back. There were six persons besides the prisoner, all soldiers except one, who wore the coarse, long, cord-girdled gown of a Capuchin. His hood was drawn over his face, and the torches imperfectly showed that he was of the bare-footed order and wore only sandals. He held up a crucifix and walked close beside Klussman. But the Swiss gazed all around the dark world which he was so soon to leave, and up at the fortress he had attempted to betray, and never once at the murmuring friar. [Pg 207]

The soldier in the trench heard a breathing near him, and saw that a number of the ponies, drawn by the light, had left their fitful grazing and were venturing step by step beyond the end of the trench. Some association of this scene with soldiers who used to feed them at night, after a hard day of drawing home the winter logs, may have stirred behind their shaggy foreheads. He took his hunting-knife with sudden and desperate intention, threw off his moccasins, cut his leggins short at the middle of the leg, and silently divided his blanket into strips.

Preparations were going forward under the elm. One of the soldiers climbed the tree and crept out upon an arched limb, catching the rope end thrown up to him. Both torches were given to one man, that all the others might set themselves to the task. Klussman stood upon the stool, which they had brought for the purpose from the cook's galley in one of their ships. His blond face, across which all his thoughts used to parade, was cast up by the torches like a stiffened mask, hopeless yet fearless in its expression. [Pg 208]

"Come, Father Vincent," said the man who had made the knot, sliding down the tree. "This is a Huguenot fellow, and good words are lost on him. I wonder that my lord let him have a friar to comfort him."

"Retire, Father Vincent," said the men around the stool, with more roughness than they would have shown to a favorite confessor of D'Aulnay's. The Capuchin turned and walked toward the trench.

The soldier in the trench could not hear what they said, but he had time for no further thought of Klussman. He had been watching the ponies with the conviction that his own life hung on what he might drive them to do. They alternately snuffed at Klussman's presence and put their noses down to feel for springing grass. Before they could start and wheel from the friar, the soldier had thrown his hunting-knife. It struck the hind leg of the nearest pony and a scampering and snorting hurricane swept down past the elm. Klussman's stool and the torch-bearer were rolled together. Both lights were stamped out by the panic-struck men, who thought a sally had been made from the fort. Father Vincent saw the knife thrown, and turned back, but the man in the trench seized him with steel muscles and dragged him into its hollow. If the good father uttered cry against such violence, there was also noise under the elm, and the wounded pony yet galloped and snorted toward the river. The young soldier fastened his mouth shut with a piece of blanket, stripped off his capote and sandals and tied him so that he could not move. Having done all most securely and put the capote and sandals upon himself, the soldier whispered at the friar's ear an apology which must have amused them both,— [Pg 209]

"Pardon my roughness, good father. Perhaps you will lend me your clothes?" [Pg 210]

XVI.

THE CAMP.

D'Aulnay's sentinels about the walls, understanding that all this confusion was made by a stampede of ponies, kept the silence which had been enjoined on them. But some stir of inquiry seemed to occur in the bastions. Father Vincent, lying helpless in the trench, and feeling the chill of lately opened earth through his shaven head and partly nude body, wondered if he also had met D'Aulnay's gratitude for his recent inquiry into D'Aulnay's fitness to receive the sacraments.

"But I will tell my lord of Charnisay the truth about his sins," thought Father Vincent, unable to form any words with a pinioned mouth, "though he should go the length of procuring my death." [Pg 211]

The soldier with his buckskin covered by Father Vincent's capote stepped out into the starlight and turned his cowed face toward the fort. He intended to tell the sentinels that D'Aulnay had sent him with a message to the commandant of St. John. The guards, discerning his capote,

would perhaps obey a beckoning finger, and believe that he had been charged with silence; for not having heard the churchman's voice he dared not try to imitate it, and must whisper. But that unforeseen element which the wisest cannot rule out of their fate halted him before he took a dozen steps up the hill.

"Where is Father Vincent de Paris?" called some impatient person below the trench. Five figures coming from the tree gained distinctness as they advanced, but it was a new-comer who demanded again,—

"Where is Father Vincent de Paris? Did he not leave the camp with you?"

The soldier went down directly where his gray capote might speak for itself to the eye, and the man who carried the stool pointed with it toward the evident friar. [Pg 213]

"There stands the friar behind thee. He hath been tumbled into the trench, I think."

"Is your affair done?"

"And well done, except that some cattle ran mad among us but now, and we thought a sally had been made, so we put out our torches."

"With your stupid din," said the messenger from camp, "you will wake up the guns of the fort at the very moment when Sieur D'Aulnay would send his truce bearer in."

"I thank the saints I am not like to be used for his agent," said the man who had been upset with the torches, "if the walls are to be stormed as they were this morning."

"He wants Father Vincent de Paris," said the under officer from camp. "Good father, you took more license in coming hither than my lord intended."

The soldier made some murmured noise under his cowl. He walked beside the officer and heard one man say to another behind him,— [Pg 214]

"These holy folks have more courage than men-at-arms. My lord was minded to throw this one out of the ship when he sailed from Port Royal."

"The Sieur D'Aulnay hath too much respect to his religion to do that," answered the other.

"You had best move in silence," said the officer, turning his head toward them, and no further words broke the march into camp. D'Aulnay's camp was well above the reach of high tide, yet so near the river that soft and regular splashings seemed encroaching on the tents. The soldier noticed the batteries on their height, and counted as ably as he could for the cowl and night dimness the number of tents holding this little army. Far beyond them the palpitating waters showed changeful surfaces on Fundy Bay.

The capote was long for him. He kept his hands within the sleeves. Before the guard-line was passed he saw in the middle of the camp an open tent. A long torch stood in front of it with the point stuck in the ground. The floating yellow blaze showed the tent's interior, its simple fittings for rest, the magnificent arms and garments of its occupant, and first of all, D'Aulnay de Charnisay himself, sitting with a rude camp table in front of him. He was half muffled in a furred cloak from the balm of that Easter night. Papers and an ink-horn were on the table, and two officers stood by, receiving orders. [Pg 215]

This governor of Acadia had a triangular face with square temples and pointed beard, its crisp fleece also concealing his mouth except the thin edges of his lips. It was a handsome nervous face of black tones; one that kept counsel, and was not without humor. He noticed his subordinate approaching with the friar. The men sent to execute Klussman were dispersed to their tents.

"The Swiss hath suffered his punishment?" he inquired. [Pg 216]

"Yes, my lord D'Aulnay. I met the soldiers returning."

"Did he say anything further concerning the state of the fort?"

"I know not, my lord. But I will call the men to be questioned."

"Let it be. He hath probably not lied in what he told me to-day of its weak garrison. But help is expected soon with La Tour. Perhaps he told more to the friar in their last conference."

"Heretics do not confess, my lord."

"True enough; but these churchmen have inquisitive minds which go into men's affairs without confession," said the governor of Acadia with a smile which lengthened slightly the thread-lines of his lips. D'Aulnay de Charnisay had an eye with a keen blue iris, sorting not at all with the pigments of his face. As he cast it on the returned friar his mere review deepened to a scrutiny used to detecting concealments.

"Hath this Capuchin shrunk?" exclaimed D'Aulnay. "He is not as tall as he was." [Pg 217]

All present looked with quickened attention at the soldier, who expected them to pull off his cowl and expose a head of thrifty clusters which had never known the tonsure. His beaver cap lay in the trench with the real Father Vincent.

