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A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD ST. LOUIS

By

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"A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD DETROIT,"
"A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD WASHINGTON," ETC.

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Cities that have grown from small hamlets seldom keep register of their earlier days, except in the legends handed down in families. St. Louis has the curious anomaly of beginning over several times. For the earliest knowledge of how the little town looked I wish to express my obligations for some old maps and historical points to Mr. Frederick M. Crunden, Public Librarian, Miss Katharine I. Moody, and Colonel David Murphy.

A. M. Douglas.

CHAPTER I—RENÉE DE LONGUEVILLE

The bell had clanged and the gates of the stockade were closed. There were some houses on the outside; there was not so much fear of the Indians here, for the French had the art of winning them into friendship. Farms were cultivated, and the rich bottom lands produced fine crops. Small as the town was twenty years before the eighteenth century ended, it was the headquarters of a flourishing trade. The wisdom of Pierre Laclede had laid the foundation of a grand city. The lead mines even then were profitably worked, and supplied a large tract of the Mississippi River east and west.

Antoine Freneau stood a few moments in the door of his log hut, down by the old Mill Creek, listening with his hand to one ear. There were sounds of spring all about, but he was not heeding them. Then he turned, closed the door, which was braced on the inner side with some rough iron bands; fastened it with the hook, and let down a chain. He was seldom troubled with unexpected evening visitors.

The log hut was hidden at the back with trees enough to form a sort of grove. It had two rooms. This at the front was a sort of miscellaneous storehouse. Freneau did quite a trade with the Indians and the boatmen going up and down the river. There was no real attempt at orderly store-keeping. Articles were in heaps and piles. One had almost to stumble over them.

The back room was larger. There was a stone chimney, with a great wide fireplace, where Freneau was cooking supper. In the far corner was a bed raised on sawed rounds of logs, with skins stretched over the framework, on which was a sack of hay with a heap of Indian blankets, just as he had crawled out of it in the morning. A table and three stools manufactured by himself; a rude sort of closet, and a curious old brass-bound chest, now almost black with age, completed the furnishing. The puncheon floor, in common use at that time, was made with logs split in the middle and the rounding side laid in a sort of clay plaster that hardened and made it very durable. The top would get worn smooth presently. The walls were hung with various trophies and arms of different kinds. Two windows had battened shutters; one stood a little way open, and this was on the creek side.

The supper had a savory fragrance. He had baked a loaf of bread on a heated flat stone, spreading the dough out thin and turning it two or three times. A dish of corn stewed with salted pork, a certain kind of coffee compounded of roasted grains and crushed in the hollow of a stone, gave out a fragrance, and now he was broiling some venison on the coals.

There were sundry whispers about the old man as to smuggling. Once his place had been searched, he standing by, looking on and jibing the men so engaged, turning any apparent mystery inside out for them. Then he would be gone days at a time, but his house was securely fastened. Occasionally he had taken longer journeys, and once he had brought back from New Orleans a beautiful young wife, who died when her baby girl was born. The nurse had taken it to her home in Kaskaskia. Then it had been sent to the Sisters' School at New Orleans. She had been home all one winter and had her share in the merry making. In the spring her father took her to Canada, to the great disappointment of hosts of admirers. At Quebec she was married and went to France. That was ten years ago. He had grown queer and morose since, and turned miserly.

There was a peremptory thump at the door, and Antoine started, glancing wildly about an instant, then went through and unfastened the stout hook. The chain he did not remove: it was about a foot from the floor and well calculated to trip up any unwary intruder and send him sprawling face downward.

The night had grown dark, and a mist-like rain had set in. The trees were beating about in the rising wind.

"Open wide to us, Antoine Freneau! See what I have brought you, if you can make light enough."

"Gaspard Denys—is it you? Why, I thought you were in the wilds of Canada. And——"

He kicked aside the chain and peered over at the small figure beside Gaspard.

Gaspard had just stood the child down, and his arms tingled with the strain when the muscles were set loose.

"You have brought her!"

There was a sound in the voice far from welcome, almost anger.

"Yes; your messenger from New Orleans told the truth. The nurse or companion, whatever you may call her, had instructions, if no one claimed her, to place her in a convent."

"And you—you interfered?" Freneau struck his clinched fist hard on a pile of skins.

Gaspard laughed.

“What I am to do with a child is more than I can tell,” Freneau said doggedly, almost threateningly.

“Well, you can give us something to eat. Your supper has a grand fragrance to a hungry man. Then we can discuss the other points. A bear taken away from his meal is always cross—eh, Antoine?”

Freneau turned swarthy; he was dark, and the red tinge added made him look dangerous.

“I don’t understand——”

“Well, neither do I. You married your daughter to a French title when you knew she would have been happier here with a young fellow who loved her; and—yes, I am sure she loved me. Somewhere back, when my forebears called themselves St. Denys, there might have been a title in the family. In this New World we base our titles on our courage, ambitions, successes. Then her little daughter was born, and she pined away in the old Château de Longueville and presently died, while her husband was paying court and compliments to the ladies at the palace of Louis XVII. There are deep mutterings over in France. And De Longueville, with his half dozen titles, marries one of Marie Antoinette’s ladies in waiting. The child goes on in the old château. Two boys are born to the French inheritance, and little mademoiselle is not worth a rush. She will be sent to her grandfather somewhere in the province of Louisiana. But the nurse goes to Canada to marry her lover, expatriated for some cause. You see, I know it all. If mademoiselle had stayed in France she would have been put in a convent.”

“The best thing! the best thing!” interrupted the old man irascibly.

“Word was sent to enter her in a convent at Quebec. Well, I have brought her here. Give us some supper.”

He had been taking off the child’s cap and coat after they entered the living room. A great flaming torch stood up in one corner of the chimney, and shed a peculiar golden-red light around the room, leaving some places in deep shadow. The old man turned his meat, took up his cake of bread, and put them on the table. Then he went for plates and knives.

“This is your grandfather, Renée,” Denys said, turning the child to face him.

The girl shrank a little, and then suddenly surveyed him from his yarn stockings and doeskin breeches up to his weather-beaten and not especially attractive face, surmounted by a shock of grizzled hair. She looked steadily out of large brown eyes. She was slim, with a clear-cut face and air of dignity, a child of nine or so. Curiously enough, his eyes fell. He turned in some confusion without a word and went on with his preparations.

“Let us have some supper. It is not much. Even if I had expected a guest I could not have added to it.”

“It is a feast to a hungry man. Our dinner was not over-generous.”

Gaspard took one side of his host and placed the little girl opposite her grandfather. She evinced no surprise. She had seen a good deal of rough living since leaving old Quebec.

Antoine broke the bread in chunks and handed it to each. The dish of corn was passed and the venison steak divided.

“After this long tramp I would like to have something stronger than your home-brewed coffee, though that’s not bad. Come, be a little friendly to a returned traveller,” exclaimed the guest.

“You should have had it without the asking, Gaspard Denys, if you had given me a moment’s time. You came down the Illinois, I suppose?”

“To St. Charles. There the boat was bound to hang up for the night. But Pierre Joutel brought us down in his piroque after an endless amount of talk. There was a dance at St. Charles. So it was dark when we reached here. Lucky you are outside the stockade.”

“And you carried me,” said the child, in a clear, soft voice that had a penetrative sound.

Antoine started. Why should he hear some pleading in the same voice suddenly strike through the years?

Gaspard poured out a glass of wine. Then he offered the bottle to Antoine, who shook his head.

“How long since?” asked Gaspard mockingly.

“I do not drink at night.”

“Renée, you are not eating. This corn is good, better than with the fish. And the bread! Antoine, you could change the name of the town or the nickname. Go into the baking business.”

Freneau shrugged his shoulders.

Scarcity of flour and bread had at one time given the town the appellation of Pain Court. Now there were two bakeries, but many of the settlers made excellent bread. Freneau's bread cake was split in the middle and buttered, at least Gaspard helped himself liberally and spread the child's piece with the soft, sweet, half-creamy compound.

"You must eat a little of the meat, Renée. You must grow rosy and stout in this new home."

The men ate heartily enough. Everything was strange to her, though for that matter everything had been strange since leaving the old château. The post-chaise, the day in Paris, the long journey across the ocean, the city of Quebec with its various peoples, and the other journey through lakes and over portages. Detroit, where they had stayed two days and that had appeared beautiful to her; the little towns, the sail down the Illinois River to the greater one that seemed to swallow it up.

Marie Loubet had said her rich grandfather in the new country had sent for her, and that her father did not care for her since his sons were born. Indeed, he scarcely gave her a thought until it occurred to him that her American-French grandfather was well able to provide for her. Her mother's dot had been spent long ago. He wanted to sell the old château and its many acres of ground, for court living was high, and the trend of that time was extravagance.

"You had better place your daughter in a convent," said the amiable stepmother, who had never seen the little girl but twice. "The boys will be all we can care for. I hope heaven will not send me any daughters. They must either have a large dot or striking beauty. And I am sure this girl of yours will not grow up into a beauty."

Yet her mother had been beautiful the Count remembered. And he smiled when he thought of the dower he had exacted from the old trader. No doubt there was plenty of money still, and this grandchild had the best right to it. She might like it better than convent life.

Marie's lover had emigrated two years before, and had sent her money to pay her passage. Why, it was almost a miraculous opening. So Renée de Longueville was bundled off to the new country.

And now she sat here, taking furtive glances at her grandfather, who did not want her. No one in her short life had been absolutely cross to her, and she was quite used to the sense of not being wanted until she met Gaspard Denys. Of the relationships of life she knew but little; yet her childish heart had gone out with great fervor to him when he said, "I loved your mother. I ought to have married her; then you would have been my little girl."

"Why did you not?" she asked gravely. Then with sweet seriousness, "I should like to be your little girl."

"You shall be." He pressed her to his heart, and kissed down amid the silken curls.

So now she did not mind her grandfather's objection to her; she knew with a child's intuition he did not want her. But she could, she *did*, belong to Uncle Gaspard, and so she was safe. A better loved child might have been crushed by the knowledge, but she was always solacing herself with the next thing. This time it was the first, the very first thing, and her little heart gave a beat of joy.

Yet she was growing tired and sleepy, child fashion. The two men were talking about the fur trade, the pelts that had come in, the Indians and hunters that were loitering about. It had been a long day to her, and the room was warm. The small head drooped lower with a nod.

There was a pile of dressed skins one side of the room, soft and silken, Freneau's own curing.

Gaspard paused suddenly, glanced at her, then rose and took her in his arms and laid her down on them tenderly. She did not stir, only the rosy lips parted as with a half smile.

"Yes, tell me what to do with her," Antoine exclaimed, as if that had been the gist of the conversation. "You see I have no one to keep house; then I am out hunting, going up and down the river, working my farm. I couldn't be bothered with womankind. I can cook and keep house and wash even. I like living alone. I could send her to New Orleans," raising his eyes furtively.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said the other peremptorily. "Antoine Freneau, you owe me this child. You know I was in love with the mother."

"You were a mere boy," retorted the old man disdainfully.

"I was man enough to love her then and always. I have never put any one in her place. And the last time we walked together over yonder by the pond, I told her I was going up north to make money for her, and that in a year I should come back. I was twenty, she just sixteen. I can see her now; I can hear her voice in the unformed melody of the child's. We made no especial promise, but we both knew. I meant to ask your consent when I came back. Seven months afterward, on my return, I found you had whisked her off and married her to the Count, who, after all, cared so little for her that her child is nothing to him. I don't know what lies you told her, but I know she would never have given me up without some persuasion near to force."

The old man knew. It had been a lie. He kept out of Gaspard's way for the next two years, and it was well for him.

"There was no force," he returned gruffly. "Do you not suppose a girl can see? He was a fine fellow and loved her, and she was ready to go with him. No one dragged her to church. Well, the priest would have had something to say. They are not wild Indians at Quebec, and know how to treat a woman."

Gaspard had never forced more than this out of him. But he was sure some trickery had won the day and duped them both.

"Well, what have you gained?" mockingly. "You might have kept your daughter here and had grandchildren growing up about you, instead of living like a lonely old hermit."

"The life suits me well enough," in a gruff tone.

"Then give me the child that should have been mine. You don't want her."

"What will you do with her?"

"Have a home some day and put her in it."

"Bah! And you are off months at a time!"

"There would be some one to look after her. I shall not lead this roving life forever. If she were less like her mother you might keep her, since you were so won by her father. And I am not a poor man, Antoine Freneau."

"She is such a child." Did Gaspard mean that some day he might want to marry her?

"That is what I want. Oh, you don't know——"

He paused abruptly. Antoine could never understand the longing that had grown upon him through these weeks to possess the child, to play at fatherhood.

"No, I shall not be likely to marry," almost as if he had suspected what was in Antoine's pause, but he did not. "And I've envied the fathers of children. They had something to work for, to hope for. And now I say I want Renée because she is such a child. I wish she could stay like this just five years; then I'd be willing to have her grow up. But I know you, Antoine Freneau, and you won't take half care of her; you couldn't love her, it isn't in you. But you shall not crowd her out of love."

"You talk like a fool, Gaspard Denys! But if you want the child—I am an old man, and I tell you frankly that I don't know what to do with her. I would have to change my whole life."

"And I would be glad to change mine for such a cause. You must promise not to interfere in any way. We will have some writings drawn up and signed before the priest."

Antoine gave a yawn. "To-morrow, or any time you like. What are you going to do now? It is late. If you will take a shakedown in the other room—you see, I'm not prepared for visitors."

"Yes; I have slept in worse places. The child has a box of clothes at St. Charles. Hers will have to do for to-night."

He straightened out the impromptu bed and fixed the child more comfortably. He was tired and sleepy himself. Antoine lighted a bit of wick drawn through a piece of tin floating in a bowl of oily grease and took it in the storeroom, where both men soon arranged a sort of bunk.

"Good-night," said Antoine, and shut the door.

But he did not go to bed. The fire had mostly burned out, and now the torch dropped down and the room was full of shadows. He sat awhile on the edge of the bed and made it creak; then he rose and opened the shutter very softly, creeping out. Even then he listened suspiciously. Turning, he ran swiftly down to the river's edge, through the wet sedge of last year's grass. Then he gave a low whistle.

Some one answered with an oath. "We were just going away," in a hissing French voice. "What the devil kept you so?"

"I could not get away. There was a fellow," and Antoine prefaced the excuse with an oath. "He wouldn't go; I had to fix a bunk for him."

"Antoine Freneau, if you betray us—" in a threatening tone.

"Ah, bah! Would I kill the goose that lays golden eggs? Come, hurry."

They unloaded some cases from the piroque and dumped them on the soft ground.

"Now, carry them yourself. What! No barrow? You are a fool! But we must be off up the river."

There was considerable smuggling in spite of the watchfulness of the authorities. Duties were levied on so many things, and some—many, indeed—closely under government supervision.

Antoine Freneau tugged and swore. The cases of brandy were not light. He went back and forth, every time peering in the window and listening; but all was quiet. The cases he hid among the trees. He had drawn some tree branches, ostensibly for firewood, and covered the cases with this brush until he could dispose of them more securely.

Once, several years before, his house had been thoroughly ransacked in his absence. He knew he was suspected of unlawful dealings, and he had a dim misgiving that Gaspard had one end of the secret. He had more than once been very overbearing.

He came in wet and tired, and, disrobing himself, crawled into bed. Fine work, indeed, it would be to have a housekeeper and a prying child! He laughed to think Gaspard fancied that he would be unwilling to give her up.

Still he had hated Count de Longueville that he should have extorted so much dowry. But then it seemed a great thing to have titled grandsons and a daughter with the entrée of palaces, although he would never have gone to witness her state and consequence.

Every year money had grown dearer and dearer to him, though, miser like, he made no spread, never bragged, but pleaded poverty when he paid church dues at Christmas and Easter.

CHAPTER II—OLD ST. LOUIS

Soon after daylight the strong west wind drove away the rain and clouds. The air was soft and balmy, full of the indescribable odors of spring. Birds began their pipings; robin and thrush and meadow-larks and wood-pigeons went circling about on glistening wings.

Antoine found himself some dry clothes and kindled his fire. He would bake a few corn cakes; they had demolished the loaf of bread last night. There was a flitch of dried bacon and some eggs.

The door opened, and Gaspard wished his host good-morning. Renée was still asleep.

There was a little rivulet that emptied in the mill pond, and near the house Freneau had hollowed out quite a basin. Gaspard went down here for his morning ablutions. A tall, well-developed man, just turned of thirty with a strong, decisive face, clear blue eyes that could flash like steel in a moment of indignation, yet in the main were rather humorous; chestnut hair, closely cropped, and a beard trimmed in the same fashion. He soused his head now in the miniature basin and shook it like a water dog. Then he drew in long breaths of the divine morning air, and glanced about with a sort of worship in his heart, took a few steps this way and that. Antoine watched him with bated breath, he was so near the secret.

But Denys had heard nothing in the night. He was tired and had slept soundly. Suddenly he bethought himself of the little girl and went into the house. Antoine was preparing breakfast. Renée was sitting up, glancing round. She had been in so many strange places this did not disturb her.

She rose upright now, and stretched out her hands with a half-timid, half-joyous smile.

“Uncle Gaspard,” she said, “where are we?”

Old Antoine raised his head. The French was so pure, the voice had an old reminder of the one back of her mother.

“We are at St. Louis, child.”

“And where is the King?”

“Oh, my little girl, back in France. There is no king here. And we are not French any longer, but Spanish.”

“I am French.” She said it proudly.

“We keep our hearts and our language French. Some day there may be another overturn. I do not see as it matters much. The Spanish are pretty good to us.”

“Good! And with these cursed river laws!” grumbled Antoine.

“If report says true, it can’t interfere very much with you.”

“Report is a liar,” the man flung out savagely.

Gaspard Denys laughed.

After a moment he said, “Isn’t there a towel or a cloth of some kind? I dried myself in the air.”

“I told you I had not any accommodations for womenkind. You should have left her at the convent. Farther back, it is De Longueville’s business to care for her.”

“But you see he did not. You and he are her only blood kin, and you both cast her off. It is well she has found a friend.”

“The convent and the Sisters would have been better.”

“Come, man, some sort of a towel,” exclaimed Denys imperatively.

Antoine rummaged in the old chest, and presently brought forth one. Denys noted that it was soft and fine and not of home manufacture. Then he led Renée out to the little basin and, dipping the towel in, washed her face and hands.

“Oh, how good it feels!” she cried delightedly.

Gaspard had grown quite used to playing lady’s maid. He took a comb out of its case of Indian work that he carried about in his pocket, and combed out the tumbled hair. She winced now and then at a bad tangle, and laughed on the top of it. Then he bent over and kissed her on the forehead. She caught his head in her small arms and pressed her soft cheek against his caressingly.

“I love you, Uncle Gaspard,” she exclaimed. “But I don’t love that old man in there. Are you sure he is my grandfather? I couldn’t live here. I should run away and live with the birds and the squirrels.”

“And the Indians.”

“But that Light of the Moon was sweet and pretty.”

“Yes. I should like to have brought her with us for your maid.”

“Oh, that would have been nice!” She clapped her hands. “What is over there?” nodding her head.

“That is St. Louis—the fort, the palisades, the stockade to keep out the Indians.”

“There are no Indians in France,” she said retrospectively.

“No. And I have wondered a little, Renée, if you would not rather be back there.”

“And not have you?” She clung to his arm.

He gave a little sigh.

“Oh, are you not glad to have me? Does no one want me?”

The pathos of the young voice pierced his heart.

“Yes, I want you. I had no one to care for, no brothers or sisters or——”

“Men have wives and children.” There was a touch of almost regret in her tone, as if she were sorry for him.

“And you are my child. We will go in town to-day and find some one to look after you. And there will be children to play with.”

“Oh, I shall be so glad. Little girls?”

“Yes. I know ever so many.”