He folded his arms on his breast with a gesture of patience which had its effect. D'Aulnay's

followers knew the warfare between their seignior and Father Vincent de Paris, the only churchman in Acadia who insisted on bringing him to account; and who had found means to supplant a favorite priest on this expedition, for the purpose of watching him. D'Aulnay bore it with assumed good-humor. He had his religious scruples as well as his revenges and ambitions. But there were ways in which an intruding churchman could be martyred by irony and covert abuse, and by discomfort chargeable to the circumstances of war. Father Vincent de Paris, on his part, bore such martyrdom silently, but stinted no word of needed rebuke. A woman's mourning in the dusky tent next to D'Aulnay's now rose to such wildness of piteous cries as to divert even him from the shrinkage of Father Vincent's height. No other voice could be heard, comforting her. She was alone with sorrow in the midst of an army of fray-hardened men. A look of embarrassment passed over De Charnisay's face, and he said to the officer nearest him,—

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"Remove that woman to another part of the camp."

"The Swiss's wife, my lord?"

"The Swiss's widow, to speak exactly." He turned again with a frowning smile to the silent Capuchin. "By the proofs she gives, my kindness hath not been so great to that woman that the church need upbraid me."

Marguerite came out of the tent at a peremptory word given by the officer at its opening. She did not look toward D'Aulnay de Charnisay, the power who had made her his foolish agent to the destruction of the man who loved her. Muffling her heartbroken cries she followed the subaltern away into darkness—she who had meant at all costs to be mistress of Penobscot. When distance somewhat relieved their ears, D'Aulnay took up a paper lying before him on the table and spoke in some haste to the friar.

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"You will go with escort to the walls of the fort, Father Vincent, and demand to speak with Madame La Tour. She hath, it appears, little aversion to being seen on the walls. Give into her hand this paper."

The soldier under the cowl, dreading that his unbroken silence might be noted against him, made some muttering remonstrance, at which D'Aulnay laughed while tying the packet.

"When churchmen go to war, Father Vincent, they must expect to share its risks, at least in offices of mediation. Look you: they tell me the Jesuits and missionaries of Quebec and Montreal are ever before the soldier in the march upon this New World. But Capuchins are a lazy, selfish order. They would lie at their ease in a monastery, exerting themselves only to spy upon their neighbors."

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He held out the packet. The soldier in the capote had to step forward to receive it, and D'Aulnay's eye fell upon the sandal advanced near the torch.

"Come, this is not our Capuchin," he exclaimed grimly. "This man hath a foot whiter than my own!"

The feeling that he was detected gave the soldier desperate boldness and scorn of all further caution. He stood erect and lifted his face. Though the folds of the cowl fell around it, the governor caught his contemptuous eye.

"Wash thy heart as I have washed my feet, and it also will be white, D'Aulnay de Charnisay!"

"There spoke the Capuchin," said D'Aulnay with a nod. His close face allowed itself some pleasure in baiting a friar, and if he had suspected Father Vincent of changed identity, his own men were not sure of his suspicion the next instant.

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"Our friar hath washed his feet," he observed insolently, pointing out the evident fact. "Such penance and ablution he hath never before put upon himself since he came to Acadia! I will set it down in my dispatches to the king, for his majesty will take pleasure in such news:—'Father Vincent de Paris, on this blessed Pâques day of the year 1645, hath washed his feet.'"

The men laughed in a half ashamed way which apologized to the holy man while it deferred to the master, and D'Aulnay dismissed his envoy with seriousness. The two officers who had taken his orders lighted another torch at the blaze in front of the tent, and led away the willing friar. D'Aulnay watched them down the avenue of lodges, and when their figures entered blurred space, watched the moving star which indicated their progress. The officer who had brought Father Vincent to this conference, also stood musing after them with unalaid suspicion.

"Close my tent," said D'Aulnay, rising, "and set the table within."

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"My lord," spoke out the subordinate, "I did not tell you the men were thrown into confusion around the Swiss."

"Well, monsieur?" responded D'Aulnay curtly, with an attentive eye.

"There was a stampede of the cattle loosened from the stable. Father Vincent fell into the empty trench. They doubtless lost sight of him until he came out again."

"Therefore, monsieur?"

"It seemed to me as your lordship said, that this man scarce had the bearing of a friar, until, indeed, he spoke out in denunciation, and then his voice sounded a deeper tone than I ever heard

in it before."

"Why did you not tell me this directly?"

"My lord, I had not thought it until he showed such readiness to move toward yon fort."

"Did you examine the trench?"

"No, my lord. I hurried the friar hither at your command."

"It was the part of a prudent soldier," sneered his master, "to leave a dark trench possibly full of La Tour's recruits, and trot a friar into camp." [Pg 223]

"But the sentinels are there, monsieur, and they gave no alarm."

"The sentinels are like you. They will think of giving an alarm to-morrow sunrise, when the fort is strengthened by a new garrison. Take a company of men, surround that trench, double the guards, send me back that friar, and do all with such haste as I have never seen thee show in my service yet."

"Yes, my lord."

While the officer ran among the tents, D'Aulnay walked back and forth outside, nervously impatient to have his men gone. He whispered with a laugh in his beard, "Charles de Menou, D'Aulnay de Charnisay, are you to be twice beaten by a woman? If La Tour hath come back with help and entered the fort, the siege may as well be raised to-morrow."

The cowed soldier taxed his escort in the speed he made across that dark country separating camp and fortress. [Pg 224]

"Go softly, good father," remonstrated one of the officers, stumbling among stones. "The Sieur D'Aulnay meant not that we should break our necks at this business."

But he led them with no abatement and a stern and offended mien; wondering secretly if the real Father Vincent would by this time be able to make some noise in the trench. Unaccountable night sounds startled the ear. He turned to the fortress ascent while the trench yet lay distant.

"There is an easier way, father," urged one of the men, obliged, however, to follow him and bend to the task of climbing. The discomfort of treading stony soil in sandals, and the sensibility of his uncovered shins to even that soft night air, made him smile under the cowl. A sentinel challenged them and was answered by his companions. Passing on, they reached the wall near the gate. Here the hill sloped less abruptly than at the towered corner. The rocky foundation of Fort St. John made a moat impossible. Guards on the wall now challenged them, and the muzzles of three guns looked down, distinct eyes in the lifted torchlight, but at the sign of truce these were withdrawn. [Pg 225]

"The Sieur D'Aulnay de Charnisay sends this friar with dispatches to the lady of the fort," said one of the officers. "Call your lady to receive them into her own hand. These are our orders."

"And put down a ladder," said the other officer, "that he may ascend with them."

"We put down no ladders," answered the man leaning over the wall. "We will call our lady, but you must yourselves find an arm long enough to lift your dispatches to her."

During this parley, the rush of men coming from the camp began to be heard. The guards on the wall listened, and two of them promptly trained the cannon in that direction.

"You have come to surprise us again," taunted the third guard, leaning over the wall; "but the Swiss is not here now!" [Pg 226]

The soldier saw his escape was cut off, and desperately casting back his monk's hood, he shouted upwards,—

"La Tour! La Tour! Put down the ladder—it is Edelwald!" [Pg 227]

XVII.

AN ACADIAN PASSOVER.

At that name, down came a ladder as if shot from a catapult. Edelwald sprung up the rounds and both of D'Aulnay's officers seized him. He had drawn one of his long pistols and he clubbed it on their heads so that they staggered back. The sentinels and advancing men fired on him, but by some muscular flash he was flat upon the top of the wall, and the cannon sprung with a roar at his enemies. They were directly in its track, and they took to the trench. Edelwald, dragging the ladder up after him, laughed at the state in which they must find Father Vincent. The entire garrison rushed to the walls, and D'Aulnay's camp stirred with the rolling of drums. Then there was a pause, and each party waited further aggression from the other. The fort's gun had spoken but once. Perhaps some intelligence passed from trench to camp. Presently the unsuccessful company ventured from their breastwork and moved away, and both sides again had rest for the [Pg 228]

night.

Madame La Tour stood in the fort, watching the action of her garrison outlined against the sky. She could no longer ascend the wall by her private stairs. Cannon shot had torn down her chimney and piled its rock in a barricade against the door. Sentinels were changed, and the relieved soldiers descended from the wall and returned to that great room of the tower which had been turned into a common camp. It seemed under strange enchantment. There was a hole beside the portrait of Claude La Tour, and through its tunnel starlight could be seen and the night air breathed in. The carved buffet was shattered. The usual log, however, burned in cheer, and families had reunited in distinct nests. A pavilion of tapestry was set up for Lady Dorinda and all her treasures, near the stairs: the southern window of her chamber had been made a target.

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Le Rossignol sat on a table, with the four expectant children still dancing in front of her. Was it not Pâques evening? The alarm being over she again began her merriest tunes. Irregular life in a besieged fortress had its fascination for the children. No bedtime laws could be enforced where the entire household stirred. But to Shubenacadie such turmoil was scandalous. He also lived in the hall during the day, and as late at night as his mistress chose, but he lived a retired life, squatted in a corner, hissing at all who passed near him. Perhaps he pined for water whereon to spread his wings and sail. Sometimes he quavered a plaintive remark on society as he found it, and sometimes he stretched up his neck to its longest length, a sinuous white serpent, and gazed wrathfully at the paneled ceiling. The firelight revealed him at this moment a bundle of glistening satin, wrapped in sleep and his wings from the alarms of war.

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Marie stood at the hearth to receive Edelwald. He came striding from among her soldiers, his head showing like a Roman's above the cowl. It was dark-eyed, shapely of feature, and with a mouth and inward curve above the chin so beautiful that their chiseled strength was always a surprise. As he faced the lady of the fortress he stood no taller than she did, but his contour was muscular.

After dropping on his knee to kiss her hand, he stood up to bear the search of her eyes. They swept down his friar's dress and found it not so strange that it should supplant her immediate inquiry,—

"Your news? My lord is well?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Is he without?"

"My lady, he is at the outpost at the head of Fundy Bay."

Her face whitened terribly. She knew what this meant. La Tour could get no help. Nicholas Denys denied him men. There was no hope of rescue for Fort St. John. He was waiting in the outpost for his ship to bring him home—the home besieged by D'Aulnay. The blood returned to her face with a rush, her mouth quivered, and she sobbed two or three times without tears. La Tour could have taken her in his arms. But Edelwald folded his empty arms across his breast.

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"My lady, I would rather be shot than bring you this message."

"Klussman betrayed us, Edelwald! and I know I hurt men, hurt them with my own hands, striking and shooting on the wall!"

She threw herself against the settle and shook with weeping. It was the revolt of womanhood. The soldier hung his head. It relieved him to declare savagely,—

"Klussman hath his pay. D'Aulnay's followers have just hanged him below the fort."

"Hanged him! Hanged poor Klussman? Edelwald, I cannot have Klussman—hanged!"

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Le Rossignol had stopped her mandolin, and the children clustered near Edelwald waiting for his notice. One of them now ran with the news to her.

"Klussman is hanged," she repeated, changing her position on the table and laying the mandolin down. "Faith, we are never satisfied with our good. I am in a rage now because they hanged not the woman in his stead."

Marie wiped off her tears. The black rings of sleeplessness around her eyes emphasized her loss of color, but she was beautiful.

"How foolish doth weariness make a woman! I expected no help from Denys—yet rested my last hope on it. You must eat, Edelwald. By your dress and the alarm raised you have come into the fort through danger and effort."

"My lady, if, you will permit me first to go to my room, I will find something which sorts better with a soldier than this churchman's gown. My buckskin, I was obliged to mutilate to make me a proper friar."

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"Go, assuredly. But I know not what rubbish the cannon of D'Aulnay have battered down in your room. The monk's frock will scarce feel lonesome in that part of our tower now: we have had two Jesuits to lodge there since you left."

"Did they carry away Madame Bronck? I do not see her among your women."

"She is fortunate, Edelwald. A man loved her, and traveled hither from the Orange settlement. They were wed five days ago, and set out with the Jesuits to Montreal."

Marie did not lift her heavy eyelids while she spoke, and anguish passed unseen across Edelwald's face. Whoever was loved and fortunate, he stood outside of such experience. He was young, but there was to be no wooing for him in the world, however long war might spare him. The women of the fort waited with their children for his notice. His stirring to turn toward them rustled a paper under his capote.

"My lady," he said pausing, "D'Aulnay had me in his camp and gave me dispatches to you."

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"You were there in this friar's dress?"

Marie looked sincerely the pride she took in his simple courage.

"Yes, my lady, though much against my will. I was obliged to knock down a reverend shaveling and strip him. But the gown hath served fairly for the trouble."

"Hath D'Aulnay many men?"

"He is well equipped."

Edelwald took the packet from his belt and gave it to her. Marie broke the thread and sat down on the settle, spreading D'Aulnay's paper to the firelight. She read it in silence, and handed it to Edelwald. He leaned toward the fire and read it also.

D'Aulnay de Charnisay demanded the surrender of Fort St. John with all its stores, ammunition, moneys and plate, and its present small garrison. When Edelwald looked up, Marie extended her hand for the dispatch and threw it into the fire.

"Let that be his answer," said Edelwald.

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"If we surrender," spoke the lady of the fort, "we will make our own terms."

"My lady, you will not surrender."

As she looked at Edelwald, the comfort of having him there softened the resolute lines of her face into childlike curves. Being about the same age she felt always a youthful comradeship with him. Her eyes again filled.

"Edelwald, we have lost ten men."

"D'Aulnay has doubtless lost ten or twenty times as many."

"What are men to him? Cattle, which he can buy. But to us, they are priceless. To say nothing of your rank, Edelwald, you alone are worth more than all the armies D'Aulnay can muster."

He sheltered his face with one hand as if the fire scorched him.

"My lady, Sieur Charles would have us hold this place. Consider: it is his last fortress except that stockade."

"You mistake him, Edelwald. He would save the garrison and let the fort go. If he or you had not come to-night I must have died of my troubles."

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She conquered some sobbing, and asked, "How does he bear this despair, Edelwald? for he knew it must come to this without help."

"He was heartsick with anxiety to return, my lady."

She leaned against the back of the settle.

"Do not say things to induce me to sacrifice his men for his fort."

"Do you think, my lady, that D'Aulnay would spare the garrison if he gets possession of this fort?"

"On no other condition will he get the fort. He shall let all my brave men go out with the honors of war."

"But if he accepts such terms—will he keep them?"

"Is not any man obliged to keep a written treaty?"

"Kings are scarce obliged to do that."

"I see what you would do," said Marie, "and I tell you it is useless. You would frighten me with D'Aulnay into allowing you, our only officer, and these men, our only soldiers, to ransom this fort with your lives. It comes to that. We might hold out a few more days and end by being at his mercy."