“I saw my little brothers in Paris as we came through. They were very pretty—at least their clothes were. And papa’s wife—well, I think the Queen couldn’t have had any finer gown. They were just going to the palace, and papa kissed me farewell. It was very dreary at the old château. And when the wind blew through the great trees it seemed like people crying. Old Pierre used to count his beads.”

What a strange, dreary life the little girl had had! It should all be better now. The child of the woman he had loved!

“If grandfather is rich, as Marie said, why does he live that way?”

She made a motion toward the house.

“No one knows whether he is rich or not. He trades a little with the Indians and the boats going up and down the river.”

The shrill summons to breakfast reached them.

They went in, the child holding tightly to Gaspard's hand. It seemed as if her grandfather looked more forbidding now than he had last night. He was both sulky and surly, but the viands were appetizing, and this morning Renée felt hungry. Gaspard was glad to see her eat. The old man still eyed her furtively.

"Well?" he interrogated, as they rose from the table, looking meaningly at Gaspard.

"We are going in the town, the child and I," Gaspard replied briefly.

Antoine nodded.

Oh, what a morning it was! The air seemed fairly drenched with the new growth of everything; the tints were indescribable. Some shrubs and flowers had begun to bloom. Renée had seen so much that was cold and bleak, trees leafless and apparently lifeless amid the almost black green of hemlocks and firs. Streams and pools frozen over, and a coldness that seemed to penetrate one's very soul. At Detroit it had softened a little and all along the journey since then were heralds of warmth and beauty. The child, too, expanded in it, and the changes in her face interested Gaspard intently. He was a great lover of nature himself.

Early St. Louis was all astir. From the bustle, the sound of voices, the gesticulation, and running to and fro, it appeared as if there might be thousands of people instead of six or seven hundred. Everything looked merry, everybody was busy. There was a line of boats coming, others already at the primitive landings, Indians and trappers in picturesque attire, gay feathers and red sashes; fringes down the sides of their long leggings and the top of their moccasins. Traders were there, too, sturdy brown-faced Frenchmen, many of whom had taken a tour or two up in the North Country themselves, and had the weather-beaten look that comes of much living out of doors. Children ran about, black-eyed, rosy-cheeked, shrill of voice. Small Indians, with their grave faces and straight black hair, and here and there a squaw with her papoose strapped to her back.

Gaspard Denys paused a moment to study them. He really had an artist's soul; these pictures always appealed to him.

They came in the old Rue Royale, skirting the river a short distance, then turned up to the Rue d'Eglise. Here was a low stone house, rather squat, the roof not having a high peak. A wide garden space, with fruit trees and young vegetables, some just peeping up from brown beds and a great space in front where grass might have grown if little feet had not trodden it so persistently. A broad porch had a straw-thatched roof, and here already a young girl sat spinning, while several children were playing about.

"Lisa! Lisa!" called the girl, rising. "Ah, Monsieur Denys, we are very glad to see you. You have been absent a long while. You missed the merry-making and—and we missed you," blushing.

A pretty girl, with dark eyes and hair done up in a great coil of braids; soft peachy skin with a dainty bloom on the cheek and a dimple in the broad chin. Her lips had the redness of a ripe red cherry that is so clear you almost think it filled with wine.

"And I am glad to see you, Barbe," taking her outstretched hand. "Ought I to say 'ma'm'selle' now?" glancing her all over, from the braids done up to certain indications in the attire of womanhood.

She blushed and laughed. "Oh, I hope I have not grown as much as that. I should like always to be Barbe to you."

"But some day you may be married. Then you will be madame to everybody."

"Lise thinks I have too good a home to give up lightly. I am very happy."

Madame Renaud came out of the house. She was taller and larger than her sister, but with the same dark eyes and hair. Her sleeves were rolled up above her elbows and showed a plump, pretty arm; her wide, homespun apron nearly covered her.

"Oh, Gaspard—M'sieu Denys! You are such a stranger and we have missed you much, much," with an emphasis. "We were not sure but some Quebec belle would capture you and keep you there. You will have warm welcomes. Whose is the child?"

The other children had stopped their play and were edging nearer Renée, who in turn shrank against Denys.

"I have come to talk about the child. May I not come in? Are you busy?"

"With bread and cakes. We are not so poorly off if we have a bad name," smiling with amusement. "Here is a chair, and a stool for the little one. She looks pale. Is she not well?"

"She has had a long journey. First across the ocean, then from Quebec in not the pleasantest of weather for such a tramp. But she has not been ill a day."

Denys placed his arm over the child's shoulder, and she leaned her arms on his knee.

Madame Renaud raised her eyebrows a trifle.

“You remember the daughter of Antoine Freneau?”

“Yes—a little. He took her to Canada and married her to some great person and she died in France. Poor thing! I wonder if she was happy?”

She, too, knew of the gossip that Denys had been very much in love with this girl, and she stole a little furtive glance; but the man’s face was not so ready with confessions. Much hard experience had settled the lines.

“Then the Count married again. He is in the King’s service at the palace. They sent the child over to her grandfather. I went to Canada for her.”

“And this is Renée Freneau’s child. Poor thing!”

She glanced intently at the little girl, who flushed and cast down her eyes. Why was she always a poor thing?

“And that is no home for her.”

“I should think not! Home, indeed, in that old cabin, where men meet to carouse, and strange stories are told,” said madame decisively.

“I am to be her guardian and look after her. I think I shall settle down. I have tramped about enough to satisfy myself for one while. I shall go into trading, and have some one keep a house for me and take care of the child. Meanwhile I must persuade some one to give her shelter and oversight.”

“Yes, yes, m’sieu,” encouragingly.

“And so I have come to you,” looking up, with a bright laugh.

Gaspard Denys very often obtained just what he wanted without much argument. Perhaps it was not so much his way as his good judgment of others.

“And so I have come to you,” he repeated. “If you will take her in a little while, I think she will enjoy being with children. She has had a lonely life thus far.”

“Poor thing! Poor little girl, to lose her mother so soon! And you think old Antoine will make no trouble?”

“Oh, no, no! He would not know what to do with her.”

Madame Renaud laughed derisively, and gave a nod, throwing her head back, which displayed her pretty throat.

“So I shall look after her. He will never interfere. It will not be for long. And how shall I appear putting on fatherly airs?” in a tone of amusement.

“Louis is but two and thirty, and you——”

“Have just turned thirty,” subjoined Gaspard.

“And little Louis is twelve, stout and sturdy and learning to figure as well as read under the good père. Then there are three others, and papa is as proud of them as was ever any hen with her chicks. I never heard that Chanticleer was a pattern of fatherly devotion.”

They both laughed at that.

“And, Gaspard, you should have settled upon some nice girl at the balls. You have been chosen king times enough.”

He flushed a trifle. “I have been quite a roamer in strange places, and at first had a fancy for a life of adventure. But, as I said, I think of settling down now. And if you will keep the little girl for me until I get a home——”

“And you want a good housemaid. Gaspard, Mère Lunde has lost her son. True, he was a great burden and care, and she has spent most of her little fortune upon him. I think she would be glad ——”

“The very person. Thank you a thousand times, Madame Renaud. I should want some one settled in her ways, content to stay at home, and with a tender heart. Yes, Mère Lunde will be the very one.

“She was going to the père’s; then his niece came from Michilimackinac. They had bad work at the Mission with the Indians, and she just escaped with her life and her little boy.”

“Yes; I will see her. It is advised that you get the cage before you find the bird; but the bird may

be captured elsewhere if you wait too long. The child's box comes in from St. Charles; they would not stir a step farther last night. I must go and look after it. Then I can send it here? And Louis will not kick it out of doors when he comes?" smiling humorously.

"He will be liker to keep the little one for good and all and let you whistle," she retorted merrily.

"Thank you a hundred times until you are better paid. And now I must be going. I expect the town will almost look strange."

"And plain after gay Quebec; and Detroit, they say, has some grand people in it. But, bah, they are English!" with a curl of the lip.

He rose now. Madame Renaud had not been idle, but had rolled out dough fairly brown with spices and cut it in little cakes of various shapes, filling up some baking sheets of tin.

"You will leave the child? Renée—what is her name? It has slipped my mind."

"Renée de Longueville."

The child clung to his hand. "I want to go with you," she said in a tone of entreaty.

"Yes, and see St. Louis? He is her king or was until she touched this Spanish soil."

"The Spaniards have been very good to us. But we all hope to go back again some day. Renée, will you not stay and play with the children? There is Sophie, about your age or a little older, and Elise——"

"No," she returned with a long breath; "I want Uncle Gaspard."

"Adopted already? Well, you will bring her in to dinner?" with a cordial intonation.

"If not, to supper."

"You will tire her to death dragging her around."

"Oh, heaven forefend," in mock fear.

He paused a moment or two and glanced at Renée, half questioningly, but she still clung to him.

They took their way along the street, but from every corner they had a glimpse of the river, now flowing lazily along. The French seemed to have a fancy for building their towns on the margin of a river. Partly, perhaps, from fear of the Indians, but quite as much from innate sociability, as they preferred compactness, and did not branch out into farms until later on. But many of these squares had not more than three or four houses; some, indeed, only one, the rest devoted to a garden.

Here was the market, but there were not many customers this morning, though the stands were attractively arranged. And beyond was the old Laclede mansion. He it was who had laid out the town and named its streets. On the main street was his large store, but it was then the end of Rue Royale. He had welcomed the emigration from Fort Chartres when the English had taken possession, and set a band of workmen building log houses for them. His own house was quite roomy and imposing.

Then they went down to the levee, which presented a busy and picturesque sight. Boats were being unloaded of bales of furs and articles of merchandise. Indians with blankets around them or with really gay trappings; *coureur de bois*; Frenchmen, both jolly and stern, chaffering, buying, sending piles of skins away on barrows, paying for them in various kinds of wares, arms, ammunition, beads and trinkets, though these were mostly taken by the squaws.

Denys found his parcels and the box belonging to the child, and responded to the cordial greetings.

"Here, Noyan," he called to a man who had just trundled his barrow down and who paused to make an awkward salutation. He had a blue cotton kerchief tied round his head, buckskin trousers, and a sort of blouse coat made of coarse woollen stuff, belted in loosely; but it held a pouch containing tobacco and his knife, and a small hatchet was suspended from it.

"M'sieu Denys! One has not seen you for an age! Were you up to the north? It is a good sight. And have you been making a fortune?"

The wide, smiling mouth showed white, even teeth.

"Not up in the fur regions. I took Canada this time."

"Then thou hast lots of treasures that will set the dames and the maids crazy with longing. They are gay people in those old towns, and the state they keep is something like a court, I hear. Have you brought home Madame Denys? Is it not high time?"

"Past time," returning the laugh. "But our good Pierre Laclede is content to remain a bachelor,

and why not I?”

“I am afraid thou art hard to suit. Surely we have pretty maids here; and at New Orleans it is said they make a man lose his head if they do but smile on him. A dangerous place that!” and he laughed merrily.

“Are you busy?”

“Yes and no. I am to look after M. Maxent’s boat load, but it will not be in until noon. So, if I can catch a job I am ready.”

“Then you are the man for me. Come. They have piled up the freight here on the wharf. I am a lucky fellow to meet you. I feel quite strange after my long absence. I suppose the old storehouse has not burned down? It could not well be robbed,” and Monsieur Denys laughed with gay indifference.

“When a man has only the coat on his back he need not be afraid of thieves.”

“Unless he fall among Indians.”

“Ah, bah! yes,” with a comical shrug. “And sometimes they take his skin.”

There were bales strapped up, with thongs of hide over the coarse covering; some sacks made of hide; several boxes bound about with bands of iron. Noyan looked them over and considered.

“I must go twice, M’sieu Denys,” looking askance as if his employer might object.

“Very well. This box is to go to Madame Renaud’s.”

The man nodded, and began to pile on the goods, fastening them with some stout straps.

“Do you go, too?”

“Oh, yes. Here, Jaques, sit on this box and guard these two bundles, and earn a little more than your salt.”

A shock-headed boy, with a broad, stupid face, had been looking on indifferently, and now he dropped on the box like a weight of lead, with a grunt that meant assent and a grin that betokened satisfaction.

“We must retrace our steps,” said Denys to the little girl. “But it is not far.”

They passed the market again. They turned into the Rue de Rive, just beyond the Rue Royale. A building of rough stone, with a heavy doorway that looked as if it had been deserted a long while, which was true enough. A broad bar had fastened it securely, and the great lock might have guarded the treasures of Niebelungs.

Denys unlocked it with some difficulty, threw open the door and unfastened the shutter.

“Whew! What a musty old hole! It must be cleaned up. I will attend to that to-morrow. Dump the things in here, and then go for the others.”

On the western end was an addition of hewn logs, with big posts set in the corners. Denys marched around and surveyed it. There was a space of neglected ground, with two or three fine trees and a huddle of grape-vines fallen to the ground. It did not look altogether inviting. But just beyond was the Rue de la Tour that led straight out to the old fort, and only a step farther was the church and the priest’s house. Then, it would not be very far from the Renauds.

Renée was watching him as he peered about.

“It looks a dull place for a little girl!” he exclaimed.

“Are you going to live here?” with some curiosity.

“Oh, yes. But it will be fixed up. And—a flower garden,” hesitatingly.

“I don’t mind if you are here,” and she slipped her hand in his with a gesture of possession.

“And we will have a nice old woman to get our meals and make our beds and keep the house tidy. Oh, it will be all right when it is cleared up. And you will soon know some little girls. And we can take walks around.”

She started suddenly. A bird up in the tree poured forth a torrent of melody. Her eyes grew luminous, her lips quivered, her pale cheeks flushed.

“Oh, birds!” she cried. “I used to talk to them at the château and feed them with crumbs. They would come to my hand.”

“You shall tame them here. Oh, we will have nice times together,” and now he pressed her hand.

The sweetness of her little face went to his heart. Yes, she was like her mother.

Noyan came with the next load, threw off the few parcels, and took his way to Madame Renaud's. Denys locked his door again and they turned away.

"Now we will go and find Mère Lunde. It is up somewhere by the fort. That will be quite a landmark for you. And the great Indian chief, Pontiac, that I told you about at Detroit, lies buried there."

"I do not think I like Indians," she returned gravely. "Only the babies are so odd, and the little children. It is a pity they should grow up so cruel."

"We have kept very good friends with them thus far."

They had begun to build the new palisades. Yes, here was the fort, and the Guion house, and the grave that she did not care to linger over. Then they turned into the street of the Barns, *La rue des Granges*, and soon found Mère Lunde, who was cooking a savory pottage, and welcomed Gaspard Denys warmly.

A little old Frenchwoman such as artists love to paint. She was round in the shoulders, made so by much stooping over her son and her work in the tiny garden, where she raised much of her living. She was wrinkled, but her eyes were bright, and her cheeks still had a color in them. She wore the coif, her best one being white, but this a sort of faded plaid. Her skirt just came to her ankles, and to-day she had on sabots, that made a little clatter as she stepped round. Over her shoulders was pinned a small gray kerchief. She looked so cheerful and tidy, so honest and kindly, that she went to one's heart at once.

M'sieu must hear about her son, poor lad—all she had to live for. Yet, perhaps, it was well the Good Father took him before she went. And now she worked a little for the neighbors. Everybody was kind to her. And would they not partake of her simple meal? It was not much, to be sure, but it would make her very happy.

Denys admitted that he was hungry, and Renée's eyes had an assenting light in them. Over the meal he made his proposal, which Mère Lunde accepted with tears in her eyes.

"God is good," she said, crossing herself devoutly. "Father Meurin said I must have faith, and something would come. Oh, how can I thank you! Yes, I will gladly keep your house, and care for the child, and strive to please you every way. Oh, it is, indeed, the best of fortune to happen to me, when life had begun to look lone and drear."

"To-morrow, then, we will begin to clear up."

"Yes; to-morrow," she replied cheerfully.

CHAPTER III—A NEW HOME

In after years, when Renée de Longueville looked back at what seemed the real beginning of her life, everything about the old town was enveloped in a curious glamour. For it was all abloom. Such flowers, such great trees in pink and white, such fragrance everywhere, and everybody moving to and fro, as if impelled by some strange power. What were they all doing? And the children were so merry. To a little girl who had been mewed up in an old château, rather gloomy at that, and no one about but elderly servants, the transition was mysterious, quite beyond the child's depth. But she felt the new life in every limb, in every nerve, and she was full of joy.

The streets of the old town, if not wide, were comparatively straight; those running along the river the longest, those stretching up to the fort only a few squares. Nearly every homestead had its separate lot or garden, enclosed by some sort of rude fence. Outside were the fields, cultivated largely in common; woodlands and an immense prairie stretching out to the northwest. Beside the fort were several towers in which ammunition was stored, although the Spanish government had a great fancy for building these.

Gaspard Denys was very busy cleaning up his place and making some alterations. In his heart he began to feel quite like a family man. Most of the stores were kept in the residences, except those down on the levee. The people seldom suffered from depredations. Their treatment of the Indians was uniformly honorable, and they kept them as much as possible from the use of ardent spirits. The slaves were happy in their lot. Indeed, a writer in early eighteen hundred speaks of the town as arcadian in its simplicity and kindliness to its dependents. Women never worked in the fields, and much of the housework was done by the slaves and Indian women. Holidays were frequent, in which all joined. In the summer, out-of-doors sports and dances often took place, very much like modern picnics, at which one frequently saw parties of Indians. There were no hostelries; but if a stranger came in town he was sheltered and treated to the best. Hospitality was considered one of the first duties.

There was one large room in the log part of the house, but Denys resolved to build another. His little girl should have a place of her very own, and from time to time he would find adornments

for it. Here she should grow to womanhood. Antoine Freneau was not a young man when he had married; and though people who did not meet with accidents lived to a good old age, he was old already. He always pleaded poverty, though he did considerable dickering in the way of trade, and it was surmised that his business dealings would not stand honest scrutiny, and his unsocial habits did not endear him to the joyous community. Still, whatever he had left would come to Renée. He, Denys, would make sure of that.

Renée soon became domesticated with the Renauds. Elise and Sophie played about most of the time, and were jolly, laughing little girls. Twice a week they went to the house of the good Father Lemoine, who taught them to read and write and gave them some knowledge of mathematics, which was quite necessary in trading. Twice a week the boys went, and on Saturday they repeated the catechism orally.

Denys called in a little help; but every man was his own builder, with some cordial neighborly assistance. So they raised the posts and studding, and fastened the cross ties—round on the outside, the smooth part, or middle, going on the inside. The interstices were filled with mortar made of tough grass and clay that hardened easily. Sometimes this was plastered on the inside, but oftener blankets were hung, which gave a bright and cheerful appearance, and warmth in winter.

The stone part was cleared up and put in order. It had a big chimney, part of which was in the adjoining room. Denys spread about quantities of sweet grass to neutralize the musty smell; though the clear, beautiful air, with its mingled perfumes, was doing that. On the shelves he spread some of his wares, implements of different sorts were ranged about the walls. Near the door was a counter; back of it two iron-bound chests, very much battered, that he had bought with the place and the small store of goods from the family of the dead owner. These held his choicest treasures, many of which he had brought from Quebec, which were to please the ladies.

The voyages up and down the river were often tedious, and sometimes the traders were attacked by river pirates, who hid in caves along the banks and drew their boats up out of sight when not needed. Peltries and lead went down to New Orleans, wheat and corn and imported articles were returned. There were some troublesome restrictions, and about as much came overland from Detroit.

If Renée made friends with the Renaud household, they had no power to win her from Uncle Gaspard. They had insisted on his accepting their hospitality, though he devoted most of his time to the work he was hurrying forward. Now and then he came just at dusk and spent the night, but was always off early in the morning before Renée was up.

She often ran up the street, sometimes reaching the house before he started. The children were ready enough to go with her, but she liked best to be alone. She had a curious, exclusive feeling about him, young as she was.