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"Let the men themselves be spoken to," entreated Edelwald.

"They will all, like you, beg to give themselves to the holding of Charles La Tour's property. I have balanced these matters night and day. We must surrender, Edelwald. We must surrender to-morrow."

"My lady, I am one more man. And I will now take charge of the defense."

"And what could I say to my lord if you were killed?—you, the friend of his house, the soldier who lately came with such hopes to Acadia. Our fortunes do you harm enough, Edelwald. I could never face my lord again without you and his men."

"Sieur Charles loves me well enough to trust me with his most dangerous affairs, my lady. The keeping of this fortress shall be one of them." [Pg 238]

"O Edelwald, go away from me now!" she cried out piteously. He dropped his head and turned on the instant. The women met him and the children hung to him; and that little being who was neither woman nor child so resented the noise which they made about him as he approached her table that she took her mandolin and swept them out of her way.

"How fares Shubenacadie?" he inquired over the claw she presented to him.

"Shubenacadie's feathers are curdled. He hath greatly soured. Confess me and give me thy benediction, Father Edelwald for I have sinned."

"Not since I took these orders, I hope," said Edelwald. "As a Capuchin I am only an hour old."

"Within the hour, then, I have beaten my swan, bred a quarrel amongst these spawn of the common soldier, and wished a woman hanged." [Pg 239]

"A naughty list," said Edelwald.

"Yes, but lying is worse than any of these. Lying doth make the soul sick."

"How do you know that?"

"I have tried it," said Le Rossignol. "Many a time have I tried it. Scarce half an hour ago I told her forlorn old highness that the fort was surely taken this time, and I think she hath buried herself in her chest."

"Edelwald," said a voice from the tapestried pavilion. Lady Dorinda's head and hand appeared, with the curtains drawn behind them.

As the soldier bent to his service upon the hand of the old maid of honor, she exclaimed whimsically,—

"What, Edelwald! Are our fortunes at such ebb that you are taking to a Romish cloister?"

"No cloister for me. Your ladyship sees only a cover which I think of rendering to its owner again. He may not have a second capote in the world, being friar extraordinary to D'Aulnay de Charnisay, who is notable for seizing other men's goods." [Pg 240]

"Edelwald, you bring ill news?"

"There was none other to bring."

"Is Charles La Tour then in such straits that we are to have no relief in this fortress?"

"We can look for nothing, Lady Dorinda."

"Thou seest now, Edelwald, how France requites his service. If he had listened to his father he might to-day be second to none in Acadia, with men and wealth in abundance."

"Yet, your ladyship, we love our France!"

"Oh, you do put me out of patience! But the discomforts and perils of this siege have scarce left me any. We are walled together here like sheep."

"It is trying, your ladyship, but if we succeed in keeping the butcher out we may do better presently."

Marie sent her woman for writing tools, and was busy with them when Edelwald returned in his ordinary rich dark dress. She made him a place beside her on the settle, and submitted the paper to his eye. The women and children listened. They knew their situation was desperate. Whispering together they decided with their lady that she would do best to save her soldiers and sacrifice the fort. [Pg 241]

Edelwald read the terms she intended to demand, and then looked aside at the beautiful and tender woman who had borne the hardships of war. She should do anything she wished. It was worth while to surrender if surrendering decreased her care. All Acadia was nothing when weighed against her peace of mind. He felt his rage mounting against Charles La Tour for leaving her exposed in this frontier post, the instrument of her lord's ambition and political feud. In Edelwald's silent and unguessed warfare with his secret, he had this one small half hour's truce. Marie sat under his eyes in firelight, depending on the comfort of his presence. Rapture opened its sensitive flower and life culminated for him. Unconscious of it, she wrote down his suggestions, bending her head seriously to the task. [Pg 242]

Edelwald himself finally made a draft of the paper for D'Aulnay. The weary men had thrown themselves down to sleep, and heard no colloquy. But presently the cook was aroused from among them and bid to set out such a feast as he had never before made in Fort St. John.

"Use of our best supplies," directed Marie. "To-morrow we may give up all we have remaining to the enemy. We will eat a great supper together this Pâques night."

The cook took an assistant and labored well. Kettles and pans multiplied on coals raked out for their service. Marie had the men bring such doors as remained from the barracks and lay them from table to table, making one long board for her household; and this the women dressed in the best linen of the house. They set on plate which had been in La Tour's family for generations. Every accumulation of prosperity was brought out for this final use. The tunnel in the wall was stopped with blankets, and wax candles were lighted everywhere. Odors of festivity filled the children with eagerness. It was like the new year when there was always merry-making in the hall, yet it was also like a religious ceremony. The men rose from their pallets and set aside screens, and the news was spread when sentinels were changed.

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Marie called Zélie up to her ruined apartment, and standing amidst stone and plaster, was dressed in her most magnificent gown and jewels. She appeared on the stairs in the royal blackness of velvet whitened by laces and sparkling with points of tinted fire. Edelwald led her to the head of the long board, and she directed her people to range themselves down its length in the order of their families.

"My men," said Madame La Tour to each party in turn as they were relieved on the walls to sit down at the table below her, "we are holding a passover supper this Pâques night because it may be our last night in Fort St. John. You all understand how Sieur de la Tour hath fared. We are reduced to the last straits. Yet not to the last straits, my men, if we can keep you. With such followers your lord can make some stand elsewhere. D'Aulnay has proposed a surrender. I refused his terms, and have set down others, which will sacrifice the fort but save the garrison. Edelwald, our only officer, is against surrender, because he, like yourselves, would give the greater for the less, which I cannot allow."

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"My lady," spoke Glaud Burge, a sturdy grizzled man, rising to speak for the first squad, "we have been talking of this matter together, and we think Edelwald is right. The fort is hard beset, and it is true there are fewer of us than at first, but we may hold out somehow and keep the walls around us. We have no stomach to strike flag to D'Aulnay de Charnisay."

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"My lady," spoke Jean le Prince, the youngest man in the fortress, who was appointed to speak for the second squad when their turn came to sit down at the table, "we also think Edelwald is right in counseling you not to give up Fort St. John. We say nothing of D'Aulnay's hanging Klussman, for Klussman deserved it. But we would rather be shot down man by man than go out by the grace of D'Aulnay."

She answered both squads,—

"Do not argue against surrender, my men. We can look for no help. The fort must go in a few more days anyhow, and by capitulating we can make terms. My lord can build other forts, but where will he find other followers like you? You will march out not by the grace of D'Aulnay but with the honors of war. Now speak of it no more, and let us make this a festival."

So they made it a festival. With guards coming and going constantly, every man took the pleasure of the hall while the walls were kept.

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Such a night was never before celebrated in Fort St. John. A heavier race might have touched the sadness underlying such gayety; or have fathomed moonlight to that terrible burden of the elm-tree down the slope. But this French garrison lent themselves heartily to the hour, enjoying without past or future. Stories were told of the New World and of France, tales of persecuted Huguenots, legends which their fathers had handed down to them, and traditions picked up among the Indians. Edelwald took the dwarf's mandolin and stood up among them singing the songs they loved, the high and courageous songs, loving songs, and songs of faith. Lady Dorinda, having shut her curtain for the night, declined to take any part in this household festivity, though she contributed some unheard sighs and groans of annoyance during its progress. A phlegmatic woman, fond of her ease, could hardly keep her tranquillity, besieged by cannon in the daytime, and by chattering and laughter, the cracking of nuts and the thump of soldiers' feet half the night.

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But Shubenacadie came out of his corner and lifted his wings for battle. Le Rossignol first soothed him and then betrayed him into shoes of birch bark which she carried in her pocket for the purpose of making Shubenacadie dance. Shubenacadie began to dance in a wild untutored trot most laughable to see. He varied his paddling on the flags by sallies with bill and wings against the dear mistress who made him a spectacle; and finally at Marie's word he was relieved, and waddled back to his corner to eat and doze and mutter swan talk against such orgies in Fort St. John. The children had long fallen asleep with rapturous fatigue, when Marie stood up and made her people follow her in a prayer. The waxlights were then put out, screens divided the camp, and quiet followed.

Of all nights in Le Rossignol's life this one seemed least likely to be chosen as her occasion for a flight. The walls were strictly guarded, and at midnight the moon spread its ghostly day over all visible earth. Besides, if the fortress was to be surrendered, there was immediate prospect of a voyage for all the household.

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The dwarf's world was near the ground, to which the thinking of the tall men and women around her scarcely stooped. But she seized on and weighed and tried their thoughts, arriving at shrewd

issues. Nobody had asked her advice about the capitulation. Without asking anybody's advice she decided that the Hollandais Van Corlaer and the Jesuit priest Father Jogues would be wholesome checks upon D'Aulnay de Charnisay when her lady opened the fort to him. The weather must have prevented Van Corlaer from getting beyond the sound of cannon, and neither he nor the priest could indifferently leave the lady of St. John to her fate, and Madame Antonia would refuse to do it. Le Rossignol believed the party that had set out early in the week must be encamped not far away.

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Edelwald mounted a bastion with the sentinels. That weird light of the moon which seems the faded and forgotten ghost of day, rested everywhere. The shadow of the tower fell inward, and also partly covered the front wall. This enchanted land of night cooled Edelwald. He threw his arms upward with a passionate gesture to which the soldiers had become accustomed in their experience of the young chevalier.

"What is that?" exclaimed the man nearest him, for there was disturbance in the opposite bastion. Edelwald moved at once across the interval of wall and found the sentinels in that bastion divided between laughter and superstitious awe.

"She's out again," said one.

"Who is out?" demanded Edelwald.

"The little swan-riding witch."

"You have not let the dwarf scale this wall? If she could do that unobserved, my men, we are lax."

"She is one who will neither be let nor hindered. We are scarce sure we even saw her. There was but the swoop of wings."

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"Why, Renot, my lad," insisted Edelwald, "we could see her white swan now in this noon of moonlight, if she were abroad. Besides, D'Aulnay has sentinels stationed around this height. They will check her."

"They will check the wind across Fundy Bay first," said the other man.

"You cannot think Le Rossignol has risen in the air on her swan's back? That is too absurd," said Edelwald. "No one ever saw her play such pranks. And you could have winged the heavy bird as he rose."

"I know she is out of Fort St. John at this minute," insisted Renot Babinet. "And how are you to wing a bird which gets out of sight before you know what has happened?"

"I say it is no wonder we have trouble in this seigniory," growled the other man. "Our lady never could see a mongrel baby or a witch dwarf or a stray black gown anywhere, but she must have it into the fort and make it free of the best here."

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"And God forever bless her," said Edelwald, baring his head.

"Amen," they both responded with force.

The silent cry was mighty behind Edelwald's lips;—the cry which he intrusted not even to his human breath—

"My love—my love! My royal lady! God, thou who alone knowest my secret, make me a giant to hold it down!"

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XVIII.

THE SONG OF EDELWALD.

At daybreak a signal on the wall where it could be seen from D'Aulnay's camp brought an officer and his men to receive Madame La Tour's dispatches. Glaud Burge handed them, down at the end of a ramrod.

"But see yonder," he said to François Bastarack his companion, as they stood and watched the messengers tramp away. He pointed to Klussman below the fort—poor Klussman whom the pearly vapors of morning could not conceal. "I could have done that myself in first heat, but I like not treating with a man who did it coolly."

Parleying and demurring over the terms of surrender continued until noon. All that time ax, saw and hammer worked in D'Aulnay's camp as if he had suddenly taken to ship-building. But the pastimes of a victorious force are regarded with dull attention by the vanquished. Finally the papers were handed up bearing D'Aulnay's signature. They guaranteed to Madame La Tour the safety of her garrison, who were to march out with their arms and personal belongings, the household goods of her people; and La Tour's ship with provisions enough to stock it for a voyage. The money, merchandise, stores, jewels and ordnance fell to D'Aulnay with the fort.

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D'Aulnay marched directly on his conquest. His drums approached, and the garrison ran to throw

into a heap such things as they and their families were to take away. Spotless weather and a dimpled bay adorned this lost seigniory. It was better than any dukedom in France to these first exiled Acadians. Pierre Doucett's widow and another bereaved woman knelt to cry once more over the trench by the powder-house. Her baby, hid in a case like a bolster, hung across her shoulder. Lady Dorinda's belongings, numbered among the goods of the household, were also placed near the gate. She sat within the hall, wrapped for her journey, composed and silent. For when the evil day actually overtook Lady Dorinda, she was too thorough a Briton to cringe. She met her second repulse from Acadia as she had met her first, when Claude La Tour found her his only consolation. In this violent uprooting of family life so long grown to one place, Le Rossignol was scarcely missed. Each one thought of the person dearest to himself and of that person's comfort. Marie noted her absence, but the dwarf never came to harm. She was certain to rejoin the household somewhere, and who could blame her for avoiding the capitulation if she found it possible? The little Nightingale could not endure pain. Edelwald drew the garrison up in line and the gates were opened.

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D'Aulnay entered the fort with his small army. He was splendidly dressed, and such pieces of armor as he wore dazzled the eye. As he returned the salute of Edelwald and the garrison, he paused and whitened with chagrin. Klussman had told him something of the weakness of the place, but he had not expected to find such a pitiful remnant of men. Twenty-three soldiers and an officer! These were the precious creatures who had cost him so much, and whom their lady was so anxious to save! He smiled at the disproportionate preparations made by his hammers and saws, and glanced back to see if the timbers were being carried in. They were, at the rear of his force, but behind them intruded Father Vincent de Paris wrapped in a blanket which one of the soldiers had provided for him. The scantiness of this good friar's apparel should have restrained him in camp. But he was such an apostle as stalks naked to duty if need be, and he felt it his present duty to keep the check of religion upon the implacable nature of D'Aulnay de Charnisay.

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D'Aulnay ordered the gates shut. He would have shut out Father Vincent, but it could not be managed without great discourtesy, and there are limits to that with a churchman. The household and garrison ready to depart saw this strange action with dismay, and Marie stepped directly down from her hall to confront her enemy. D'Aulnay had seen her at Port Royal when he first came to Acadia. He remembered her motion in the dance, and approved of it. She was a beautiful woman, though her Huguenot gown and close cap now gave her a widowed look—becoming to a woman of exploits. But she was also the woman to whom he owed one defeat and much humiliation.

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He swept his plume at her feet.

"Permit me, Madame La Tour, to make my compliments to an amazon. My own taste are women who stay in the house at their prayers, but the Sieur de la Tour and I differ in many things."