“But he is not your true uncle,” declared Elise, one day when she had laid her claim rather strenuously. “Mamma said so. Your uncles have to be real relations.”

“But he said when we were in Quebec that he *was* my uncle—that I was to be his little girl,” was the defiant rejoinder.

“And if your gran’père had not agreed?”

“I would never have stayed there. It makes me shiver now. I would—yes, I would have run away.”

“He is not like our gran’père, who is a lovely old man, living up by the Government House. And gran’mère gives us delightful little cakes when we go there. And there are uncles and aunts, real ones. Barbe is our aunt.”

Renée’s small heart swelled with pride and a sense of desolation. She had gathered already that Grandpapa Freneau was not at all respected; and there were moments when she felt the solitariness of her life—the impression that she had in some sense been cast off.

“But my father is at the palace of the King of France. He came to see me on an elegant horse, and his clothes were splendid. And there are two little brothers. Oh, such fine people as there are in Paris.”

That extinguished the little girls. It was true that now the French had gotten over their soreness about the transfer. They never meddled with politics, but they still loved the old flag. The Spanish governors had been judicious men thus far.

So that night Renée slipped out from the supper table and sped like a little sprite along the Rue Royale, and then up the Rue de Rive. The moon was coming over the river with a pale light, as if she was not quite ready for full burning. She heard the sounds of hammering, and rushed in the open doorway.

“Well, little one! Your eyes are so bright that if you were an Indian girl I should call you Evening Star.”

“I wanted to see you so,” in a breathless fashion.

“What has happened?”

“Why, nothing. Only the day seemed so long.”

“You went to the father’s?”

“Oh, yes,” rather indifferently.

“Why didn’t you run over then? You might have taken supper with me.”

“Because—there were Elise and Sophie.”

“But there was supper enough to go round. We had some fine broiled fish. Mère Lunde is an excellent cook.”

“Oh, when can I come to stay?” Her tone was full of entreaty, and her eyes soft with emotion.

“But—you won’t have any little girls to play with.”

“I don’t want any one but you.”

He had paused from his work, and now she sprang to him and encircled him as far as she could with her small arms.

“You are not homesick?” It would be strange, indeed, since she had never had a true home.

“I don’t know. That,” giving her head a turn, “is not my real home.”

“Oh, no. But they have all been good to you. Ma’m’selle Barbe is very fond of you.”

“Oh, everybody is good and kind. Even Louis, though he teases. And Père Renaud. But not one of them is you—*you*.”

“My little girl!” He stooped over and hugged her, kissed her fondly. The child’s love was so innocent, so sincere, that it brought again the hopes of youth.

“And you will always keep me—always?” There was a catch in her breath like a sob.

“Why, yes. What has any one said to you?” with a slight touch of indignation.

“Sophie said you were not my own uncle. What would make you so? Can you never be?”

There was a pathos in her tone that touched him to the heart, even as he smiled at her childish ignorance, and was wild to have the past undone.

“My dear, you can hardly understand. I must have been your mother’s brother.”

“Oh, then you would have belonged to that hateful old man!” and she gave her foot a quick stamp. “No, I should not want you to.”

He laughed softly. He would have been glad enough to belong to the hateful old man years ago, and belong to the child as well.

“It doesn’t matter, little one,” he said tenderly. “I shall be your uncle all my life long. Don’t bother your head about relationships. Come, see your room. It will soon be dry, and then you shall take possession.”

It had been whitewashed, and the puncheon floor—laid in most houses, it being difficult to get flat boards—stained a pretty reddish color. The window had a curtain hung to it, some of the Canadian stuff. One corner had been partitioned off for a closet. There was a box with a curtain tacked around it, and a white cover over it, to do duty as a dressing-table. There were two rustic chairs, and some pretty Indian basket-like pouches had been hung around.

“Oh, oh!” she cried in delight. “Why, it is as pretty as Ma’m’selle Barbe’s—almost as pretty,” correcting herself. “And can I not come at once?”

“There must be a bed for you to sleep on, though we might sling a hammock.”

“And Mère Lunde?”

“Come through and see.”

In one corner of this, which was the ordinary living room, was a sort of pallet, a long box with a cover, in which Mère Lunde kept her own belongings, with a mattress on the top, spread over with a blanket, answering for a seat as well. She had despoiled her little cottage, for Gaspard Denys had said, “It is a home for all the rest of your life if you can be content,” and she had called down the blessings of the good God upon him. So, here were shelves with her dishes, some that

her mother had brought over to New Orleans as a bride; china and pewter, and coarse earthenware acquired since, and queer Indian jars, and baskets stiffened with a kind of clay that hardened in the heating.

“Welcome, little one,” she exclaimed cheerfully. “The good uncle gets ready the little nest for thee. And soon we shall be a family indeed.”

She lighted a torch and stood it in the corner, and smiled upon Renée.

“Oh, I shall be so glad to come!” cried the child joyfully. “And my room is so pretty.”

She looked with eager eyes from one to the other.

“And the garden is begun. There are vines planted by ma’m’selle’s window. In a month one will not know the place. And it is near to the church and the good father’s house.”

“But I wouldn’t mind if it was a desert, so long as you both were here,” she replied enthusiastically.

“We must go back, little one. They will wonder about you. Just be patient awhile.”

“And thou hast no cap,” said Mère Lunde.

“Oh, that does not matter; the night is warm. Adieu,” taking the hard hand in her soft one. Then she danced away and caught Gaspard’s arm.

“Let us walk about a little,” she pleaded. “The moon is so beautiful.” If they went direct to the Renauds’, he would sit on the gallery and talk to Barbe.

“Which way?” pausing, looking up and down.

“Oh, toward the river. The moon makes it look like a silver road. And it is never still except at night.”

That was true enough. Business ended at the old-fashioned supper time. There was one little French tavern far up the Rue Royale, near the Locust Street of to-day; but the conviviality of friends, which was mostly social, took place at home, out on the wide porches, where cards were played for amusement. The Indians had dispersed. A few people were strolling about, and some flat boats were moored at the dock, almost indistinguishable in the shade. The river wound about with a slow, soft lapping, every little crest and wavelet throwing up a sparkling gem and then sweeping it as quickly away.

From here one could see out to both ends. The semi-circular gates terminated at the river’s edge, and at each a cannon was planted and kept in readiness for use. Now and then there would be vague rumors about the English on the opposite shore. The new stockade of logs and clay surmounted by pickets was slowly replacing the worn-out one.

Renée was fain to linger, with her childish prattle and touching gestures of devotion. How the child loved him already! That a faint tint of jealousy had been kindled would have amused him if he had suspected it.

When they turned back in the Rue Royale they met M. Renaud enjoying his pipe.

“Ah, truant!” he exclaimed; “they were beginning to feel anxious about you. Barbe declared you might stay all night. Was it not true you had threatened?”

“They would not have me,” she returned laughingly, her heart in a glow over the thought that when she did stay permanently, there would be no need of Uncle Gaspard going to the Renauds’.

“Was that it?” rather gayly. “The girls will miss thee. They are very fond of thee, Renée de Longueville.”

Then Renée’s heart relented with the quick compunction of childhood.

“M. Laclede’s fleet of keel boats will be up shortly, I heard to-day. The town must give him a hearty welcome. What a man he is! What energy and forethought! A little more than twenty years and we have grown to this, where there was nothing but a wild. Denys, there is a man for you!”

“Fort Chartres helped it along. I was but a boy when we came over. My mother is buried there, and it almost broke my father’s heart to leave her.”

“Those hated English!” said Renaud, almost under his breath. “The colonies have revolted, it is said. I should be glad to see them driven out of the country.”

“Yes, I heard the talk at Quebec and more of it as I came down the lakes. But the country is so big, why cannot each take a piece in content? Do you ever think we may be driven out to the wilderness?”

“And find the true road to India?” with a short laugh. “Strange stories are told by some of the

hunters of inaccessible mountains. And what is beyond no one knows," shrugging his shoulders.

No one knew whether the gold-fields of La Salle's wild dreams lay in that direction or not. There were vague speculations. Parties had started and never returned. The hardy pioneers turned their steps northward for furs. And many who heard these wild dreams in their youth, half a century later crossed the well-nigh inaccessible mountains and found the gold. And before the century was much older ships were on their way to the East of dream and fable.

Barbe and Madame Renaud were out on the porch in the moonlight, and it was very bright now. Denys would not stay, and soon said good-night to them, going back to his work by a pine torch.

Renée counted the days, and every one seemed longer. But at last the joyful news came.

"We shall run over often," declared Sophie, who had a fondness for the little girl in spite of childish tiffs.

Renée was busy enough placing her little store of articles about, discovering new treasures, running to and fro, and visiting Mère Lunde, who had a word of welcome every time she came near.

"It will be a different house, petite," she said, with her kindly smile.

The garden could not compare with the Renauds in the glory of its gay flower-beds. Two slaves of a neighbor—they were often borrowed for a trifle—were working at it. A swing had been put up for the little lady.

But somehow, when the afternoon began to lengthen, when Uncle Gaspard had gone up to the Government House on some business, and Mère Lunde was in a sound doze over the stocking she was knitting, Renée felt strangely solitary. She missed the gay chat of Madame Renaud and her sister and the merriment of the children. There seemed none immediately about here. She strolled around to the front of the store; the door was locked, and it looked rather dreary.

She was glad to-morrow was the day for the classes to meet. Why, it was almost as lonesome as at the old château!

That evening Uncle Gaspard brought out his flute, which filled her with delight. The violin was the great musical instrument in St. Louis—the favorite in all the French settlements. But the flute had such a tender tone, such a mysterious softness, that it filled her with an indescribable joy. And there was none of the dreadful tuning that rasped her nerves and made her feel as if she must scream.

Then, it was strange to sleep alone in the room when she had been with Ma'm'selle Barbe and the two girls. They were versed in Indian traditions, and some they told over were not pleasant bed-time visions. But the comfort was that all these terrible things had happened in Michigan, or a place away off, called New England; and Sophie did not care what the Indians did to the English who had driven them out of the settlements on the Illinois. So, why should she? She was still more of a French girl, because she was born in France.

But the world looked bright and cheery the next morning, and the breakfast was delightful, sitting on the side toward Uncle Gaspard, and having Mère Lunde opposite, with her gay coif and her red plaid kerchief instead of the dull gray one. Her small, wrinkled face was a pleasant one, though her eyes were faded, for her teeth were still white and even, and her short upper lip frequently betrayed them. She poured the coffee and passed the small cakes of bread, which were quite as good as Madame Renaud's.

The lines were not strictly drawn in those days between masters and servants. And Mère Lunde had been her own mistress for so many years that she possessed the quiet dignity of independence.

Then Renée inspected her room afresh, ran out of doors and gathered a few flowers, as she had seen Ma'm'selle Barbe do. She ventured to peep into Uncle Gaspard's abode.

"Come in, come in!" he cried cheerily. "There is no one to buy you up, like a bale of merchandise."

"But—you wouldn't sell me?" Her eyes had a laughing light in them, her voice a make-believe entreaty, and altogether she looked enchanting.

"Well, it would take a great deal of something to buy you. It would have to be more valuable than money. I don't care so much for money myself."

He put his arm about her and hugged her up close. He was sitting at a massive old desk that he had bought with the place. It seemed crowded full of various articles.

"But you love me better than any one else?"

"Any one else? Does that mean ever so many people love you? The Renaud children, and Ma'm'selle Barbe, and—perhaps—your grandfather?"

“Oh, you know I don’t mean that!” Her cheek flushed with a dainty bit of vexation. “The others *like* me well enough, but you—how much do you love me?”

“The best of any one. Child, I do not think you will ever understand how dear you are to me. There is no measurement for such love.”

That was the confession she wanted. Her face was radiant with delight—a child’s pleasure in the present satisfaction.

She glanced around. “Do you mean to sell all these things?” she asked wonderingly.

“Oh, yes and many more. I ought to be down on the Rue Royale, where people could find me easily. But I took a fancy to this old place, and the man was in my debt; so he paid me with it. It would not be so pleasant to live down there, on the lower side, by the levee. But I shall stay here and wait till the people come to me. After all, for a few years, if we get enough to eat and a little to wear, it will suffice.”

“And what then?” with captivating eagerness.

“Why, then—” he hesitated. Why should he think of this just now? He did not want her grown up into a charming mademoiselle, even if she resembled her mother still more strongly.

“Yes; what then? Isn’t it just the same afterward, or do people come to a time when they stop eating?” and a gleam of mischief crossed her face.

“That is at the end of life, child—sixty or eighty years.”

“No, I don’t mean that time,” with a shrug and a little curl of the lip. “Maybe—after a few years ——”

“Well?” in amused inquiry.

“You might go to New Orleans and take me. Ma’m’selle Barbe has been, and she says it is so beautiful and gay.”

“And you have been half over the world. Ma’m’selle has not been to Quebec nor Detroit.”

“Oh, that is true enough,” laughingly. “Nor to France.”

Two customers paused at the door, and he said, “Run away, dear.” So she went obediently, watched Mère Lunde at her work awhile, then strolled out to the garden spot, where two hired slaves were working. What should make them so different from white people? Where was Africa and the Guinea Coast that she heard spoken of at the Renauds’? Their lips were so thick and red and their hair so woolly. But they seemed very merry, though she could not understand a word they said; it was a queer patois.

Uncle Gaspard came out presently. “Wouldn’t you like to have a flower garden?” he asked.

“What is here?” She put out her small moccasined toe toward a rather stiff-looking plot of green plants.

“Oh, that is Mère Lunde’s garden of herbs. All manner of things for potage, and the making of sundry remedies in which she has great faith. She will look after that.”

“And must I look after mine?”

“I will come and help you.”

“Oh, then, I will have a garden!” she cried joyfully.

CHAPTER IV—THE SOWING OF A THORN

It was only a short distance to the priest’s house, where the classes met. She ran off by herself. There was quite a throng of girls, though, as with most of the early Western settlers, education was not esteemed the one thing needful for girls. To make good wives was the greatest attainment they could achieve. Still, Father Lemoine labored with perseverance at the tillage of their brains on the two afternoons, and the tillage of their souls on Saturday.

After the two hours were over the restless children had a run up to the Fort. The Guions there were Madame Renaud’s relatives. There was a great thicket of roses that covered the line of palings, and some ladies were having refreshments under a sort of arbor, little cakes and glasses of wine much diluted with water.

“Oh, yes, come in,” exclaimed Sophie as Renée hung back. “You have been here before, you needn’t feel strange.”

That was true enough. Then she had been Sophie’s guest. Now she had a curious hesitation.

Elise was going around courtesying to the ladies, and answering their inquiries. Sophie stooped to play with the cat. An old lady nearest Renée handed her a plate of small spiced cakes.

“You have gone to Monsieur Denys,” she said in a soft tone. “He is—” raising her eyes in inquiry.

“He is my uncle.” Renée made a graceful little courtesy as she said this, and thanked the lady for the cake.

“I suppose M. Denys means to settle down now,” said another. “It is high time. He ought to marry. There is nothing like a good wife.”

“That will come along,” and another nodded with a mysterious but merry smile. “That is why he is smartening up so. And he has brought some elegant stuffs from Canada to dress her in when he gets her. Madame Aubrey was in yesterday and bought of him a gown for Genevieve. He was showing her some finery that would adorn a bride. I think we shall hear before long.”

They all nodded and glanced sidewise from Elise to Sophie as if they might have something to do with it.

“I must go,” exclaimed Renée, her face flushing.

“No, wait, I am not ready,” said Sophie.

But Renée courtesied to them all and flashed through the rose-hung entrance. She ran swiftly down the street, turned the corner to her own home, and entered the gate. Mère Lunde sat at the doorway knitting.

“Where is Uncle Gaspard?” she cried breathlessly.

“In the shop chaffering. They have found him out, you see, and I hope the good Father of all will send him prosperity,” crossing herself devoutly.

Renée dropped down on the doorstep. Her child’s heart was in a tumult. Had not the house been planned for her, and the pretty room made especially? Where would he put a wife? His small place in the corner of the shop, hung about with curtains, was not fit, since the wife would be Ma’m’selle Barbe, whose pretty white bed had fringed hangings that she had learned to knot while she was in New Orleans.

“Why do you sigh so, little one?”

Renée could not contain her anxiety.

“O ma mère, do you think Uncle Gaspard will marry?” she cried with passionate vehemence. “Will he bring a wife here to live with us?”

“What has put such a thing in thy head, child? Surely the good priest would not venture to suggest that to thee!”

“It was in the Guions’ garden. I went there with the girls. And some one said he had fixed the house for that, and they smiled and I knew who they meant.”

She wiped some tears from her hot cheek.

“Who was it?” the dame asked simply.

“Who should it be but Ma’m’selle Barbe! Oh, I could guess who they thought would come.”

“Ma’m’selle is a pretty girl and sweet tempered. She has a dot, too,” said the placid woman. “But then I think——”

Renée burst into a passion of tears, and springing up stamped on the ground.

“She shall not come here!” she cried vehemently. “She shall not have Uncle Gaspard! Oh, why did he go clear to Canada for me, why did he bring me here?”

“There was your gran’père——”

“But he doesn’t want me. No one wants me!”

“Chut! chut! little one. Do not get in such a passion. Surely a child could not help it if it was to be so. But now that I think the matter over, he said I must come, as there would be no one here to look after you, and that your gran’père’s was no place for you. Truly, it is not, if the whispers about him are well grounded. It is said the river pirates gather there. And he goes away for weeks at a time. No, I do not believe M. Denys means to marry.”

“Oh, truly? truly?” Renée flung her arms about the woman’s neck. “Say again you do not believe it.”

Every pulse was throbbing, and her breath came in tangled gasps. The woman’s tranquillity

rasped her.

“Nay, he would have planned different. And Ma’m’selle Barbe has young admirers. Ah, you should have seen her at Christmas and Epiphany! She was chosen Queen, she had one of the lucky beans. She would hardly want so grave a man. All young things love pleasure, and it is right; care comes fast enough.”

And now Renée remembered that a young man had spent evenings with his violin, and they two had sat out on the gallery. But she could not divest her mind of the curious sort of suspicion that Barbe cared very much for Uncle Gaspard.

“No, no,” went on Mère Lunde. “People gossip. They often mate two who have no such intention. Dry thy eyes, petite, and laugh again. There has a robin built in the beech near thy window, and now I think there are young ones in the nest. I heard them cry for food. And the father bird goes singing about as if he wanted to tell the news. It is pleasanter than thine.”

Renée smiled then. Yes, if the young man loved, ma’m’selle. How they had laughed and talked. Perhaps—and yet she was not quite satisfied.

But she went out and glanced up at the tree. Yes, there was a nest, and a funny, peeping sound, a rustle in the branches.

The path had been packed clear down to the gate. Some garden beds were laid out, and the neglected grass trimmed up. It began to look quite pretty. If there was something to do, to keep away thoughts.

“Mère Lunde, will you teach me to knit?” she asked suddenly.

“And sew, child. A woman needs that.”

“I can sew a little. But I have nothing to sew.”

“That will be provided if you wish for it. I think your uncle will be glad. I have heard that where there are holy Sisters they teach girls, but we have none here. And now you may help me get the supper.”

That tended to divert her troubled thoughts. And then Uncle Gaspard came in with a guest and the meal was a very merry one. Afterward the two sat over the desk busy with writing and talking until she was sleepy and went to bed.

She studied Uncle Gaspard furtively the next morning. He asked about the school, and said in the afternoon they would take a walk, and this morning she had better go to market with Mère Lunde.