"Doubtless, my lord De Charnisay," responded Marie with the dignity which cannot taunt, though she still believed the outcast child to be his. "But why have you closed on us the gates which we opened to you?"

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"Madame, I have been deceived in the terms of capitulation."

"My lord, the terms of capitulation were set down plainly and I hold them signed by your hand."

"But a signature is nothing when gross advantage hath been taken of one of the parties to a treaty."

The mistake she had made in trusting to the military honor of D'Aulnay de Charnisay swept through Marie. But she controlled her voice to inquire,—

"What gross advantage can there be, my lord D'Aulnay—unless you are about to take a gross advantage of us? We leave you here ten thousand pounds of the money of England, our plate and jewels and furs, and our stores except a little food for a journey. We go out poor; yet if our treaty is kept we shall complain of no gross advantage."

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"Look at those men," said D'Aulnay, shaking his glove at her soldiers.

"Those weary and faithful men," said Marie: "I see them."

"You will see them hanged as traitors, madame. I have no time to parley," exclaimed D'Aulnay. "The terms of capitulation are not satisfactory to me. I do not feel bound by them. You may take your women and withdraw when you please, but these men I shall hang."

While he spoke he lifted and shook his hand as if giving a signal, and the garrison was that instant seized, by his soldiers. Her women screamed. There was such a struggle in the fort as there had been upon the wall, except that she herself stood blank in mind, and pulseless. The actual and the unreal shimmered together. But there stood her garrison, from Edelwald to Jean le Prince, bound like criminals, regarding their captors with that baffled and half ashamed look of the surprised and overpowered. Above the mass of D'Aulnay's busy soldiery timber uprights were reared, and hammers and spikes set to work on the likeness of a scaffold. The preparations of the morning made the completion of this task swift and easy. D'Aulnay de Charnisay intended to hang her garrison when he set his name to the paper securing their lives. The ringing of hammers sounded far off to Marie.

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"I don't understand these things," she articulated. "I don't understand anything in the world!"

D'Aulnay gave himself up to watching the process, in spite of Father Vincent de Paris, whose steady remonstrances he answered only by shrugs. In that age of religious slaughter the Capuchin could scarcely object to decreasing heretics, but he did object as a man and a priest to such barbarous treachery toward men with whom a compact had been made. The refined nurture of France was not recent in D'Aulnay's experience, but he came of a great and honorable house, and the friar's appeal was made to inherited instincts.

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"Good churchman," spoke out Jean le Prince, the lad, shaking his hair back from his face, "your capote and sandals lie there by the door of the tower, where Edelwald took thought to place them for you. But you who have the soldier's heart should wear the soldier's dress, and hide D'Aulnay de Charnisay under the cowl."

"You men-at-arms," Glaud Burge exhorted the guards drawn up, on each side of him and his fellow-prisoners, "will you hang us up like dogs? If we must die we claim the death of soldiers. You have your pieces in your hands; shoot us. Do us such grace as we would do you in like extremity."

The guards looked aside at each other and then at their master, shamed through their peasant blood by the outrage they were obliged to put upon a courageous garrison. But Edelwald said nothing. His eyes were upon Marie. He would not increase her anguish of self-reproach by the change of a muscle in his face. The garrison was trapped and at the mercy of a merciless enemy. His most passionate desire was to have her taken away that she might not witness the execution. Why was Sieur Charles La Tour sitting in the stockade at the head of Fundy Bay while she must endure the sight of this scaffold?

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Marie's women knelt around her crying. Her slow distracted gaze traveled from Glaud Burge to Jean le Prince, from Renot Babinet to François Bastarack, from Ambroise Tibedeaux along the line of stanch faces to Edelwald. His calm uplifted countenance—with the horrible platform of death growing behind it—looked, as it did when he happily met the sea wind or went singing through trackless wilderness. She broke from her trance and the ring of women, and ran before D'Aulnay de Charnisay.

"My lord," said Marie—and she was so beautiful in her ivory pallor, so wonderful with fire moving from the deep places of her dilated black eyes that he felt satisfaction in attending to her—"it is useless to talk to a man like you."

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"Quite, madame," said D'Aulnay. "I never discuss affairs with a woman."

"But you may discuss them with the king when he learns that you have hanged with other soldiers of a ransomed garrison a young officer of the house of De Born."

D'Aulnay ran his eye along the line. The unrest of Edelwald at Marie's slightest parley with D'Aulnay reminded the keen governor of the face he had last night seen under the cowl.

"The king will be obliged to me," he observed, "when one less heretical De Born cumpers his realm."

"The only plea I make to you, my lord D'Aulnay, is that you hang me also. For I deserve it. My men had no faith in your military honor, and I had."

"Madame, you remind me of a fact I desired to overlook. You are indeed a traitor deserving death. But of my clemency, and not because you are a woman, for you yourself have forgotten that in meddling with war, I will only parade you upon the scaffold as a reprieved criminal. Bring hither a cord," called D'Aulnay, "and noose it over this lady's head." Edelwald raged in a hopeless tearing at his bonds. The guards seized him, but he struggled with unconquered strength to reach and protect his lady. Father Vincent de Paris had taken his capote and sandals at Jean le Prince's hint, and entered the tower. He clothed himself behind one of the screens of the hall, and thought his absence short, but during that time Marie was put upon the finished scaffold. A skulking reluctant soldier of D'Aulnay's led her by a cord. She walked the long rough planks erect. Her garrison to a man looked down, as they did at funerals, and Edelwald sobbed in his fight against the guards, the tears starting from under his eyelids as he heard her foot-fall pass near him. Back and forth she trod, and D'Aulnay watched the spectacle. Her garrison felt her degradation as she must feel their death. The grizzled lip of Glaud Burge moved first to comfort her.

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"My lady, though our hands be tied, we make our military salute to you," he said.

"Fret not, my lady," said Renot Babinet.

"Edelwald can turn all these mishaps into a song, my lady," declared Jean le Prince. Marie had that sensation of lost identity which has confused us all. In her walk she passed the loops dangling ready for her men. A bird, poised for one instant on the turret, uttered a sweet long trill. She could hear the river. It was incredible that all those unknown faces should be swarming below her; that the garrison was obliged to stand tied; that Lady Dorinda had braved the rabble of soldiery and come out to wait weeping at the scaffold end. Marie looked at the row of downcast faces. The bond between these faithful soldiers and herself was that instant sublime.

"I crave pardon of you all," said Marie as she came back and the rustle of her gown again passed them, "for not knowing how to deal with the crafty of this world. My foolishness has brought you to this scaffold."

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"No, my lady," said the men in full chorus.

"We desire nothing better, my lady," said Edelwald, "since your walking there has blessed it."

Father Vincent's voice from the tower door arrested the spectacle. His cowl was pushed back to his shoulders, baring the astonishment of his lean face.

"This is the unworthiest action of your life, my son De Charnisay," he denounced, shaking his finger and striding down at the governor, who owned the check by a slight grimace.

"It is enough," said D'Aulnay. "Let the scaffold now be cleared for the men."

He submitted with impatience to a continued parley with the Capuchin. Father Vincent de Paris was angry. And constantly as D'Aulnay walked from him he zealously followed.

The afternoon sunlight sloped into the walls, leaving a bank of shadow behind the timbered framework, which extended an etching of itself toward the esplanade. The lengthened figures of soldiers passed also in cloudy images along the broken ground, for a subaltern's first duty had been to set guards upon the walls. The new master of Fort St. John was now master of all southern and western Acadia; but he had heard nothing which secured him against La Tour's return with fresh troops.