She found that quite an entertainment. The old market was not much, a little square with some stalls, all kept by old women, it seemed. One had cakes, the *croquecignolles*, the great favorite with everybody. A curious kind of dry candied fruit, and a sausage roll that the men and boys from the levees bought and devoured with hearty relish. Then there was a stall of meats and a portly butcher in a great white gown. Some of the stands were there only two or three days in the week. Most of the inhabitants looked out for their own stores, but there were the boatmen and the fur traders, and the *voyageurs*. There was but one bake shop, so the market stall was well patronized.

Some one called to Renée as she neared her own corner, and she turned. It was a little girl she had seen in the class at the priest’s house.

“I am glad you have come here to live,” she began. “Your name is Renée de Long——”

“Renée de Longueville,” with a touch of formality.

“And mine is Rosalie Pichou. I live just down in the street below. I have five brothers and not one sister. How many have you?”

“None at all.”

“Oh, I shouldn’t like that. And I am always wishing for a sister. But one of my brothers will be married shortly, only he is not coming home to live.”

“Do you like him to marry?”

“Oh, yes, we shall have a gay time and a feast. And then there will be the new house to visit. Andre is just twenty-one, Pierre is eighteen, Jules sixteen, and I am twelve. I am larger and older than you.”

They had walked up to the gate. Mère Lunde stood by it. “Will you not come in and see Renée?” she asked, on the child’s behalf.

“Oh, yes,” was the frank answer. “I came to see the new room when M. Denys was building it.

Oh, how pretty you have it!" in an almost envious tone.

"But then you can have all. At home, there are two little boys to provide for, and I think boys are always hungry. Jules gets lots of game, he is such a good shot. Oh, I have such a pretty cat and a kitten. I wonder if you would like the kitten?"

"Oh, yes," said Mère Lunde. "A cat is a comfortable creature to have about, and a kitten full of play, merci! One never tires of her pranks. You will like it, Renée?"

The child's eyes shone with delight.

"And your mother will let you bestow it?" the mère asked tentatively.

"Oh, yes. You see, there are two dogs and a tame squirrel, and Jules is always bringing home something. Ma mère scolds about it. And Jules is afraid the kitten may get at his birds. Oh, yes, you can have it without doubt. I'll run and fetch it now."

Rosalie was back before she had time to go even one way, Renée thought. A beautiful striped gray kitten, with a very cunning face. A fine black stripe went from the outer corner of the eyes to his ears, and gave him the appearance of wearing spectacles, which amused Renée very much. Then they talked about the class.

"I hate to study," declared Rosalie. "And reading is such slow work when you don't understand. But it is beginning to be the fashion, ma mère says, and presently people will be despised if they do not know how to read. I like the sums best. You can say them after the Father and not bother your brains. And that's why I don't mind the catechism. It isn't like picking the words out of a page."

"I can read quite well," said Renée, with a little pride. "And I like it."

"I can make netting and knit stockings and am learning to cook. Oh, I must go home at once and help ma mère with the dinner. She told me not to stay, and that I was to ask you to visit me. Come soon," and she made a pretty gesture of farewell.

Renée picked up the kitten. It was very tame, and made believe bite her hand. Then it gave a sudden spring.

"Oh, it will run away!" cried Renée in alarm.

But one of the men in the garden caught it and gave it back to her.

"Let us make him eat something. Then he will wash his face and stay. And he will be excellent to catch mice in the shop. They destroy the skins so."

The kitten enjoyed a bit of meat. Then he sat down very gravely and washed his face, which made Renée laugh.

Uncle Gaspard came home and expressed himself delighted with the kitten. He was fond of cats, and had been thinking of one. They had their dinner, and he said he knew the Pichous very well, and was glad Renée had a playmate so near.

Presently they went out for their walk. Already Denys had explained to Mère Lunde the prices of some of the ordinary articles, and where the powder and shot were kept, so that she might provide for a casual customer. But being a little out of the way, trade was not likely to be very brisk.

They went up the Rue de la Place and out at the side of the fort. There were no houses save here and there a few wigwams, and Indian children playing about in the front of them. Cultivated fields stretched out. The King's Highway marked the western limit of the municipality; all the rest was the King's domain, to be granted to future settlers. There was the wide prairie, and to the northward the great mound. They mounted this, and then they could see up the winding of the river to the chain of rocks, and the Missouri on its way to join the greater stream and be merged in it. Farther still, vague woodlands, until all was lost in dim outlines and seemed resting against the sky.

Gaspard Denys liked this far view. Sometimes he had thought of coming out here and losing himself in the wilds, turning hunter like Blanchette Chasseur, as a famous hunting friend of Pierre Laclede's was called. North of the Missouri he had built a log cabin for himself, where any hunter or traveller was welcome to share his hospitality. Denys himself had partaken of it.

Now he wondered a little if he had been wise to choose the child instead, and give up his freedom. Blanchette had also established a post at Les Pettites Côtes, which was the headquarters for many rovers, and became the nucleus of another city. He was fond of adventures.

But if he, Denys, had married, as he had once dreamed! Then he would have given up the wild life long ago. Then there would have been home and love.

“O Uncle Gaspard,” Renée cried, “you squeeze my hand so tight. And you walk so fast.”

He paused suddenly and gazed down in the flushed face, the eyes humid under their curling lashes.

“My little dear!” and his heart smote him. “Let us sit down here in the shade of this clump of trees and rest. You see, I never had a little girl before, and forgot that she could not stride with my long legs.”

“And I am so thirsty.”

He glanced about. “We are only going a little farther,” he said, “and then we shall find a splendid spring and something to eat. Are you very tired?”

She drew a long breath and held up her little red hand.

“Poor hand!” he said tenderly, pressing it to his lips. “Poor little hand!”

She leaned her head down on his shoulder.

“You wouldn’t like to have me go away?” she murmured plaintively.

“Go away?” in surprise. “What put such an idea in your head?”

“You wouldn’t send me?”

Strange these thoughts should find entrance in her mind when he had just asked himself that curious question so akin to it.

“What do you mean, little one?”

“If—if you married—some one—who did not want me,” in so desolate a tone that it gave him a pang.

“But I am not going to marry any one.”

“Are you very, very sure?” with an indrawn breath.

He took her face between his hands suddenly and turned it upward. It was scarlet and tears beaded the long lashes.

“Come,” he said in soft persuasion, “what is behind all this? Who has been talking to you? If it is Mère Lunde——”

“No—she said it was not true.”

“Surely that little Pichou girl is not a mischief maker! If so, she must keep clear of us. I will not have you tormented.”

Then Renée began to cry softly and the truth came out with sobs.

He smiled, and yet he was deeply touched. The little thing was jealous. Yet was it not true that he was all she had in the world to love, and that no one had really loved her until he came into her life? How she had trusted him back there in Quebec after the first few hours!

Now he gathered her up in his arms as if she been a baby, and kissed the small hot face, tasting the salt tears.

“Little one,” he began in a tender, comforting tone, “set your heart at rest. If the good God spares us, there will be many pleasant years together, I hope. I am not going to marry any one, and Ma’m’selle Barbe has a fine young admirer. She doesn’t want an old fellow like me. You can’t understand now, but when you are older I will tell you the whole story. I loved your mother and your grandfather took her away, married her to some one else. That is why you are so dear to me.”

“Oh!” she cried, with a depth of feeling that surprised him. “Oh!” Then she dropped down on her knees and put her arms about his neck, and he could feel her heart beat against his breast. He was immeasurably impressed. Could she understand what that meant?

When he raised her face it was sweet and grave as that of an older person might have been. Then she said softly. “I shall love you my whole life long. I shall never love any one so dearly.”

How did she who had never had any one to love understand affection so well? Perhaps because it is natural to the sex to own something it can adore, and yet the little Renaud girls liked him very much, but there was no such absorption in their regard. Ah, he was her all. They had the natural ties of childhood on which to lavish their love. Barbe—he had never thought of marrying her, though he had seen her grow up to womanhood, and very charming at that. She was for some younger mate, and there were plenty of them. Pretty girls, nor scarcely any girls, went begging in the new countries. They were tempting enough without much *dot*.

And that her little heart should be torn by jealousy! He could have smiled, only it seemed pitiful. He pressed her closer, sorry any innuendoes should have been made before her.

“Come, dear,” he began tenderly, “we have not finished our walk. Or will I have to carry you?”

She sprang up lightly, her face all abloom, though her long lashes still glistened.

“Oh, no, no,” smilingly. “But you have carried me—over part of the long portage when I was so tired, and that night when it was dark. Oh, how big and strong you are. There was some one in a book in the old château—I have nearly forgotten, who was strong and brave. Uncle Gaspard, why haven’t you any books? The little ones at the Father’s are so queer, with their short sentences, and the children blunder so. I like best to know about some person. Oh, can’t we all tell that the dog barks and the kitten mews, the cock crows, without reading it in a primer! And—I would like to have a prayer book of my very own.”

“I think I have one somewhere about. But I will send to New Orleans for some books the next time the boats go down. People have not had much time for learning thus far.”

“And I had nothing to do in the old château but play and read. There was no one to play with,” sadly. “How funny that little girl was who brought me the kitten! Five brothers! Well, I have two at home, in Paris, I mean, but I never saw them only once. Rosalie! Isn’t it a pretty name? I wonder if you would like me to be called anything else?”

“No, dear. You are a queen, my little queen. I don’t want you changed in any way. I only want you to be happy and content.”

She was so thoroughly rested now that although she gave little skips occasionally and held his hand tightly, her heart seemed as light as the birds flying overhead. And now they were coming to a small Indian settlement, with a few wigwams, and long stretches of corn up high enough to make a beautiful waving green sea as the wind moved it in undulating billows. Women were cooking out of doors on little stone fireplaces. Children played about; two small papooses hung up to a tree branch were rocking to and fro. In the sun lay two braves asleep, too lazy to hunt or fish. Yet it was a pretty picture.

The tepees were in a semi-circular form. Denys passed the first one. At the second a woman sat beside the flap doing some beautiful bead and feather work. She raised her eyes and then sprang up with a glad smile, holding her work in a sort of apron.

“It is M’sieu Denys,” in broken French, that sounded soft for an Indian voice. “He has come back. He has taken a long journey to the Far East.” She glanced curiously at the stranger.

“And brought home a little girl,” smiling at the child. “She has come from the land of the great Onontio, and I am to care for her. I am not going to rove about any more, but trade with the residents and send goods up and down the river. And I shall want many articles of you, Mattawissa.”

She smiled and nodded. “I make not much for trade, but sometimes the hunters buy for their sweethearts as they return. And will you trade beads and silks? The threads we make are so troublesome to dye, and sometimes the color is rough, not pretty,” with a shrug. “I have heard it comes up from the great city down below.”

“New Orleans. Yes. But I brought it with me from Canada. They use it in the convents, where they do fine work. And the Spanish often take it home to show, and ornament their houses for the strangeness of it, and moccasins and bands, and the pretty things for real service. No one makes them quite as well as you.”

“Will not the child sit down?” She brought a bag stuffed with grass, much like the more modern hassock. Renée thanked her, and seated herself.

Mattawissa was proud of her French, and lame as it was, brought it out on every occasion when talking to the white people. Denys had a smattering of several Indian tongues, which most of the fur hunters and traders soon acquired.

Some of the little children of the forest crept up cautiously. Men they were used to seeing; white women rarely, as those at a distance seldom went into the settlements in their early youth. They were not strange to Renée, and she smiled a little, but they retained their natural gravity and evinced no disposition to make friends.

Then Renée’s attention was directed to the articles Mattawissa brought out. Beautiful strips of wampum, collars ornamented with bits of shells hanging by threads that made a soft, rhythmic sound as they were handled about, bits of deerskin that were like velvet, on which she had traced out delicate fancies that were really fascinating. Denys grew enthusiastic over them, and begged them all.

“This is for Talequah, the daughter of the Sioux who marries the son of a chief before the moon of roses ends. I cannot part with that. But I want beads, and if I could come in and choose?” inquiringly.

“Oh, yes, come in by all means,” Denys answered quickly. “I want to send down the river—in a fortnight perhaps, and will take whatever you can spare. You shall look over my store and select.”

“To-morrow if you like,” hesitatingly.

“Yes, the sooner the better.”

“I will bring these.”

“No, I will take them. It is not a heavy load,” with a pleasant smile. “And surely I am as able as you to carry the parcel. Then I am not a brave. A trapper is used to waiting on himself.”

“But—I have something for the child.”

“O Renée, you will like that. Ma’m’selle is getting her chamber furnished.”

“And you must eat.” She went in the wigwam and returned with a red earthen bowl decorated on the outside with a good deal of taste, not unlike Egyptian pottery, the yellow edge so burned in and rubbed by some process that it suggested dull gold burnished. Also a dainty boat made of birch bark embroidered and beaded, with compartments inside for trinkets, or it could be used for a work-box.

“Oh, how very pretty! Uncle Gaspard, I can keep the boat on my table, and the bowl on the little shelf you put up. And I shall fill it with flowers. Madame, I thank you with all my heart. I know it is because you like Uncle Gaspard so well, for an hour ago you did not know of me;” and she pressed the Indian woman’s hand.

“I am glad it pleases you. I may find some other article. And now be seated again. There is a long walk before you, and you must have something to eat.”

She went out to the old woman bending over her preparations, and brought for each a bowl of sagamity, a common Indian repast, oftener cooked with fish than bits of pork; and a plate of cakes made of Indian corn pounded fine in a rude mortar, or sometimes ground with one stone on top of another. For though there were mills that ground both corn and wheat, the Indians kept to their primitive methods. What did it matter so long as there were squaws to do the work?

Renée did not like the sagamity, but the cakes were good and the birch beer was fine she thought. In spite of protest she insisted on carrying her treasures home.

Then Mattawissa wove a few strands of grass together, and bringing the four ends up over the bowl knotted them into a bunch and made a kind of basket. A piece of bark was slipped under the joining and this wound around with a bit of deerskin so that it would not cut the fingers. Renée watched the process with much interest, and thought it very ingenious.

Then they started homeward quite fresh from their long rest, but at the last they had to hurry a little lest the gate at the fort should be closed.

CHAPTER V—WITH A TOUCH OF SORROW

The boats were coming up the river, a long line slow moving, and not with the usual shouts and songs. Half the town turned out to welcome them. Along the edge of the levee in the old days stretched a considerable bluff, washed and worn away long ago to the level of Market and Chestnut Streets. From here you had much of the river both up and down in clear sight.

It was thronged with men now in motley array, smoking their short pipes, exchanging a bit of badinage and telling each other what treasures they expected. For a few weeks there would be a rush of business until the boats were loaded again and everything dropped back to the olden inertia. There would be plenty of frolics too and a great warm welcome for Pierre Laclede.

A canoe was coming up swiftly, and yet there was no sign of gladness on the boats, no flags flying gayly.

“What does it all mean?” said some one perplexed.

The canoe was steered slowly, touched the rude wharf, and the cheer died in the throats of the throng.

“It is bad news we bring. Monsieur Laclede is not with us. M. Pierre Chouteau is heartbroken. Where is the colonel?” and the boat swung round.

“Here, here,” and the tall, soldierly man sprang down the steps. “What is it? What has happened to my brother?” and his tone was freighted with anxiety.

“Nothing to him but sorrow, Monsieur le Colonel. But our brave and true friend, our great man and leader in everything, M. Laclede, is lost to us forever. Monsieur, he is dead.”

The sailor bowed reverently. Colonel Chouteau clasped his hands together.

“Dead! dead! Our beloved M. Laclede.” It ran through the crowd like a knell.

A great wave of sorrow swept over St. Louis. True, the boats came in and there was bustle and business enough unloading. Some of them were to go farther up, but they paused in a reverent fashion. The merriment of welcome was hushed in reverent sadness. The little bell began to toll, the steps so eager a moment ago were slow enough now. Every one felt he had lost a friend.

“But when and how did this happen?” asked Colonel Chouteau, dazed by the unexpected sorrow, and still incredulous.

The captain of one of the boats on which indeed Pierre Laclede had taken his passage, stepped to the wharf and made a salute with his hand. Every one crowded around to hear the story.

It was melancholy enough and moved more than one to tears. M. Laclede had not been altogether well on leaving New Orleans, and was trusting to the exhilarating air of his loved town to restore him. But fever set in and he had grown rapidly worse. It was a long and tedious journey in those days, and medical lore was at a low ebb. Before they had reached the Arkansas River the brave soul had yielded up his life, still in the prime of a splendid manhood, not even attaining the privilege of sepulture in the town of his heart, for which he had worked and planned with a wisdom that was to remain long years afterward, like the fragrance of a high, unwearied soul.

They gathered in groups relating this and that to his praise. He had founded the town, his busy brain and far-reaching wisdom had seen and seized upon the points possible for a great *entrepôt* of trade. And in the years to come his wildest dreams would be more than realized, though the faint-hearted ones feared now that everything would stop.

Renée was aroused to a great interest in the tales of the intrepid explorers. Sitting in the door in the soft darkness, for now the moon did not rise until past midnight, she lingered, listening with a child’s eagerness to whom something new and wonderful is related, and Denys telling adventures that even now moved him deeply. De Soto marching with his little band across the Continent, suffering from perfidy and mutiny, resolved to find a westward passage and the gold that had rewarded other explorers in South America, and at last ill and wearied out, giving up his life, and at night pushing off on the longer journey where friendly hands rowed out silently as if to some unknown country, and softly dropped their burden in the river, partly it is said because they did not want the Indians to know that he was mortal and could die.

Marquette and Joliet, brave heroes of a faith they wished to establish everywhere, La Salle with his indomitable courage, being deserted and with but one guide pushing through dangers, then going to France to seek aid from the great king, convinced now that the Mississippi River was not a waterway to the western coast as some had predicted, but would open up a great river route to the Gulf of Mexico. There were wild guesses in those days. But this proved true. In the name of Louis XIV. he took possession of this splendid estate, that rendered France the greatest proprietor of the new country. Not content with all this glory he must essay another dangerous trip and lose his life by a perfidious follower.

Men made histories in those days and had but little time to write them. Priests’ journals and letters were to translate them later on. But stories and legends were told over, passed down in families, and treasured as sacred belongings.

Renée was deeply interested. The heroism stirred her. Nearly every story she wound in some way about Uncle Gaspard. It seemed as if he must have sailed in every boat, trudged through wildernesses, even explored the old cave with its shining walls and sides of lead that they mistook first for silver; and after getting over his disappointment how Sieur Renault opened the grand Valle mine that seems inexhaustible even to-day. Gaspard had a wonderful way of making all these old heroes live in the flesh again.

Renée was a very happy little girl now. It was quite true that Ma’m’selle Barbe had a lover, a handsome young fellow who was devoted, who came every night with his violin, and when he did not play sang charming French love songs. The Guions would much rather have had it Gaspard Denys. He was “settled.” And then he was a shrewd business fellow and would be sure to make a fortune. Already he was acquiring a good trade. Alphonse Maurice had no business of his very own, and was barely twenty-one. But youthful marriages were very much in vogue in those days, and most of them were happy. Life was so much more simple.

Madame Renaud had a great leaning toward Gaspard as well. But what could one do if he would not come, would not play the lover? She would have laughed at the idea of the little Renée in any sense being a rival.

The child had settled to a happy round. She went to the classes, but she could read very well, and Gaspard had a way of explaining figures to her. There was the business, too, that she was taking a great interest in, and this amused him very much.

Her kitten grew and was a great pet. There was a flower garden, though wild flowers grew all about and there were wild berries in profusion. She often went with Mère Lunde to gather them, sometimes with parties of children. She learned little housewifely tricks as well. When she found

Mère Lunde had no end of memories and legends tucked under her cap, she often made the gentle old body bring them out, when Uncle Gaspard had to spend his evenings talking to the men.

She rather liked the Saturday lesson, though she soon had it all by heart. And she was quite a devout little church-goer. She had been very much impressed when Father Gibault, the vicar general, came up and delivered a funeral oration for Monsieur Pierre Laclede.

Meanwhile the Chouteau brothers stepped into M. Laclede's business. Colonel Auguste Chouteau had been his lieutenant and right-hand man for years. He was very proud of the town, too, and resolved to improve the old Laclede house and make it quite a centre.

There was a new governor as well. Why a mild and judicious ruler like Francisco Cruzat should have been superseded by an avaricious, feeble-minded Spaniard, who was half the time incapable from drink, no one could explain.

Meanwhile some larger questions were coming to the fore that caused great uneasiness. There was war between the American colonies and the British, who had conquered a part of Canada. Spain avowed her sympathy with the colonies. The Indians of the great northwest had affiliated with the British. Then an American, Colonel Rogers Clark, had captured the British posts at Cahokia and Kaskaskia, but afterward gone to Vincennes.

Colonel Chouteau argued that the town should be put in a state of defence. The new palisades had not been finished. This was pushed forward now, the wall strengthened with logs and clay, and in some places rebuilt. The old cannon was replaced with new, and the gates made more secure. The governor even in his sober moments laughed at these precautions.

Sometimes on a Sunday or holiday Gaspard Denys took Renée to visit her grandfather. He made no effort to claim her. Indeed, he was away a good deal, and then his cabin was locked up.

Over beyond at the southern end was the great Chouteau pond, almost a lake where the mill was situated, then a kind of creek winding about and another lovely spot, broadening out, turning around again, and ending in a long point. Young people and older ones too went out to row, taking their dinner in picnic fashion. They were always full of pleasure, these merry French.

Christmas had delighted Renée, and brought a disappointment as well. It was a great season in old St. Louis. At twelve o'clock every one who possibly could went to midnight mass and the little church was crowded. The people were already outgrowing it. Father Meurin had come up from other visitations, there was good old white-haired Father Savigne, who had been a missionary to the Indians and several times barely escaped with his life. Father Valentine taught the children and was much younger.

The altar was decorated and illuminated with candles in front of the Virgin Mother and her baby Son. The solemn yet lovely sound of the Gregorian chants made waves of music through the chapel and stirred every heart. There was the solemn consecration, the kneeling, adoring multitude, the heartfelt responses.

They might not have understood the intricate, hair-splitting truths of to-day, and many no doubt came far short of the divine precepts, but they did worship with all their hearts and souls. And when the priest rang the bell on the hour of midnight it touched them all with deep reverence; and they were glad to join in the hymn, and the benediction descended like a blessing.

Ah, how beautiful it was out of doors! There was no moon, but myriad stars gleamed and glowed, and it seemed as if they were touched with all faint, delicate colors. The ground was white with snow, the peaked roofs were spires, and the river a dark, winding valley.

Outside the church everybody shook hands and gave good wishes. Children and old people were all together. No one would have missed the mass. But now they chatted gayly and talked of the coming day, the young men loitering to capture some pretty girl and walk home with her.

Mère Lunde stirred the fire and Denys put a great log on it, and on his own in the shop. The little girl's window was hung with a fur curtain, for occasionally the wind found chinks to whistle through as it came from the great prairies beyond and brought the sound of writhing and sometimes crushed forests. But all was warmth within. Mère Lunde made a hot drink with wine and spices, and brought out her Christmas cake which she had not meant to cut until to-morrow.

"But see, it is to-morrow already," she said with her cheery laugh. She had devoted several prayers for her poor son's soul and she was quite sure he was safe with the Blessed Virgin and now understood what heavenly life was like.

"It was all so beautiful," Renée said with a long breath of delight. "And the singing! I can hear it yet in the air."

"Thou must to bed, little one, for to-morrow will be a gay day," said Gaspard, kissing her. "Mère, see that she is well tucked in, for the night is cold."

Alas! for all the precaution the little girl woke up with a strange hot feeling in her throat, and her

head was heavy and seemed twice as large as ordinary. She tried to raise it, but everything in the room swam round. She gave a faint cry, but no one heard, for Mère Lunde was busy among pans and pots.

“Come, little laggard!” cried a cheery voice. “The children are here with their étrennes.”

These were little cakes with dried fruit dipped in maple syrup and thus coated over. The children carried them about to each other on Christmas morning.

The only answer was a low moan. Uncle Gaspard leaned over the small bed.

“Renée, Renée, what is it?” He raised her in his arms and was startled at her flushed face, her dulled eyes, her hot hands.

“O mère,” he cried. “Come, the little one is very ill.”

They looked at her, but she did not seem to know them, and moaned pitifully. “Something must be done. She has taken cold, I think, and has a hot fever.”

Very few people called in a doctor in those days. Indeed, it would have been difficult to find him this morning. There were many excellent home-made remedies that all housewives put up in the autumn, compounded of roots and barks, some of them learned from the Indian women.

“Poor child, poor *petite*, yes, she must be attended to at once. Get thy breakfast, m’sieu, while I make some comfort and aid for her. Yes, it is a fever.”

“But what shall I do for her?”

“Get me some ears of corn, good big ones.”

“And leave her?” aghast at the thought.

“Thou wilt not cure her by staring at her. She can take no harm for a few moments.”

There was always a big kettle standing on the coals with four short legs holding it up. Mère Lunde raked out the ashes and pushed the flaming brands under it. Gaspard exhumed an armful of corn from a big box in the shop.

“Drop them in,” she said. “A dozen or so.”

“Oh, yes, I know now.” He nodded in a satisfied fashion, for he had faith in the remedy.

Soon the water bubbled up and the fragrance of the steaming corn diffused itself about the room. Mère Lunde went to the bed and put a thick blanket under the child. Then the ears were laid about her and she was rolled up like a mummy. The woman raised her head a trifle and forced a potion down her throat that almost strangled her. Spreading blankets over her, she tucked her in securely, and, patting the top one, meant for love to the child, she turned away.

“Well people must eat for strength, and Christmas day is no time for fasting. Come.”

But Gaspard Denys was in no mood for eating. He had never thought of Renée being ill. He knew of some children who had died, and there was Monsieur Laclede who looked strong enough to live to a hundred years, who had gone out of life with a fever. Oh, he could not give up his little girl!

“Is that all?” he asked presently.

Mère Lunde understood.

“There’s no use running in and out like the mill stream, for it’s the flour that is getting ground,” she said sententiously. “Wait a bit.”

He had large patience with most events of life, but here was breathless with suspense. If she had been drooping for days, but she was so merry last night.

Rosalie came to the door. The children were going to Chouteau pond to skate and slide. Would not Renée join them?

“Alas! Renée was very ill.”

“But she must get better by to-morrow,” nodding hopefully and laughing.

After that Grandpère Freneau came up, which startled Gaspard, for he had never deigned to visit his grandchild. He was sober and comparatively well dressed, and had a little gift for her, a curious inlaid box, with a trinket a girl might like. She would be well again in a few days. Children were tough and sturdy, it was the old people who had to think about ills. As for him, he was strong enough yet.

Then he made a clumsy sort of bow and retreated.

“I hope it will bring no bad luck,” exclaimed Mère Lunde. “But he has not a good name. I should throw the gift into the fire!”

“I dare say it is of no great value.” He shook the box. “Some bits of silver with which he salves his conscience.”

Mère Lunde crossed herself.

He put it away in his desk. He was not superstitious, but he wished it had not happened this morning.

It was quite late, but he unbarred his shop door. There was no trade now. The fall business had lasted longer than usual on account of the fine, open weather. When the cold once set in it often lasted steadily for three months. But there was plenty of pleasure. The regular trappers had gone off, but hunting parties often sallied out and returned laden with game.

Mère Lunde stole in to look at her patient and shook her head, threw some more ears of corn in the kettle and answered the calls that came in a joyous mood and left in sorrow. For people were very sympathetic in those days, and cares were shared in true neighborly fashion.

Presently there was a little moisture about the edge of Renée’s hair, but the watcher did not like the dull purple of her cheeks nor the labored breathing. There might be a poultice for the throat; yes, she would make that. And if the good Father came and made a prayer! But that seemed as if one must be very ill indeed.

Gaspard had no mind for pleasure. He went in and stood by the child, who most of the time lay in a heavy sort of sleep. How strange she looked with her red, swollen face, quite unlike herself!

Yes, he would go for Dr. Montcrevier, though he had not much faith in him, for he seemed to think more of strange bugs and birds and fishes than human beings. However, his search was fruitless, perhaps it was as well.

“The fever is abating,” was Mère Lunde’s greeting in a joyous tone. “Great drops have come out on her forehead. Ah, I think we shall conquer with the good corn. And she has been awake.”

There was less pressure for breath, though the rattle in the throat was not a pleasant sound. But by mid-afternoon she was in a drench of perspiration, and then Mère Lunde rubbed her dry and rolled her in a fresh blanket.

“What is the matter? I feel so queer,” exclaimed the tremulous voice.

“You are ill, poor little child,” in a tender tone.

“Is it morning? The night was so long. It seemed as if the house was burning up.”

“It was the bad fever. Oh, yes, it is day, almost another night. Oh, little one, the good God be praised!”

Mère Lunde dropped down on her knees and repeated a short prayer.

Renée raised her head.

“Oh, it still feels queer. And I am so tired.”

She dropped off to sleep again. Mère Lunde had two potions, one for the fever, one for her general strength, but she would not disturb her now. Sleep was generally a good medicine.

“She has spoken. She is better,” was the mère’s greeting as Denys entered. “But she is asleep now. Do not disturb her.”

Yes, the dreadful purple was going out of her face. He took the limp little hand. It was cooler, though the pulse still beat hard and high. Ah, how much one could come to love and hardly know it until the threat of losing appeared. And he thought of her mother. He could never get it out of his mind but that she had died in cruel neglect, alone and heartbroken. He pressed the slim fingers to his lips, he studied the brow with its soft, light rings of hair, the almost transparent eyelids and long lashes, the dainty nose that had a piquant ending not quite *retroussé* but suggestive of it, and the small mouth, the lips wide in the middle that gave it a roundness often seen in childhood. She would be a pretty young girl, though it was her soft yet deep and wondering eyes that made her resemble her mother.

When she roused again Mère Lunde administered her potions. She made a very wry face over the bitter one. The good mère put another poultice on her throat and spread it well over her chest; rolling her up again like a mummy. She would have laughed if there had not been a great lump in her throat.

“I am like a papoose,” she said. “Uncle Gaspard, sit here and tell me some stories.”

He would not go away after she had fallen asleep, but wrapped himself in a blanket and leaned

his head on the foot of her bed. Now and then she moaned a little, which gave him a pang, and after midnight she grew very restless. The fever was coming on again. Mère Lunde roused her and gave her another potion, and before daylight she had prepared the corn bath again. The fever did not seem to be as obstinate. By noon she was quite comfortable. Father Lemoine brought in the vicar general, who was going back to Ste. Genevieve. This was a great honor, and Mère Lunde brought out some wine that had come from the real vineyards of France.

Father Meurin heard the little girl's story. He had known of Antoine Freneau, indeed, he had performed the first marriage and given the first baptism in the little town. That was in a tent, because there was no church. And the first services had been held in the fields, for the church had been built hardly ten years.

"She would be in poor hands if left to her grandfather," he admitted. "And I hope she will be rightly brought up. If you had a wife, M. Denys."

"I have rambled about so much I have had no time to marry," he returned rather drily. "But now I shall settle down."

"I hope so. It is what the towns need, steady occupancy. And you will deal rightly with the child and see that she is brought up as a daughter of the Church should be. You are quite sure her mother—" he finished the question with his eyes.

"I saw the marriage register in the cathedral at Quebec. Then her mother was taken to France, where she died," Denys answered.

The vicar nodded, satisfied. He repeated the prayer for the recovery of the sick and gave them all a kindly blessing with his adieu.

Gaspard Denys fell into a brown study. She was not his child, to be sure. Would it make any difference any time in the future? Ought there to be some woman different from Mère Lunde—bah! it would be years before Renée was grown up. And the little one wanted no one to share his love. He was glad—that would always be an excuse to himself. He never could put any one in the place he had hoped to set Renée Freneau.

CHAPTER VI—BY THE FIRESIDE

Renée mended slowly. She had indeed been very ill. She was so weak that it tired her to sit up among the pillows in her bed. And one day when she insisted upon getting up she dropped over into Mère Lunde's arms.

"Where is all my strength gone to?" she inquired pettishly.

"*Pauvre petite*," it was queer, and the good woman had no science to explain it.

But her throat improved and her voice cleared up, the fever grew lighter every day and she began to have some appetite. Friends came in to inquire and sympathize and bring delicacies. Madame Renaud offered her services, but no one was really needed, though the cordial, smiling face did Renée good. Ma'm'selle Barbe brought the two little girls, who looked awestricken at the pale face, where the eyes seemed bigger than ever.

Uncle Gaspard made a sort of settle on which they could put some cushions and blankets so that she could be brought out to the living room and watch Mère Lunde at her work. Then he improved upon it and made it into a kind of chair with a back that could be raised and lowered by an ingenious use of notches and wooden pins. He was getting so handy that he made various useful articles, for in those days in these upper settlements there were so few pieces of furniture that could be purchased, unless some one died and left no relatives, which was very seldom. Proud enough one was of owning an article or a bit of china or a gown that was a family heirloom.

"Oh," he said one evening when she was comfortably fixed and the blaze of the great logs lighted up the room and made her pale face a little rosy, "I had almost forgotten—you have been so ill it drove most other things out of my mind. Your grandfather came up here on Christmas day and brought you a gift."

"A gift! Oh, what was it?"

"Mère Lunde had not forgotten, but she had a superstitious feeling about it. I will get it for you," Gaspard said.

He returned from the adjoining room with the box in his hand. It was very securely fastened with a twisted bit of deerskin, which was often used for cord.

"Open it," she begged languidly.

He cut the cord but did not raise the cover. She held it some seconds in her hand.

"Uncle, do you remember you told me about a girl who opened a box and let troubles out all over

the world?”

“But she was bidden not to. Grandpère Antoine did not leave any such word as that,” smilingly.

She raised the cover slowly. There was a bit of soft white fur in the bottom and on it lay a golden chain and a cross, with a pearl set where the arms and upright met. In the clasp was a smaller pearl. She held it up silently.

“The good saints must have touched his soul!” ejaculated Mère Lunde. “A beautiful cross! It is gold?” with a questioning glance at Denys.

Renée handed it to him.

“Oh, yes, gold of course. And your grandfather seemed quite moved with pity for you. I saw him again this morning, but he said, ‘Oh, I did not think she would die.’”

Renée’s eyes were wide open, with a startled light. “Did anybody think—that?” and her voice trembled.

“You may be sure I did not,” exclaimed Denys with spirit, almost with joyousness. “I would not have let you go.”

She held out both arms to him, and he clasped her to his heart.

“But people are compelled to sometimes,” said Mère Lunde gravely.

“We were not compelled. And now you are to get well as rapidly as possible. Everybody has been having a merry time with the king’s ball, and you have missed it. But there is next year.”

How far away next year seemed! Spring, and summer, and autumn.

“How long have I been ill? It is queer, but I don’t seem to remember clearly,” trying to think, and studying the leaping blaze that seemed like a group of children playing tag, or hide and seek.

“It is almost a month. First it was pretty bad,” and he compressed his lips with a queer expression and shook his head. Now he had let his hair grow quite long, as most of the men did, and the ends fell into a sort of curl.

“And then—Mère Lunde, the things you gave me were very bad and bitter, and my head used to go round, I remember. Sometimes things stood on the ceiling in such a funny position. And then to be like a baby, hardly able to walk.”

She gave a soft, languid ripple of a laugh. Ah, what if he had lost her!

“And when can I go out?”

“Oh, not in a long while. It is bitter cold, even the river is full of ice chunks. But you may dance at the next king’s ball.”

“The king’s ball?” inquiringly.

“Not the King of France,” with a gentle smile. “When the Christ was born three kings came to do Him honor. And the feast is always kept.”

“The blessed Epiphany,” explained Mère Lunde. “Though why it should be given over to all this merry-making I can’t see.”

“Did you ever go?” asked Renée.

“Oh, yes. But not last year—I had started for Canada. And the year before I was up with the hunters.”

“Tell me about it.”

He sat down beside her. She was twisting the chain about her fingers.

“There is not much to do for the people who stay here in the winter, though New Orleans is twice as gay. So they have the balls. There are four queens, pretty young girls, and they each choose a king and open the ball with him. Then they dance. But the old people and a good many of the children go as well. And there is dancing and jollity and a feast of good things to eat, and much laughing and jesting and falling in love, with the marrying at Easter. Next year we will go.”

“I will keep my chain to wear then.” She put it back in the box. “And when I am well I will go down and thank grandfather.”

“Yes, yes, that will be the right thing to do. I will take you.”

Then they were silent awhile. “Tell me some of the stories you know,” she entreated.

“I have told you so many.”

“But you can think of one more,” in her coaxing tone. “Away up in the north and the endless fields of snow, and where does it end?”

“At the North Pole, I believe.”

“And what is that?” eagerly.

“We will have to ask Dr. Montcrevier. I have never been farther than Hudson’s Bay.”

“But people can’t live in such endless cold!”

“I think not. Only polar bears and the white and silver fox, and they come down in the winter. And then there are islands hundreds of miles away below us, where it is always summer.”

“What a queer world!” She smiled absently as if she could hardly take it in. “Have you been there?”

“Only to New Orleans. Some day we will go there, too.”

“Oh, how much there is to do. Yes, one must live a long while to do it all,” and a thoughtful expression deepened her eyes.

“And you are tired, little one. You must go to bed.”

It was strange to get so tired. She had been tired many times on the long journey from Canada, but not like this. She was very glad she had not died, however, though she had no very clear idea about death, except that it meant going to another world. Uncle Gaspard was here, and that was one reason why she wanted to stay.

Presently she began to go about and take pleasure in having the children come in and tell her about their sports. The life was so simple, the main thing seemed to be the good times. No one troubled about education and there were no “higher branches” to vex one’s soul. There was much less dissipation here than in New Orleans or even Detroit, where people from other towns were continually mingling.

One day Uncle Gaspard took her out on his sledge. She had never dreamed of anything so splendid. Great fields of snowy white, as far as the eye could see, dotted here and there with a cluster of wigwam poles and brown skins stretched on the outside for warmth. A little blue-gray smoke curled lazily upward, and then the bluest sky over it all. The air was exhilarating and brought a color to her pale cheeks, and made her eyes glow like stars.

Then spring came. The white blanket melted away, the evergreens and spruces scented the air with their new growth; the little streams rushed hither and thither as if they were joyfully carolling, birds sang and built everywhere. Children were out for wild flowers, and raced around like deers. Some days the old mound was alive with them, then they were down to Chouteau’s pond. The boys and often some girls went up the river in canoes. There was the old rock of Fort St. Louis with its story of a hundred years agone, of how La Salle had built a fort and planted an Indian colony, that, when its leader had gone, dwindled and went back to its native tribes. How there had been a fierce quarrel between the Illinois and the Outgamies, and the Illinois had fled to the top of the rock and stayed there until starvation stared them in the face and French intervention came to their assistance.

Then business opened and Gaspard Denys found his hands full. His wide acquaintance with the hunters and his dealings with the Indians brought him in a great deal of trade. There was a continual loading and unloading of boats, the levee was thronged. Denys had to take in a clerk, and his evenings were devoted to straightening accounts and preparing for the next day, and it seemed to Renée as if he was always busy now, with no time for stories.

Easter brought a gay festival and several weddings. The young *voyageurs* were warmly welcomed home and there was always a feast or a ball given in their honor. When the houses were too small, they went out and danced on the green. Marriages seemed an especially social affair. The families on both sides made the agreement and were mutually pleased. It was seldom a young couple disregarded the respect universally paid to parents, and though there was much pioneer life there was a kind of elegance and refinement among the women with all their vivacious gayety. The admixture of Spanish blood was no bad element.