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"My friends," said D'Aulnay, speaking to the garrison, "this good friar persuades in me more softness than becomes a faithful servant of the king. One of your number I will reprove."

"Then let it be Jean le Prince," said Edelwald, speaking for the first time to D'Aulnay de Charnisay. "The down has not yet grown on the lad's lip."

"But I pardon him," continued the governor, "on condition that he hangs the rest of you."

"Hang thyself!" cried the boy. "Thou art the only man on earth I would choke with a rope."

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"Will no one be reprov'd?"

D'Aulnay's eye, traveled from scorn to scorn along the row.

"It is but the pushing aside of a slab. They are all stubborn heretics, Father Vincent. We waste time. I should be inspecting the contents of this fort."

The women and children were flattening themselves like terrified swallows against the gate; for through the hum of stirring soldiery penetrated to them from outside a hint of voices not unknown. The sentinels had watched a party approaching; but it was so small, and hampered, moreover, by a woman and some object like a tiny gilded sedan chair, that they did not notify the governor. One of the party was a Jesuit priest by his cassock, and another his *donné*. These never came from La Tour. Another was a tall *Hollandais*; and two servants lightly carried the sedan up the slope. A few more people seemed to wait behind for the purpose of making a camp, and there were scarce a dozen of the entire company.

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Marie had borne without visible exhaustion the labors of this siege, the anguish of treachery and disappointment, her enemy's breach of faith and cruel parade of her. The garrison were ranged ready upon the plank; but she held herself in tense control, and waited beside Lady Dorinda, with her back toward the gate, while her friends outside parleyed with her enemy. D'Aulnay refused to admit any one until he had dealt with the garrison. The Jesuit was reported to him as Father Isaac Jogues, and the name had its effect, as it then had everywhere among people of the Roman faith. No soldier would be surprised at meeting a Jesuit priest anywhere in the New World. But D'Aulnay begged Father Jogues to excuse him while he finished a moment's duty, and he would then come out and escort his guest into the fortress.

The urgent demand, however, of a missionary to whom even the king had shown favor, was not to be denied. D'Aulnay had the gates set ajar; and pushing through their aperture came in Father Jogues with his *donné* and two companions.

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The governor advanced in displeasure. He would have put out all but the priest, but the gates were slammed to prevent others from entering, and slammed against the chair in which the sentinels could see a red-headed dwarf. The weird melody of her screaming threats kept them dubious while they grinned. The gates being shut, Marie fled through ranks of men-at-arms to Antonia, clung to her and gave Father Jogues and Van Corlaer no time to stand aghast at the spectacle they saw. Crying and trembling, she put back the sternness of D'Aulnay de Charnisay, and the pity of Father Vincent de Paris, and pleaded with Father Jogues and the *Hollandais* for the lives of her garrison as if they had come with heavenly authority.

"You see them with ropes around their necks, Monsieur Corlaer and Monsieur Jogues, when here is the paper the governor signed, guaranteeing to me their safety. Edelwald is scarce half a year from France. Speak to the governor of Acadia; for you, Monsieur Corlaer, are a man of affairs, and this good missionary is a saint—you can move D'Aulnay de Charnisay to see it is not the custom, even in warfare with women, to trap and hang a garrison who has made honorable surrender."

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A man may resolve that he will not meddle with his neighbor's feuds, or involve a community dependent on him with any one's formidable enemy. Yet he will turn back from his course the moment an appeal is made for his help, and face that enemy as Van Corlaer faced the governor of Acadia, full of the fury roused by outrage. But what could he and Father Jogues and the

persevering Capuchin say to the parchment which the governor now deigned to pass from hand to hand among them in reply?—the permission of Louis XIII. to his beloved D'Aulnay de Charnisay (whom God hold in His keeping) to take the Fort of St. John and deal with its rebellious garrison as seemed to him fit, for which destruction of rebels his sovereign would have him in loving remembrance.

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During all this delay Edelwald stood with his beautiful head erect above the noose, and his self-repressed gaze still following Marie. The wives of other soldiers were wailing for their husbands. But he must die without wife, without love. He saw Antonia holding her and weeping with her. His blameless passion filled him like a great prayer. That changing phantasm which we call the world might pass from before his men and him at the next breath; yet the brief last song of the last troubadour burst from his lips to comfort the lady of Fort St. John.

There was in this jubilant cry a gush and grandeur of power outmastering force of numbers and brute cunning. It reached and compelled every spirit in the fortress. The men in line with him stood erect and lifted their firm jaws, and gazed forward with shining eyes. Those who had faded in the slightest degree from their natural flush of blood felt the strong throbs which paint a man's best on his face. They could not sing the glory of death in duty, the goodness of God who gave love and valor to man; but they could die with Edelwald.

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The new master of Fort St. John was jealous of such dying as the song ceased and he lifted his hand to signal his executioners. Father Jogues turned away praying with tremulous lips. The Capuchin strode toward the hall. But Van Corlaer and Lady Dorinda and Antonia held with the strength of all three that broken-hearted woman who struggled like a giantess with her arms stretched toward the scaffold.

"I *will* save them—I *will* save them! My brave Edelwald—all my brave soldiers shall not die!—Where are my soldiers, Antonia? It is dark. I cannot see them any more!"

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POSTLUDE.

A TIDE-CREEK.

When ordinary days had settled flake on flake over this tragedy in Acadia until memory looked back at it as at the soft outlines of a snow-obliterated grave, Madame Van Corlaer stood one evening beside the Hudson River, and for half an hour breathed again the salt breath of Fundy Bay. Usually she was abed at that hour. But Mynheer had been expected all day on a sailing vessel from New Amsterdam, and she could not resist coming down once more through her garden to the wharf.

Van Corlaer's house, the best stone mansion in Rensselaerswyck—that overflow of settlement around the stockade of Fort Orange—stood up the slope, and had its farm appended. That delight of Dutchmen, an ample garden, extended its central path almost like an avenue to the river. Antonia need scarcely step off her own domain to meet her husband at the wharf. She had lingered down the garden descent; for sweet herbs were giving their souls to the summer night there; and not a cloud of a sail yet appeared on the river. Some fishing-boats lay at the wharf, but no men were idling around under the full moon. It was pleasanter to visit and smoke from door to door in the streets above.

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Antonia was not afraid of any savage ambush. Her husband kept the Iroquois on friendly terms with the settlement. The years through which she had borne her dignity of being Madame Van Corlaer constantly increased her respect for that colonial statesman. The savages in the Mohawk valley used the name Corlaer when they meant governor. Antonia felt sure that the Jesuit missionary, Father Isaac Jogues, need not have died a martyr's death if Van Corlaer had heard in time of his return to the Mohawks.

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At the bottom of her garden she rested her hands upon a gate in the low stone wall. The mansion behind her was well ordered and prosperous. No drop of milk was spilled in Antonia's domain without her knowledge. She had noted, as she came down the path, how the cabbages were rounding their delicately green spheres. Antonia was a housewife for whom maids labored with zeal. She could manipulate so deftly the comfort-making things of life. Neither sunset nor moonrise quite banished the dreamy blue light on these rolling lands around the head-waters of the Hudson. Across her tranquil commonplace happiness blew suddenly that ocean breath from Fundy Bay; for the dwarf of Fort St. John, leading a white waddling bird, whose feathers even in that uncertain light showed soil, appeared from the screening masonry of the wall.

She stood still and looked at Antonia; and Antonia inside the gate looked at her. That instant was a bubble full of revolving dyes. It brought a thousand pictures to Antonia's sight. Thus silently had that same dwarf with her swan appeared to a camp in the Acadian woods, announcing trouble at Fort St. John.

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Again Antonia lived through confusion which was like pillage of the fort. Again she sat in her husband's tent, holding Marie's dying head on her arm while grief worked its swift miracle in a woman formed to such fullness of beauty and strength. Again she saw two graves and a long trench made in the frontier graveyard for Marie and her officer Edelwald and her twenty-three

soldiers, all in line with her child. Once more Antonia saw the household turn from that spot weeping aloud; and De Charnisay's ships already sailing away with the spoil of the fort to Penobscot; and his sentinels looking down from the walls of St. John. She saw her husband dividing his own party, and sending all the men he could spare to navigate La Tour's ship and carry the helpless women and children to the head of Fundy Bay. All these things revolved before her, in that bubble of an instant, before her own voice broke it, saying,—

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"Is this you, Le Rossignol?"

"Shubenacadie and I," responded the dwarf, tilting up sweetly.

"Where do you come from?" inquired Antonia, feeling the weirdness of her visitor as she had never felt it in the hall at Fort St. John.

"Port Royal. I have come from Port Royal on purpose to speak with you."

"With me?"

"With you, Madame Antonia."

"You must then go directly to the house and eat some supper," said Antonia, speaking her first thought but reserving her second: "Our people will take to the fields when they see the poor little creature by daylight, and as for the swan, it is worse than a drove of Mynheer's Indians."

"I am not eating to-night, I am riding," answered Le Rossignol, bold in mystery while the moon made half uncertain the draggled state of Shubenacadie's feathers. She placed her hands on his back and pressed him downward, as if his plumage foamed up from an over-full packing-case. Shubenacadie waddled a step or two reluctantly, and squatted, spreading his wings and curving his head around to look at her. The dwarf sat upon him as upon a throne, stroking his neck with her right hand while she talked. She seemed a part of the river's whisper, or of that world of summer night insects which shrilled around.

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"I have come to tell you about the death of D'Aulnay de Charnisay," said this pigmy.

"We have long had that news," responded Antonia, "and worse which followed it."

Madame Van Corlaer despised Charles La Tour for repossessing himself of all he had lost and becoming the first power in Acadia by marrying D'Aulnay's widow.

"No ear," declared the dwarf, "hath ever heard how D'Aulnay de Charnisay died."

"He was stuck in a bog," said Antonia.

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"He was stuck in no bog," said Le Rossignol, "for I alone was beside him at the time. And I ride from Port Royal to tell thee the whole of it and free my mind, lest I be obliged to fling it in my new lady's face the next time she speaks of his happy memory. Widows who take second husbands have no sense about the first one."

Antonia slightly coughed. It is not pleasant to have your class disapproved of, even by a dwarf. And she did still secretly respect her first husband's prophecy. Had it not been fulfilled on the friend she best loved, if not on the husband she took?

"Mynheer Van Corlaer will soon be home from New Amsterdam, whither he made a voyage to confer with the governor," said Antonia. "Let me take you to the house, where we can talk at our ease."

"I talk most at my ease on Shubenacadie's back," answered Le Rossignol, holding her swan's head and rubbing her cheek against his bill. "You will not keep me a moment at Fort Orange. I fell out of patience with every place while we lived so long in poverty at that stockade at the head of Fundy Bay."

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"Did you live there long?" inquired Antonia.

"Until D'Aulnay de Charnisay died out of my lord's way. What could my lord do for us, indeed, with nothing but a ship and scarce a dozen men? He left some to keep the stockade and took the rest to man his ship when he started to Newfoundland to send her forlorn old highness back to England. Her old highness hath had many a dower fee from us since that day."

"Your lord hath mended his fortunes," remarked Antonia without approval.

"Yes, we are now the greatest people in Acadia; we live in grand state at Port Royal. You would never know him for the careworn man he was—except once, indeed, when he came from viewing the ruins of Fort St. John. It is no longer maintained as a fortress. But I like not all these things. I rove more now than when Madame Marie lived."

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Silence was kept a moment after Madame La Tour's name, between Antonia and her illusive visitor. The dwarf seemed clad in sumptuous garments. A cap of rich velvet could be discerned on her flaring hair instead of the gull-breast covering she once made for herself.

"Yet I roved much out of the peasants' way at the stockade," she continued, sending the night sounds again into background. "Peasants who have no master over them become like swine. We had two goats, and I tended them, and sat ages upon ages on the bank of a tide-creek which runs up among the marshes at the head of Fundy Bay. Madame Antonia, you should see that tide-

creek. It shone like wet sleek red carnelian when the water was out of it. I loved its basin; and the goats would go down to lick the salt. They had more sense than D'Aulnay de Charnisay, for they knew where to venture. I thought D'Aulnay de Charnisay was one of our goats by his bleat, until I looked down and saw him part sunk in a quicksand at the bottom of the channel. The tide was already frothing in like yeast upon him. How gloriously the tide shoots up that tide-creek! It hisses. It comes like thousands of horses galloping one behind the other and tumbling over each other,—fierce and snorting spray, and climbing the banks, and still trampling down and flying over the ones who have galloped in first."

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"But what did D'Aulnay de Charnisay do?" inquired Antonia.

"He stuck in the quicksand," responded Le Rossignol.

"But did he not call for help?"

"He did nothing else, indeed, until the tide's horses trampled him under."

"But what did you do?"

"I sat down and watched him," said the dwarf.

"How could you?" shuddered Antonia, feeling how little this tiny being's humanity was developed.

"We had some chat," said Le Rossignol. "He promised me a seigniory if I would run and call some men with ropes. 'I heard a Swiss's wife say that you promised him a seigniory,' quoth I. 'And you had enough ropes then.' He pledged his word and took oath to make me rich if I would get him only a priest. 'You pledged your word to the lady of Fort St. John,' said I. The water kept rising and he kept stretching his neck above it, and crying and shouting, and I took his humor and cried and shouted with him, naming the glorious waves as they rode in from the sea:—

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"'Glaud Burge!'

"'Jean le Prince!'

"'Renot Babinet!'

"'Ambroise Tibedeaux!'

"And so on until François Bastarack the twenty-third roller flowed over his head, and Edelwald did not even know he was beneath."

Antonia dropped her face upon her hands.

"So that is the true story," said Le Rossignol. "He died a good salt death, and his men pulled him out before the next tide."

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Presently Antonia looked up. Her eye was first caught by a coming sail on the river. It shone in the moonlight, moving slowly, for there was so little wind. Her husband must be there. She turned to say so to Le Rossignol; who was gone.

Antonia opened the gate and stepped outside, looking in every direction for dwarf and swan. She had not even noticed a rustle, or the pat of Shubenacadie's feet upon sand. But Le Rossignol and her familiar had disappeared in the wide expanse of moonlight; whether deftly behind tree or rock, or over wall, or through air above, Antonia had no mind to find out.

Even the approaching sail took weirdness. The ship was too distant for her to yet hear the hiss of water around its prow. But in that, Van Corlaer and the homely good happiness of common life was approaching. With the dwarf had disappeared that misty sweet sorrowful Acadian world.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LADY OF FORT ST. JOHN ***

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