One of the young traders had brought home with him a beautiful Indian wife, lawfully wedded by one of the mission priests. These mixed marriages were not in much favor with the French. Now and then a trapper brought in one and stayed a few months, but she nearly always preferred to share his hunting expeditions. Still, there were some comfortably settled, whose families years afterward were very proud of their Indian descent.

François Marchand found an old friend in Gaspard Denys. It does not take a decade to cement a friendship made over camp-fires and days filled with adventures and dangers. They had not met in two years, and the youth, who seemed but a stripling to Gaspard then, was now a fine young

fellow, his slim figure filled out, his thin face rounded with certain lines of energy, determination, and good health. His clear blue eyes were resolute and undaunted; his chestnut hair was cropped close, which made him less of an object for an Indian's scalping knife.

"How the town has grown!" he exclaimed with great earnestness. New St. Louis would have laughed at the idea that twenty or thirty families could add much importance. But there had been a few new houses built, sundry additions made to older ones where families had increased. Colonel Chouteau was beautifying the house and grounds where his lamented chief and dear friend had lived. The government house had been repaired, though the new occupant seemed much more indifferent than his people, and cared very little for the interest of the town in general.

"We shall have a fine place by and by," returned Denys. "True, New Orleans has the mouth of the great river, but if no boats come down, what then? And we are the half-way house, the north and the south both need us. If it were not for these troublesome restrictions on trade, and the fear of the British."

"France, it seems, has sided with the colonies, and Spain has given them a certain sympathy," returned Marchand. "You hear a good deal of talk up north. The fur dealers of New Amsterdam are quite sure the colonies will win in the end, though by my faith it doesn't look very promising now," and he gave a doubtful laugh.

"Almost five years of losing and winning! Well, they are plucky not to be discouraged. But what troubles me a little are the English over there!" nodding to the eastward. "If some fine day they descend upon us—well, we shall be wiped out, that is all about it! The government at New Orleans does not seem to care, and sends us this drunken, insolent fellow for commandant, who is as set in his own ways as a mule."

"The English will be kept busy enough on the eastern coast defending their ports and trying to capture the cities. Faith! it is a great and glorious country, and I hardly know which has the best, the east or the west. If some day the way is cleared to the Pacific coast, and then, presto! India!"

India was still a dream of the advancement of commerce. The western empire was to turn more than one brain.

Denys studied the young face in the glow of youthful enthusiasm.

"Marchand, you should have been a soldier," he said.

"Well, which side shall I take?" mockingly. "I am French. Those cursed English have driven us out of Canada. Thank Heaven we have left some graves of heroes there. But I wonder what Louis le Grand could have been thinking of to allow himself to be despoiled of such a magnificent estate! And here we were all turned over to Spain without even a chance to fight for our homes in the New World," and Marchand gave a strong, scornful laugh. "There are still the Indians left."

"We have kept good friends with them so far."

"But the British can stir them up easily. Rum and firearms may do the mischief. Still, it is true that some day I may have to fight for my life, or something I hold dearer than life."

"Are you going back north?"

Marchand shook his head. He was sitting on a pile of skins leaning against the wall, picturesque in his *voyageur's* attire, which was highly ornamented with Indian work. Now and then in the intervals of talk he blew out a volume of smoke from his pipe, or made rings in the air when he took it from his mouth. There was something jaunty and light-hearted about him in spite of the resolute eyes.

"Nay," with a shake of the head, "I have cut myself out of that. I like the life, too. Denys, were you ever very much in love? But no, that is a foolish question, for you are the sort of man to fight for the one who roused your soul. And so many pretty girls are here in St. Louis!"

"Yes, I heard you had married," evading the half inquiry.

"I want you to see her, my beautiful Indian prize. Though I suspect there is a strain of French blood back of her mother, who was brought somewhere from Canada. And when her father was killed at one of those dreadful massacres up on the strait (her mother had died before), she and her brother were adopted in one branch of the Huron tribe. Her brother married a chief's daughter. I saw her first more than a year ago, in the winter. She was only a child, not as forward as most Indian maids. And last winter we met again, and yes, fell in love with each other. The squaw who had been like a mother to her consented. But straightway there was trouble. Her brother had chosen a brave for her, a fellow noted for his fighting propensities and his love of drink. It was surmised that he was buying her. She shrank from him with horror. He had had two wives already, and rumor said he had beaten one to death. I was ready to leave with my men and pack, and she came to me in terror and despair. She would have killed herself, I know, before she could have gone to such a brute. We loved each other, and the old woman Nasauka pitied us, and had a strong liking for me. So it was arranged. I was to start with my people, leaving her behind.

When the train was several days under way I was to remain at a given point where Nasauka was to meet me with the girl, and then return to ward suspicion from the right track. I only hope the poor woman did not suffer for her kindly sympathy for us. We made our way along without any alarm. At a mission station a priest married us. And now we are safe here and doubtless unsuspected. But I shall not expose myself to any dangers, at least for several years to come. There are other trails to work on. Or we may go farther south."

"Quite a romantic story, Marchand. The saints be praised that you rescued her from such a life, though I think she would have chosen death rather. I have known of several instances. Yes, it will be safer not to visit the old hunting ground, even if the brave solaces himself with a new wife."

"And now you must see her. I know there is a little prejudice, and," with a cynical sort of smile, "if I had a sister I should not let her marry an Indian if I had to shut her up in a convent. But there are many charming Indian girls and kindly hearted squaws, true as steel, who will suffer anything rather than betray. Strange, too, when you find so much deceit and falseness and cruelty among the men."

"The women take all the virtues, perhaps. Yes, I shall be glad to welcome you. To-morrow you will bring her to dine with us. Meanwhile, you have found a home?"

"With the Garreaus. Pierre did the same thing, you know, and is happy enough with his two pretty children. Ah, when you see my beautiful wife you will not wonder that I went mad for her," laughing with a kind of gay triumph.

Ah, if he had been brave enough at twenty to fly with Renée Freneau! But would she have dared an unblessed marriage? And then neither dreamed of such a result from the journey to Canada.

"I shall not blame you," Gaspard answered gravely. "And if you want a staunch friend, here he is," springing up and holding out his hand.

"A thousand thanks, Gaspard Denys. I wanted to tell you my story. It is not for every one, only the fact that I have loved and married her. And now it grows late. Good-night."

They clasped hands again cordially. Denys shut his shop door and went through to the other room. Mère Lunde was telling over some beads. Renée sat in the chimney corner, but the fire was out long ago.

"Why did you let that man talk so long to you?" with pretty imperiousness. "And I grew very sleepy. But I wanted to say good-night."

"He had much to relate, a story you will like to hear sometime. And he is coming to-morrow to bring a pretty Indian wife that he found up by the Strait of Michilimackinac. That is a long name, is it not?"

"And is the strait long—as long as to the end of the millpond?"

"It is of more account. It connects the big Lake Michigan with Lake Huron."

Geography had not come to be one of the studies, and the only maps were the traders' rough outlines of journeys.

She was not considering the lakes. Her thoughts were as rapid as a bird's flight.

"Is she like Mattawissa?"

"Oh, younger, much younger. Only a girl. Fifteen or sixteen perhaps. They will come to dinner to-morrow. Mère Lunde," raising his voice a little, "we shall have guests to-morrow. Give us a good dinner."

"Guests! How many?" in a cheerful tone.

"Oh, only two. A young trader and his wife, a pretty Indian girl. Unless, indeed, some one else drops in."

This often happened in a town where there were no inns, and sometimes led to rather amusing episodes when a traveller mistook the wide-open doors and a bountiful table for a hostelry.

"Did you see her?" asked Renée, following out her own thoughts.

"No, but I have known him some time. He was a young lad here in the town, François Marchand."

Mère Lunde shut down the cover of the box that held her beads, and picked up the end of her stout apron. It always seemed to assist her memory.

"Marchand. And a boy. Had he very blue eyes?"

"Yes, and he has them still," laughed Denys.

"Then I know. He was a nice lad. It is a thousand pities he has married an Indian. Yes, you shall

have a good dinner. Renée, it is time thou went to bed."

Renée rose and kissed Uncle Gaspard. She had, ever since her illness, that seemed to have drawn them nearer together, if such a thing had been possible.

As a great honor the next day, she brought out her pretty bowl and filled it with flowers. Uncle Gaspard had made a small table with a drawer that held Mère Lunde's beads and some other choice articles, and had a shelf low down on which was kept a work-basket with sewing materials, for at times Renée was seized with a fit of devotion to her needle. On the top of the table she set the bowl.

Curious eyes had followed François Marchand down the Rue de l'Eglise. For with a vanity quite natural the young girl had taken in her flight her beautifully ornamented dress that would have adorned any Indian bride. Long afterward in the Marchand family they used to display grandmère's exquisitely worked suit.

Gaspard Denys with Renée by the hand went out to the gate to bid them welcome. Renée almost stared. A slim, graceful figure of medium height, with a face that in some towns would have attracted more attention than the attire. Large, soft eyes of dusky, velvety blackness, a complexion just tinted with Indian blood, the cheeks blossoming in the most exquisite rose hue, while the lips were cherry red. Her long hair was brushed up from her straight, low brow, held with a band of glittering bead work, and falling about her shoulders like a veil, much softer and finer than ordinary Indian hair. Her short skirt had a band of shining white feathers overlapping each other, with here and there a cluster of yellow ones that resembled a daisy. The fine, elegantly dressed fawnskin was like velvet. The bodice was wrought with beads and variously colored threads and a sort of lace the Indian women made, though it was an infrequent employment, being rather tedious. Over her shoulders a cape of soft-dressed, creamy skin, with designs worked here and there in fine detail.

She colored daintily on being presented to M. Denys, and he in turn brought forward his little protégé, who held up her head proudly and felt almost as tall. But a second glance conquered Renée. She proffered both hands cordially.

"Oh, I am sure I shall like you," she cried frankly. How could any one help adoring so much beauty! For Renée was not envious of beauty alone.

The young wife took the hands with glad pressure, and they went in together.

"Here is a friend who remembers you," said Denys to Marchand. "Her son died, and at that juncture I wanted a housekeeper. She fits in admirably."

Mère Lunde trembled with delight when he shook her hand so heartily and expressed his pleasure at seeing her again, declaring that she had grown younger instead of older, which was true enough, so great a restorer is freedom from care and fear of coming want.

"But the child?" said Marchand with curiosity in his eyes.

The child was playing hostess to the young wife with the ease and grace of a true Frenchwoman, and displaying the adornments of her room. This and that had come from Mattawissa, who made beautiful articles that Uncle Gaspard sent to New Orleans, and who was sweet and friendly, not like some of the morose old Indian women about. But then Mattawissa was not old.

Gaspard smiled at the little girl's chatter, and explained briefly.

"One would hardly think such a pretty innocent thing could belong to old Antoine! Is he still in with the river pirates? His goods must be hidden somewhere. He does not keep them in the house, it would seem, for the guards found nothing when they searched."

"He is a shrewd old dog," replied Gaspard. "But his wife and his daughter were of a different kind. And you see he could not have taken charge of the child."

Marchand nodded.

The dinner was certainly Mère Lunde's best. The men had their talk about trade and who was prospering, but the two girls, who sat side by side, had some gay laughs, and occasionally hard work to understand each other. Wawataysee, the Firefly, as she was called in her native language, knew a little French and a little English, and often confused them. Renée had picked up a few words of English, but the tongue was quite despised at that time. And when the dinner was through they went out to walk, pausing at the little old church and the priest's house on the way to the fort, and the little plot about.

Father Valentine came out and gave them a cordial greeting. Denys did the honors.

The priest bent his head close to Marchand's.

"You have been true and fair with this beautiful girl?" he asked a little anxiously. "She is your lawful wife?"

“Yes, oh, a thousand times yes. Here is the good father’s signature and that of the witnesses. It was at the little mission at St. Pierre’s.”

He took out a bundle of papers in a deerskin wallet. Tied securely in a little package by itself was the priest’s certificate.

Father Valentine nodded, well pleased. “And she is a baptized Christian,” he added. “I wish you both much happiness.”

“Suppose you keep this awhile for me,” said Marchand, “while I am changing about. I hardly know yet where I shall settle.”

“Gladly will I oblige you. But why not stay here, my son? St. Louis needs industry and energy and capable citizens for her upbuilding.”

“I am thinking of it, I confess. I have already met with a warm welcome from old friends.”

They walked round about the fort. Wawataysee knew curious legends of Pontiac and had heard of the siege of Detroit. Indeed, many of the Hurons had participated in it. And here was the end of so much bravery and energy, misdirected, and of no avail against the invincible march of the white man.

CHAPTER VII—AT THE KING’S BALL

It was a very gay summer to Renée de Longueville.

Rosalie Pichou protested and grew angry at being superseded.

“She is only an Indian after all,” the girl exclaimed disdainfully. “And my mother thinks it a shame M’sieu Marchand should have married her when there were so many nice girls in St. Louis.”

“But she is beautiful and sweet. And, Rosalie, Uncle Gaspard will not care to have you come if you say ugly things about her.”

“Well, I can stay away. There are plenty of girls to play with. And I shall soon be a young ma’m’selle and have lovers of my own, then I shall not care for a little chit like you. You can even send the cat back if you like.”

The cat had grown big and beautiful and kept the place free from mice and rats, which was a great object in the storeroom. Uncle Gaspard said he would not trade it for a handsome silver foxskin, which everybody knew was worth a great deal of money in France.

Madame Marchand made many friends by her grace and amiability. She taught Renée some beautiful handiwork, and with the little girl was always a welcome visitor at Mattawissa’s, though at first they had as much difficulty understanding each other’s Indian language as if it had been English. But what a lovely, joyous summer it was, with its walks and water excursions up and down the river and on the great pond!

On Saturday she went with Renée to be instructed in the Catechism, and whichever father was there he seemed impressed with Wawataysee’s sweet seriousness and gentle ways.

Then autumn came on. The great fields of corn were cut, the grapes gathered and the wine made. The traders came in again and boats plied up and down. Uncle Gaspard was very busy, and the men about said, making money. The women wondered if Renée de Longueville would get it all, and what old Antoine Freneau had; if so she would be a great heiress.

There were nuts to gather as well, and merry parties haunted the woods for them. Oh, what glorious days these were, quite enough to inspirit any one! Then without much warning a great fleecy wrap of snow fell over everything, but the sledging and the shouting had as much merriment in it.

Gaspard Denys did not want Renée to go to midnight mass at Christmastide.

“Oh, I am so much bigger and stronger now,” she said. “I am not going to be such a baby as to take cold. Oh, you will see.”

She carried her point, of course. He could seldom refuse her anything. And the next morning she was bright enough to go to church again. And how sweet it was to see the children stop on the porch and with bowed heads exclaim, “Your blessing, ma mère, your blessing, mon père,” and shake hands with even the poorest, giving them good wishes.

Then all parties went home to a family breakfast. Even the servants were called in. Then the children ran about with the étrennes to each other.

“Uncle Gaspard,” Renée said, “I want to take something to my grandfather. He brought me that

beautiful chain and cross last year, and I made a cake that Mère Lunde baked, and candied some pears, thinking of him."

"Perhaps he is not home. You can never tell."

"He was yesterday. M. Marchand saw him. Will you go?"

"You had better have Mère Lunde. I am busy. But if I can find time I will walk down and meet you. And—Renée, do not go in."

"I will heed," she answered smilingly.

The road was hardly broken outside the stockade. Once or twice she slipped and fell into the snow, but it was soft and did not hurt her. Mère Lunde grumbled a little.

"There is a smoke coming from the chimney," Renée cried joyfully. "Let us go around to the kitchen door."

They knocked two or three times. They could hear a stir within, and presently the door was opened a mere crack.

"Grandfather," the child began, "I have come to wish you a good Christmas. I am sorry you were not at church to hear how the little babe Jesus was born for our sakes, and how glad all the stars were, even, so glad that they sang together. And I have brought you some small gifts, a cake I made for you, alone, yesterday. You made me such a beautiful gift last year when I was ill."

"And you've come for another! That's always the way," he returned gruffly.

"No, grandfather, I do not want anything, only to give you this basket with good wishes and tell you that I am well and happy," she said in a proud, sweet voice, and set the basket down on the stone at the doorway. "It would not be quite right for you to give me anything this year."

Her gray fur cloak covered her, and her white fur cap over her fair curls gave her a peculiar daintiness.

"Good-by," she continued, "with many good wishes."

He looked after her in a kind of dazed manner. And she did not want anything! True, she had enough. Gaspard Denys took good care of her—*he* was too old to be bothered with a child.

But she skipped along very happily. The Marchands were coming in to supper, and in the meanwhile she and Mère Lunde would concoct dainty messes. She would not go out sledding with the children lest she should take cold again.

It was all festival time now. It seemed as if people had nothing to do but to be gay and merry. Fiddling and singing everywhere, and some of the voices would have been bidden up to a high price in more modern times.

And on New Year's day the streets were full of young men who went from door to door singing a queer song, she thought, when she came to know it well afterward. Part of it was, "We do not ask for much, only the eldest daughter of the house. We will give her the finest of the wine and feast her and keep her feet warm," which seemed to prefigure the dance a few days hence. Sometimes the eldest daughter would come out with a contribution, and these were all stored away to be kept for the Epiphany ball.

In the evening they sang love songs at the door or window of the young lady to whom they were partial, and if the fancy was returned or welcomed the fair one generally made some sign. And then they said good-night to the master and mistress of the household and wished them a year's good luck.

If a pretty girl or even a plain one was out on New Year's day unattended, a young fellow caught her, kissed her, and wished her a happy marriage and a prosperous year. Sometimes, it was whispered, there had a hint been given beforehand and the right young fellow found the desired girl.

But the king's ball was the great thing. In the early afternoon the dames and demoiselles met and the gifts were arranged for the evening. Of the fruit and flour a big cake was baked in which were put four large beans. When all was arranged the girls and the mothers donned their best finery, some of it half a century old, and kept only for state occasions. The older people opened the ball with the *minuet de la cour*, which was quite grand and formal.

Then the real gayety began. With it all there was a certain charming respect, a kind of fine breeding the French never lost. Old gentlemen danced with the young girls, and the young men with matrons. Children were allowed in also, and had corners to themselves. It was said of them that the French were born dancing.

There were no classes in this festivity. Even some of the upper kind of slaves came, and the young Indians ventured in.

Gaspard Denys took the little girl, who was all eagerness. M. and Madame Garreau brought their guests, the Marchands, for society had quite taken in the beautiful young Indian, who held her head up so proudly no one would have dared to offer her a slight.

Among the gayest was Barbe Guion. She had not taken young Maurice, who had gone off to New Orleans. People were beginning to say that she was a bit of a coquette. Madame Renaud announced that Alphonse Maurice was too trifling and not steady enough for a good husband. In her heart Barbe knew that she had never really meant to marry him.

At midnight the cake was cut and every young girl had a piece. This was the great amusement, and everybody thronged about.

“A bean! a bean!” cried Manon Dupont, holding it high above her head so all could see.

Then another, one of the pretty Aubry girls, whose sister had been married at Easter.

“And I, too,” announced Barbe Guion, laughing.

They cleared a space for the four queens to stand out on the floor. What eager glances the young men cast.

Manon Dupont chose her lover, as every one supposed she would, but there was no fun or surprise in it, though a general assent.

“And how will she feel at the next ball when *he* has to choose a queen?” said some one. “She is a jealous little thing.”

Ma’m’selle Aubry glanced around with a coquettish air and selected the handsomest young fellow in the room.

Who would Barbe Guion choose? She looked dainty enough in a white woollen gown with scarlet cloth bands; and two or three masculine hearts beat with a thump, as the eyes fairly besought.

Gaspard Denys was talking with the burly commandant of the fort, though it must be admitted there was very little to command. She went over to him and handed him her rose.

He bowed and a slight flush overspread his face, while her eyes could not conceal her delight.

“You do me a great deal of honor, ma’m’selle, but you might have bestowed your favor on a younger and more suitable man. I thank you for the compliment,” and he pinned the rose on his coat.

She smiled with a softened light in her eyes.

“It is the first time I have had a chance to choose a king,” she said in a caressing sort of voice. “I could not have suited myself better. And—I am almost eighteen. Elise was married a year before that.”

“You are not single for lack of admirers, ma’m’selle.” She remembered he used to call her Barbe. “What did you do with Alphonse, send him away with a broken heart?”

“His was not the kind of heart to break, monsieur. And a girl cannot deliberately choose bad luck. There is sorrow enough when it comes unforeseen.”

Then they took their places. Renée had been very eager at first and watched the two closely. M. Marchand had appealed to her on some trifle, and now she saw Barbe and Uncle Gaspard take their places in the dance.

“Did she—choose Uncle Gaspard?” the child exclaimed with a long respiration that was like a sigh, while a flush overspread her face.

“He is the finest man in the room! I would have chosen him myself if I had been a maid. And if you had been sixteen wouldn’t you have taken him, little girl? Well, your day will come,” in a gay tone.

Wawataysee placed her arm over the child’s shoulder. “Let us go around here, we can see them better. What an odd way to do! And very pretty, too!”

Renée’s first feeling was that she would not look. Then with a quick inconsequence she wanted to see every step, every motion, every glance. Her king! Barbe Guion had chosen him, and the child’s eyes flashed.

It was a beautiful dance, and the gliding, skimming steps of light feet answered the measure of the music exquisitely. Other circles formed. The kings and the queens were not to have it all to themselves.

The balls were often kept up till almost morning, though the children and some of the older people went home. Gaspard made his way through the crowd. Madame Marchand beckoned him,

and as he neared them he saw Renée was clinging to her with a desperate emotion next to tears.

“Is it not time little ones were in bed?” she asked with her fascinating smile and in pretty, broken French. “Madame Garreau wishes to retire. It is beautiful, and every one is so cordial. I have danced with delight,” and her pleasure shone in her eyes. “But we will take the child safe to Mère Lunde if it is your will.”

“Oh, thank you. Yes. You will go, Renée? You look tired.” She was pale and her eyes were heavy.

“And you—you stay here and are Ma’m’selle Barbe’s king,” she said in a tone of plaintive reproach that went to his heart.

“That is only for to-night. There are other queens beside her.”

“But she is *your* queen.” The delicate emphasis amused him, it betrayed the rankling jealousy.

“And you are my queen as well, to-morrow, next week, all the time. So do not grudge her an hour or two. See, I am going to give you her rose, *my* rose, to take home with you.”

She smiled, albeit languidly, and held out her small hand, grasping it with triumph.

He broke the stem as he drew it out, leaving the pin in his coat.

“Now let me see you wrapped up snug and tight. Mind you don’t get any cold. Tell Mère Lunde to warm the bed and give you something hot to drink.”

She nodded and the party went to the dressing room. The two Indian women chattered in their own language, or rather in a patois that they had adopted. Wawataysee was very happy, and her soft eyes shone with satisfaction. Her husband thought her the prettiest woman in all St. Louis.

Renée gave her orders and Mère Lunde attended to them cheerfully.

“For if you should fall ill again our hearts would be heavy with sorrow and anxiety.” she said.

Renée had carried the rose under her cloak and it was only a little wilted. She put it in some water herself, and brought the stand near the fireplace, for sometimes it would freeze on the outer edges of the room, though they kept a big log fire all night.

Gaspard went back to Ma’m’selle Barbe.

“Oh, your rose!” she cried. “Where is it?”

He put his hand to his coat as if he had not known it. “The pin is left,” he said. “What a crowd there is! St. Louis is getting overrun with people,” laughing gayly. “Give me a rose out of your nosegay, for it would signify bad luck to go on the floor without it.”

He took one and fastened it in his coat again, and they were soon merrily dancing. There was no absolute need of changing partners, and the queens were proud of keeping their admirers all the evening.

Barbe was delighted and happy, for Gaspard evinced no disposition to stray off, and danced to her heart’s content, if not his. He had grown finer looking, certainly, since he had relinquished the hardships of a trapper’s life. His complexion had lost the weather-beaten look, his frame had filled out, and strangely enough, he was a much more ready talker. Renée chattered so much, asked him so many questions, and made him talk over people and places he had seen that it had given him a readiness to talk to women. Men could always find enough to say to each other, or enjoy silence over their pipes.

She seemed to grow brighter instead of showing fatigue, and her voice had musical cadences in it very sweet to hear. The touch of her hand on his arm or his shoulder in the dance did give him a peculiar sort of thrill. She was a very sweet, pretty girl. He was glad not to have her wasted on Alphonse Maurice.

But the delicious night came to an end for her. There was a curious little strife among some of the young men to make a bold dash and capture a queen. The girls were sometimes willing enough to be caught. Barbe had skilfully evaded this, he noted.

“Ma’m’selle Guion has the bravest king of them all,” said a neighbor. “He is a fine fellow. I wonder, Mère Renaud, you do not fan the flame into a blaze. He is prospering, too. Colonel Chouteau speaks highly of him and holds out a helping hand. If I had daughters no one would suit me better.”

Madame Renaud smiled and nodded as if she had a secret confidence.

Mothers in old St. Louis were very fond and proud of their daughters and were watchful of good opportunities for them. And those who had none rather envied them. It was the cordial family affection that made life in these wilderness places delightful.

Barbe was being wound up in her veil so that her pretty complexion should suffer no ill at this coldest hour of the twenty-four, after being heated in the dance. She looked very charming, very tempting. If he had been a lover he would have kissed her.

“You come so seldom now,” she said in a tone of seductive complaint. “And we were always such friends when you returned from your journeys. The children have missed you so much. And Lisa wonders—”

“I suppose it is being busy every day. At that time you know there was a holiday between.”

“But there is no business now until spring opens,” in a pleading tone.

“Except for the householder, the shopkeeper. Oh, you have no idea how ingenious I have become. And the men drop in to talk over plans and berate the Governor because things are not in better shape. We would fare badly in an attack.”

“Are we in any danger from the British?”

“One can never tell. Perhaps they may take up Pontiac’s wild dream of driving us over the mountains into the sea. No,” with a short laugh, “I am not much afraid. And our Indians are friendly also.”

“Come, Barbe,” counselled Madame Renaud, but she took her husband’s arm and marched on ahead like an astute general.

Barbe clung closely to her attendant, for in some places it was slippery.

“Next time you will transfer your attentions,” she said with a touch of regret. “I wonder who will be your queen for a night?”

“The prettiest girl,” he said gayly.

“Madame Marchand is beautiful.”

“But she is no longer a girl.”

“Oh, no. You see a good deal of her, though?”

“They are over often. We are excellent friends.”

“Renée is quite bewitched with her.”

“Yes, they are very fond of each other.”

And somehow she, Barbe, was no more fond of the child than the child was of her.

Madame Renaud studied her sister’s face as they were unwinding their wraps. It was rather pale, not flushed and triumphant as she hoped.

Gaspared Denys stirred the fire in his shop and threw himself on a pile of skins and was asleep in five minutes. It had been a long while since he had danced all night.

They all slept late. There was no need of stirring early in the morning. They made no idol of industry, as the energetic settlers on the eastern coast did. Pleasure and happiness were enough for them. It ran in the French blood.

When Gaspard woke he heard a sound of an eager chattering voice. He rubbed his limbs and stretched himself, looked down on his red sash and then saw a withered red rose that he tossed in the fire.

“Ah, little one, you are as blithe as a bee,” was his greeting.

“Oh, Uncle Gaspard, you have on your ball clothes. When did you come home?” she asked.

“I dropped asleep in them. I am old and stiff this morning. I tumbled down on a pile of skins and stayed there.”

“You don’t look very old. And—are you a king now?” rather curiously.

“I must be two weeks hence. Then I resign my sceptre, and become an ordinary person.”

“And Mère Lunde said you had to choose a new queen.” There was a touch of elation in her voice.

“That is so. And I told Ma’m’selle Guion I should look out for the very prettiest girl. I shall be thinking all the time.”

“I wish you could take Wawataysee. She is the prettiest of anybody, and the sweetest.”

“And she has already chosen her king for life.”

“The breakfast will get cold,” warned Mère Lunde.

There were more snows, days when you could hardly stir out and paths had to be shovelled. The next ball night it stormed, but Renée did not care to go, because M. and Madame Marchand were staying all night and they would play games and have parched corn and cakes and spiced drinks. Wawataysee would sing, too. And though the songs were odd, she had an exquisite voice, and she could imitate almost any bird, as well as the wind flying and shrieking through the trees, and then softening with sounds of spring.

Sometimes they danced together, and it was a sight to behold, the very impersonation of grace; soft, languid mazes at first and then warming into flying sprites of the forest. And how Renée’s eyes shone and her cheeks blossomed, while the little moccasined feet made no more sound than a mouse creeping about.

There was no especial carnival at St. Louis, perhaps a little more gayety than usual, and the dances winding up at midnight. Nearly every one went to church the next morning, listened to the prayers reverently, had a small bit of ashes dropped on his or her head, went home and fasted the rest of the day. But Lent was not very strictly kept, and the maids were preparing for Easter weddings.

“It is strange,” said grandaunt Guion, “that Barbe has no lover. She is too giddy, too much of a coquette. She will be left behind. And she is too pretty to turn into an old maid. Guion girls were not apt to hang on hand.”

CHAPTER VIII—THE SURPRISE

There was, it is true, a side not so simple and wholesome, and this had been gathering slowly since the advent of the governor. More drunken men were seen about the levee. There was talk of regular orgies taking place at the government house, and the more thoughtful men, like the Chouteaus, the Guerins, the Guions, and the Lestourniers, had to work hard to get the fortifications in any shape, and the improvements made were mostly done by private citizens.

Of course there were many rumors, but old St. Louis rested securely on her past record. What the people about her were losing or gaining did not seem to trouble her. Now and then a river pirate was caught, or there was some one tripped up and punished who had traded unlawfully.

This had been the case with a French Canadian named Ducharme, who had been caught violating the treaty law, trading with Indians in Spanish territory, and giving them liberal supplies of rum in order to make better bargains with furs. His goods were seized and confiscated, but he was allowed to go his way, breathing threats of retaliation.

France had recognized the independence of the colonies, which had stirred up resentment in the minds of many of the English in northern Michigan. It was said an English officer at Michilimackinac had formed a plan of seizing or destroying some of the western towns and stations where there was likely to be found booty enough to reward them. Ducharme joined the scheme eagerly and gathered roving bands of Ojibways. Winnebagoes and Sioux, and by keeping well to the eastern side of the Mississippi marched down nearly opposite Gabaret Island, and crossed over to attack the town.

Corpus Christi was a great festival day of the church. Falling late in May, on the 25th, it was an out-of-doors entertainment. After mass had been said in the morning, women and children, youths and maidens, and husbands who could be spared from business, went out for a whole day’s pleasure with baskets and bags of provisions.

The day was magnificent. The fragrance of spruce and fir, the breath of the newly grown grasses, the bloom of trees and flowers, was like the most exhilarating perfume, and stirred all the senses.

Spies had crept down the woods to reconnoitre and assure themselves their arrival had not been suspected. It seemed indeed an opportune moment. It was now mid-afternoon. There had been dancing and merriment, the children had run and played, gathered wild strawberries and flowers, and some of the more careful ones had collected their little children and started homeward.

To the westward was Cardinal Spring, owned by a man of that name, but considered free property. He and another hunter had been shooting game, and as he stooped for a drink his companion espied an Indian cautiously creeping through the trees.

“Indians! Indians!” he shouted, and fired.

Cardinal snatched up his gun, but a storm of bullets felled him. Rivière was captured. A young Frenchman, catching sight of the body of Indians, gave the alarm.

“Run for your lives! Fly to the fort!” he shouted.

There were men working in the fields, and nearly every one took his gun, as much for the chance

at game as any real fear of Indians. They covered the retreat a little, and as this was a reconnoitring party, the main body was at some distance.

“Fly! Fly!” Men who had no weapons caught little ones in their arms and ran toward the fort. All was wild alarm.

“What is it?” cried Colonel Chouteau, who had been busy with some papers of importance.

“The Indians! The Indians!” shouted his brother.

“Call out the militia! Where is the Governor?”

“In his own house, drunk as usual,” cried Pierre indignantly, and he ran to summon the soldiers.

There had been a small body of troops under the command of Captain Cartabona, a Spaniard sent from Ste. Genevieve at the urgent request of the chief citizens, but it being a holiday they were away, some canoeing down the river or fishing, and of the few to be found most of them were panic stricken. The captain had been having a carouse with the Governor.

“Then we must be our own leaders. To arms! to arms! every citizen! It is for your wives and children!” was the inspiriting cry.

“You shall be our leader!” was shouted in one voice almost before the Colonel had ceased. For Colonel Chouteau was not only admired for his friendliness and good comradeship, but trusted to the last degree.

Every man rushed for his gun and ran to the rescue, hardly knowing what had happened save that the long-feared attack had come upon them unawares. They poured out of the fort, but the flying women and children were in the advance with the Indians back of them.

Colonel Chouteau marshalled his little force in a circuitous movement, and opened a volley that took the Indians by surprise. They fell back brandishing their arms and shouting to their companions to come on. Then the Colonel saw that it was no mere casual attack, but a premeditated onslaught. Already bodies were lying on the ground struggling in death agonies.

The aim was so good that the assailants halted, then fell back to wait for their companions. This gave most of the flying and terrified throng an opportunity to reach the fort. For the wounded nothing could be done at present.

Now the streets were alive with men who had no time to pick out their own families, but ran, musket or rifle in hand, to man the fort. Colonel Chouteau and his brother Pierre were experienced artillerists, and stationed themselves at the cannon.

The Indians held a brief colloquy with the advancing body. Then it was seen that an attack was determined upon. They approached the fort, headed by several white leaders, and opened an irregular fire on the place.

“Let them approach nearer,” commanded the Colonel. The walls of the stockade and the roofs of the nearest houses were manned with the residents of the town. A shower of arrows fell among them. Surprised at no retaliation, the enemy ventured boldly, headed by Ducharme.

Then the cannons poured out their volley, which swept down the foremost. From the roofs muskets and guns and even pistols made a continuing chorus. Ducharme fell. Two of the white leaders were wounded also. Then another discharge from the cannons and the red foes fell back. The plan had been to wait until almost dusk for the attack, but the incident at the spring had hastened it.

Ducharme had not counted on the strength of the fort, and he knew the town was but poorly supplied with soldiers, so he had persuaded the Indians it would fall an easy prey and give them abundant pillage. But the roar and the execution of the cannon dismayed them, and many of them fled at once. Others marched slowly, helping some of the wounded.

General Cartabona came out quite sobered by the fierceness of the attack.

“Would it not be well to order a pursuit?” he questioned.

“And perhaps fall into a trap!” returned Colonel Chouteau with a touch of scorn. “No, no; let us bring in the wounded as we can.”

Gaspard Denys had been among the first to rush to the defence of the town. Marchand had gone out with the party, and Mère Lunde was to care for Renée. He had not stopped to look or inquire. He saw Madame Renaud.

“Oh, thank heaven my children are safe! But Barbe! I cannot find Barbe!” she cried.

“And Renée?” his voice was husky.

“She was with the Marchands. They were going to the woods. Oh, M’sieu Denys, what a horrible

thing! And we felt so safe. The Indians have been so friendly. But can you trust them?”

He was off to look after the wounded. A number were lying dead on the field. No, Renée was not among them. They carried the wounded in gently, the dead reverently. The good priest proffered his services, and Dr. Montcrevier left his beloved experiments to come and minister to them. The dead were taken to the church and the priest’s house.

All was confusion, however. Darkness fell before families were reunited. Children hid away in corners crying, and were too terrified to come out even at the summons of friendly voices. Colonel Chouteau and his brother were comforting, aiding, exhorting, and manning the fort anew. General Cartabona set guards at the gates and towers, for no one knew what might happen before morning.

Denys had hurried home as soon as he could be released. “Renée!” he called. “Mère Lunde!” but no one replied. He searched every nook and corner. He asked the Pichous. No one had seen them. A great pang rent his heart. And yet—they might have hidden in the forest. Ah, God send that they might not be taken prisoners! But Marchand was with them. He knew the man’s courage well. He would fight to the death for them.

“I must go out and search,” he said in a desperate tone. “Who will accompany me?”

A dozen volunteered. They were well armed, and carried a rude lantern made of tin with a glass in one side only. They saw now that their fire had done good execution among their red foes. The trampled ground showed which way the party had gone, and they were no longer in sight.

“Let us try the woods. They came by the way of the spring,” said one of the party.

They found the body of Cardinal and that of an old man, both dead. They plunged into the woods, and, though aware of the danger, Denys shouted now and then, but no human voice replied. Here, there, examining some thicket, peering behind a clump of trees, startling the denizen of the woods, or a shrill-voiced nighthawk, and then all was silence again.

They left the woods and crossed the strip of prairie. Here lay something in the grass—a body. Denys turned it over.

“My God!” he exclaimed in a voice of anguish. “It is François Marchand.”

He dropped on the ground overwhelmed. If he was dead, then the others were prisoners. There was no use to search farther to-night. To-morrow a scouting party might go out.

They made a litter of the men’s arms and carried Marchand back to the fort, to find that he was not dead, though he had a broken leg and had received a tremendous blow on the head.

A sad morning dawned over St. Louis, where yesterday all had been joy. True, it might have been much worse. In all about a dozen had been killed, but the wounded and those who had fallen and been crushed in the flight counted up many more. And some were missing. What would be their fate? And oh, what would happen to Wawataysee if some roving Indian should recognize her! As for Renée, if he had not wholly understood before, he knew now how the child had twined herself about his heart, how she had become a part of his life.

Marchand’s blow was a dangerous one. The Garreaus insisted upon nursing and caring for him, but Madame Garreau was wild about the beautiful Wawataysee. She knew the Indian character too well to think they would show her any mercy, if she was recognized by any of the tribe. And Renée, what would be her fate?

General Cartabona was most anxious to make amends for past negligence. The militia was called to a strict account and recruited as rapidly as possible, and the fortifications made more secure. He took counsel with Colonel Chouteau, who had the best interests of the town at heart.

“We must make an appeal for the Governor’s removal,” insisted the Colonel. “It is not only this cowardly episode, but he is narrow-minded and avaricious, incompetent in every respect, and drunk most of the time. He cares nothing for the welfare of the town, he takes no interest in its advancement. After such men as Piernas and Cruzat he is most despicable. Any Frenchman born would serve Spain better.”

“That is true. I will head a petition of ejectment, and make it strong enough to be heeded.”

The dead were buried, the living cared for. Even the fallen enemies had been given decent sepulture outside the town. And Gaspard Denys felt that he must start on his journey of rescue, if indeed that was possible.

He chose two trusty young fellows, after shutting his house securely, providing his party with ammunition, and provisions for a part of their journey, as much as they could carry. He found the Indians had boats in waiting on the Illinois River, and after proceeding some distance they had separated in two parties, going in different directions. Some of the prisoners had been left here, as they did not care to be bothered with them.

The one party kept on up the river. They learned there were some women with them, and were

mostly Indians. It was not an easy trail to follow. There had been a quarrel and another separation, a drunken debauch, part stopping at an Indian village. And here Denys heard what caused him almost a heart-break.

They had fallen in with some Hurons who had bought two of the captives. An old woman was set free with two men and sent down the river. The others were going up north.

“It is as I feared, Jaques,” he said. “They will carry Madame Marchand to her old home as a great prize. Ah, if François were only well! But I shall go on for life or death. I will not ask you to share my perils. Wawataysee came from somewhere up by the straits. She ran away with Marchand. She was to be married to an old Indian against her will. And no doubt he will be wild with gratification at getting her back, and will treat her cruelly. The child is mine and I must save her from a like fate. But you and Pierre may return. I will not hold you bound by any promises.”

“I am in for the adventure,” and Pierre laughed, showing his white teeth. “I am not a coward nor a man to eat one’s words. I am fond of adventure. I will go on.”

“I, too,” responded Jaques briefly.

“You are good fellows, both of you. I shall pray for your safe return,” Denys said, much moved by their devotion.

“And we have no sweethearts,” subjoined Pierre with a touch of mirth. “But if I could find one as beautiful and sweet as Madame Marchand I should be paid for a journey up to Green Bay.”

“It might be dangerous,” said Denys sadly.

He wondered if it was really Mère Lunde they had set free. It would be against her will, he was sure, and it would leave the two quite defenceless. A thousand remembrances haunted him day and night. He could see Renée’s soft brown eyes in the dusk, he could hear her sweet voice in the gentle zephyrs, that changed and had no end of fascinating tones. All her arch, pretty moods came up before him, her little piquant jealousies, her pretty assumptions of dignity and power, her dainty, authoritative ways. Oh, he could not give her up, his little darling.

There was sorrow in more than one household in old St. Louis, but time softened and healed it. And now the inhabitants congratulated themselves on their freedom heretofore from raids like these. Towns had been destroyed, prisoners had been treated to almost every barbarity. Giving up their lives had not been the worst.

But the summer came on gloriously, and Colonel Chouteau made many plans for the advancement of the town. He was repairing the old house where his friend had lived, and improving the grounds, and everyone felt that in him they had a true friend.

One July day three worn and weary people came in at the northern gate, and after the guards had looked sharply at them there was a shout of joy. Pierre Duchesne, whose family had lived on a faint hope, young Normand Fleurey, and Mère Lunde, looking a decade older and more wrinkled than ever.

She sat down on a stone and wept while the sounds of joy and congratulation were all about her.

Who could give her any comfort? She suffered Gaspard Denys’s pain as well as her own. And though there had been adventures and hiding from roving Indians, living on barks and roots, she could not tell them over while her heart was so sore.

She went to the old house, where the three had known so much content.

“He will come back some day,” she said, “but the child—” and her voice would break at that.

She heard Marchand had been very ill with a fever, beside the wounds. He had come near to losing his leg, and was still a little lame, and very weak and heartbroken. His wife had been torn from his arms when an Indian had given him the blow on his head with a club, and there memory had stopped. Though Mère Lunde would talk to no one else, to him she told the sad story. And he had been lying helpless all the time Wawataysee had been in such danger! Yes, he knew what would happen to her now, but presently he would go up to the strait and never rest until he had killed all who worked her ill. Oh, if she had fallen into the hands of her old tribe!

That thought was madness. But he understood what the courage of her despair would be. She would not suffer any degradation, death would be a boon instead. Ah, if he could have joined Denys! He knew the cruelty and treachery of those whose hands she had fallen into. And the child!

But it would be useless to start disabled as he was, although his anger was fierce enough, and Denys was well on the journey. Yet it was terrible to wait with awful visions before his eyes. He had seen both men and women tortured, and the agonies prolonged with fiendish delight.

Mère Lunde opened the house and cleared up the dust and disorder. The garden was overgrown with weeds and everything was running riot. Marchand insisted upon lending a helping hand here. Many an evening they sat in the doorway wondering, hoping and despairing.

CHAPTER IX—PRISONERS

The wild cry of “The Indians! the Indians!” had roused a small group from their desultory enjoyment. They were pouring down in what seemed a countless throng. Marchand had no weapon except his knife.

“Run,” he cried. “Make for the fort! Keep at the edge of the wood while we can!”

Wawataysee seized Renée’s hand. The Indian girl was as fleet as a deer. She could have saved herself, but she would not leave the child. They had now reached the open. All was screams and confusion and flying fugitives.

A tall Indian was behind them with a club. Wawataysee gave a wild shriek and the next instant stumbled over her husband’s prostrate body. The Indian rushed on.

“Oh!” cried Renée in wild affright, standing still in terror, the flying crowd like swirling leaves before her eyes.

The sharp crack of a rifle made her spring back. Were both killed now? But Wawataysee moved, groaned.

“They have shot him now, my beloved!” She raised the bleeding head and pressed it to her bosom. “Oh, he has been killed, I know. Why did I not die with him? Oh, Renée—”

Escape now was as impossible as succor. The Indian girl moaned over her husband, and made a futile attempt to drag him back to the edge of the wood to hide him. But suddenly she was violently wrenched away, and an Indian with a hand hold of each began to run with them toward the river. At last Renée fell and he had to pause. Meanwhile the firing from the fort had begun with its execution.

Wawataysee began to plead with her captor, who turned a deaf ear to her entreaties. Renée was crying in a desperate fashion, from both fright and fatigue. He raised his club, but the young wife clasped the child in her arms.

“Kill us both,” she exclaimed, “as you have already killed my husband.”

“White man?” with a grunt. “Squaw woman. Make some Indian glad.” Other prisoners were being brought in this direction, and among them Mère Lunde, who had started to reach the fort and bear the tidings to Gaspard.

“Oh, my dear child,” she cried. “The good God help us. They are trying to take the town.” And she almost fell at their feet.

Then they were marched on, the Indian guards behind with clubs and tomahawks, now and then goaded by a light blow that would not disable. The cries grew fainter, though they still heard the roar of the cannon.

And now the sun was slanting westward and the trees cast long shadows, the sound of the river fell on their ears mingled with the homeward song of birds. The heat began to wane, the air was dewy sweet.

It was almost dusk when they reached the boats, and they were bidden to get in and were conveyed to the opposite shore. Here they were bound together, two and two, with their hands fastened behind them. One Indian was detailed to watch them while the others took the boats back.

Ducharme’s arm hung helplessly by his side, and the English renegades began to upbraid him, while the Indians, seeing that no pillage was possible and no gain could be made, drew away sullenly and began to march toward the rendezvous, leaving some of their own badly wounded behind. It was midnight before they rejoined the others. Then, fearing pursuit, they started up the river again, rousing those who had fallen asleep. All told they had barely thirty prisoners, and had left as many of their own behind.

Mère Lunde had been allowed near the two girls, and now they huddled together in the boat. Renée had fallen asleep again.

“You do not know where they will take us?” Mère Lunde inquired.

Wawataysee shook her head. “They will go up the Illinois River,” she whispered.

“Do you think they will not follow?” in a low, desperate tone. “Master Denys and—”

“Oh, *he* is dead,” with a heart-breaking moan. “I held him to my heart and he made no stir, I kissed his cold lips and there was no warmth. But for the sweet child I should have begged them to kill me too, so that my spirit should be with his. If she could be restored safely, my own life I would hold as nothing.”

“They have started ere this. Do not despair,” and her lips were close to the Indian girl’s ear.

“Then I shall thank the Great Spirit for the child’s sake.” Heaven grant they might be rescued.

The stir and lap of the river and the boats had a mysterious sound in the weird darkness. Then the cry of some wild animal or a bit of wind sweeping through the trees at the edge, here and there. The stars shone out overhead. Mère Lunde dropped asleep also. But Wawataysee sat with wide-open eyes. One moment she said to herself that he could not be dead, the next his white face and half-closed, dulled eyes were against her breast. She felt as if she must shriek and tear her hair, but there was the Indian’s self-control, and the thought of her companions who might be made to suffer for her. But she could not go out of life for her own satisfaction merely, unless it came to the martyrdom worse than death, for the child was a sacred charge. Gaspard Denys would go to the death, even, for both of them, and she was grateful for all the kindness and countenance he had given her at St. Louis.

They turned up a small stream, tributary to the Illinois. At noon they drew the boats up to what looked like an impenetrable brushwood, and disembarked, pulling in the boats and canoes. There was a sort of trodden path through the wild shrubbery, and tangled vines overhung it. Two of the Indians went ahead, the prisoners were driven next, and the rest of the party brought up the rear.

“Oh, where are we going?” cried Renée in affright, clutching Wawataysee’s dress with both hands.

The girl shook her head.

They were stiff from their cramped position in the boats and faint from hunger. Now and then one received a blow and an admonition to hurry on. At length they came in sight of a clearing, an Indian settlement, with wigwams and a space planted with corn. Women were moving about over their fires, children playing or stretched out in the sun. Skins were tacked from tree to tree drying, and several women were busy making garments and leggings, some young girls cutting fringes. It was a pretty, restful scene to the tired travellers.

An old man rose, it almost seemed from the earth itself. He was thin and gaunt, hollow-cheeked and wrinkled to the last degree. From his attire and his head-dress of feathers one could gather that he was the chief of the small settlement.

“Why all this warlike array and these prisoners?” he asked sharply. “We are at peace with our white brothers. We have gathered in the remnant of our tribe, we have few young braves among us, we are mostly women and children. We have nothing to be despoiled of, we do no hunting save for ourselves.”

“We want only a little food and rest, good father Neepawa. We will not molest you and yours. We are going up to the Great Lakes. We have been led astray by a white chief who promised us much plunder, but the town was too strong for us. He has gone south to one of the English forts and taken some of his followers, leaving the prisoners with us. Give us some food and we will go on.”

Their request was acceded to, but with no special cordiality. The thing they would most have liked was whiskey, but that was not to be supplied at this simple Indian village.

“Oh, if we could stay here!” sighed Renée. “Do you know where they mean to take us?” and her eyes dilated with fear.

“Only that we are going farther north.”

Wawataysee was fain to have some conversation with the Indian women, but she soon saw that every effort was adroitly frustrated. Still, they were fed abundantly and some provisions given the party. They reembarked late in the afternoon and made their way down to the Illinois River and up farther on their journey, until their provisions were gone, when they were obliged to land again.

After foraging about awhile they met a party of Indians and traders quite plentifully supplied with whiskey. This led to quarrels and disputes. A number of them were tired of having the prisoners to feed, and had changed their minds about going north. They were roving Indians who had no strong ties anywhere. Half a dozen decided to cast in their lot with the traders.

And now those going on picked out the most likely of the prisoners. Some of the strong young men who would be useful in the capacity of slaves, one half-breed woman who had astuteness enough to make herself of account in preparing food and did not resent the small indignities offered.

As they marched down to the river’s edge these were first put on the boat. Then Wawataysee and the child. Mère Lunde started to follow, but was rudely thrust back.

“I must, I must!” she shrieked, struggling with her captor; “I must stay with the child!”

“Push off!” was the command. Three Indians stepped in and the boat was propelled out in the

stream. Then Wawataysee saw what had happened and half rose, crying wildly that they should take on the poor creature begging in her desperation.

“She is ours! We cannot do without her!”

The Indian pushed her down on her seat and uttered a rough threat.

“Oh, what will they do with her?” shrieked Renée.

A blow was the only answer. Renée fell into her companion’s lap sobbing wildly. Wawataysee tried to soothe and comfort her. But she felt strangely defenceless. The half-breed she mistrusted. If there could be some escape! She studied every point. They were no longer bound, but out here on the river one could do nothing.

So passed another night and day and a second night. No place of refuge had been found in their brief landings. But they reached another settlement, not as orderly or inviting as that of Chief Neepawa. Still, they were glad of a rest. And now their captors seemed undecided again. Two or three were already tired of the journey with its hardships.

An Indian woman found a place in her wigwam for the two girls. They were bound at night and their keeper had strict injunctions about them.

The Elk Horn, as one of the most authoritative Indians was called, now assumed the command. He had an idea, that he kept quite to himself, that he might dispose of his prisoners to some advantage, to make up in part for the ill-advised raid on St. Louis. There were many roving Indians about whose tribes had been decimated by wars and sickness, and who attached themselves to the English or American cause, whichever offered the most profit, and who liked a lawless, wandering life and plunder.

The keeper seemed kindly disposed toward the two girls and treated them well, though she watched them sharply. Wawataysee had been careful to talk in a patois of broken French and the Sioux that she had picked up. She understood nearly all that her captors said and thus held them at a disadvantage, but she could not learn what Elk Horn’s plans were, if indeed he had any certain ones. She admitted that she had left a husband in St. Louis, for there were moments when she could not believe him dead, and that this was the end of their tender love! And she was young, she had just tasted of the sweetness of it all.

There were hours of heart-break, when it seemed as if she could not endure Renée’s prattle, and would fain shake off the soft touch on her arm, the kisses on her forehead, for the awful, desperate want of the other kisses, the other clasp. And oh, how strong the longing was at times to throw herself headlong into the river and let her spirit of love fly to that other land, that the good God provided for His children.

Then she would think of Gaspard Denys and his love for the little maid. He had seen enough of the cruelty of her race to know the danger. Ah, why had the great All-Father allowed any human beings to become such fiends? Up in her northern home she had heard things that turned the blood to ice. And she had been so near the white settlements.

Yes, she must care for the little one, keep with her, befriend her, try to restore her to her dear protector.

It was best to claim that Renée was her little sister by adoption. If they could only get back! Why should they go up north? What was that more than any other place!

The woman at this would shake her head doubtfully. Yet Wawataysee could see that she softened, and once she asked how far it was to St. Louis, and how one could get there.

Wawataysee’s heart beat high with hope. Yet how could two girls reach there alone? They might meet other Indian bands who would capture them. There were wild animals. And they might not get a canoe. They had no money. Still, she would escape if they could and pray to the good God to keep them safe. Often and often she and Renée comforted themselves with the sweet, brief prayers they had learned. And oh, where was poor Mère Lunde!

Several days of rest were vouchsafed to them. Then one day a company of hunters joined them, among which there were a few white prisoners as well. One, a young fellow, strolled about with evident curiosity, and came upon the girls in a leafy covert near the wig-wam. They were given a little liberty by their keeper on promising by the Great Manitou they would not attempt to escape.

“It would be of no use,” said the woman. “An alarm would be given, and you do not know your way anywhere. Then you might be beaten when you were captured, and confined with thongs. Have patience. Sometimes all the braves go off to hunt.”

The young man listened to the French with delight. Two of the other captives were English and they had conversed mostly with signs and Indian words they had picked up.

Renée heard a stir in the leaves and started with a little cry. The hand was raised for silence.

“Pardon me. I will do you no harm,” he said, with an appeal in his voice. “It was the language that sounded so sweet to me. I am French. I come from Detroit. But we fell in with a band of Indians and only three of us escaped unhurt. We were made prisoners.”

“And we are prisoners, too,” returned Wawataysee, with a sigh. “We come from St. Louis.”

“St. Louis! How strange! I had meant to go there. I have an uncle, Pierre Valbonais.”

“Oh, I know!” cried Renée with delight, as if she had found a friend. “He comes in my uncle’s shop; and Uncle Gaspard likes him. They sit and smoke together.”

“And I am André Valbonais. We are companions in adversity, both prisoners. Whither are you going?”

Wawataysee shook her head. “We do not know, m’sieu.”

He laughed softly. “How natural that sounds! I am glad to hear a familiar voice. Neither do I know my destination. It is one thing to-day, another to-morrow. I do not think they know themselves. Black Feather is chief of the gang. Now and then they quarrel. He killed two Indians not more than a week ago who wanted to have their own way, but he has not been cruel to us. Still, I dream of escape continually.”

“Ah, if we could compass it together!” and Wawataysee’s beautiful eyes went to his very heart.

The woman came out with her beadwork in her hand.

“You are not of our people,” she said. “You have no right here. Go your way.”

“Perhaps not. I am a sort of compulsory guest, but I will say adieu,” and bowing, he disappeared in the shrubbery; but his last glance said he would find them again.

“Who was it?” The woman looked from one to the other.

“He is French, and a prisoner. The chief is Black Feather. But the young man comes from Detroit.”

She gave a nod, as if she knew this much already.

Elk Horn and Black Feather had cemented a friendship over their whiskey. They would start the next morning. The word was given to be early astir, and the woman roused them.

“Every step takes us farther away,” said Wawataysee regretfully. Yet they would be in the company of Valbonais, who had resolved upon escape.

She walked slowly down to the river’s edge, holding Renée by the hand. Black Feather caught sight of her. Her tall, lithe figure, her airy step, the poise of the head, had a touch of familiarity. Ah, yes! and the name. The pretty Firefly had been taken away from the strait by a white trader, and her brother had been unsuccessful in his attempt to capture her. Ah, if this was she, then he was truly in luck!

He did not attempt to come nearer, but saw her and the child step into the boat. Elk Horn took command of this. Black Feather gathered his small force together, and his boatload of treasures of different kinds with which he could purchase supplies, and the other looked on with envy.

All day Black Feather watched warily, more and more certain that this girl would prove a treasure to him if he managed rightly. He would buy her of Elk Horn.

“What do you know about her?” he inquired. “She comes from St. Louis. Who was her father? for she has Indian blood, and I am sure I know her tribe.”

Elk Horn looked amazed. “I believe she married a trader and came with him. I will ask her.”

“No. Cannot some of the men tell you?”

“Oh, I think so. Have you been smitten with her charms?”

The Indian nodded, but his face showed no emotion.

They made a rude camp for the night and proceeded to cook some supper.

“I have found out,” announced Elk Horn. “A Frenchman, Marchand, married her. He was killed, I believe, in the assault on the town.”

“Yes, I like her. I will buy her of you. Let us make a bargain.”

“And the little one?” inquiringly.

“Oh, I do not want her. Yet she has some beauty, according to pale-face ideas. But no, I will take only the Indian girl.”

They ate their supper of broiled fish, and then smoked in the gathering darkness. Elk Horn deliberated. He had not exactly thought of selling her, though it was often done with female captives. He had two wives now, and did not want to be burdened with a third who was a helpless young girl. Wives were for profit, in his estimation.

Black Feather was as wary. He was not sure he wanted to marry her. She might prove turbulent and headstrong. Half breeds were not as tractable as Indian women. And they were not as strong. They might die on your hands, and what, then, would one have for the bargain?

“You will take the child. I will not part them. You can spare a trifle more. She will soon grow up.”

Black Feather shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

“Then there is no bargain,” declared Elk Horn. “I will offer my wares to some other chief. I think of one farther up in the Illinois country. But our ways may be together a few days longer. It need not make ill friends.”

Black Feather brought out some whiskey. He knew how to tempt his brother. To have a supply of this for days would be more satisfying than any future gain. For the present was the great thing to the Indian’s improvident nature. And so Black Feather made his bargain, including the child that he really did not care for. Yet perhaps it would be better not to separate them at present.

Elk Horn had not slept off all his potion. His compeer was awake early, and had laid aside the promised treasures for his inspection. Then he called his men and stealthily manned his own boats. He judged rightly that Elk Horn would not leave the place until the last drop of firewater had been drained, and then it would take him a few days to get over his debauch.

“Come,” he exclaimed roughly, at length. “Here is your portion—beads, wampum, skins and whiskey.”

Elk Horn nodded and rubbed his bleared eyes. He looked at the goods and they seemed magnified to his sight, so adroitly were they spread about.

“Ugh! It is early,” with a yawn.

“I must be on my way. You can overtake me at night. We will share the same fire, and I will have everything prepared for my brother. But I wish you to rouse the two captives and have them ready also. You will lead them to the boat, so there need be no disturbance.”

Elk Horn considered. Wawataysee might object to her new master. He felt his part had been rather underhand, but was she not his property?

They were a little surprised at the summons, and to be hurried off without breakfast. The canoes were already out in the river. The larger boat had a few men in it. Elk Horn put in Renée first.

“Where are we going?” the Indian girl asked, turning toward him.

“Up the river,” roughly, in a thick, guttural voice. “Come, get in.”

She stepped aboard, not especially remarking the men. Then suddenly her eye fell upon Valbonais, who greeted her with a joyous expression. Had he been handed over to Elk Horn? She experienced a certain contentment, and suspicion was allayed.

But as they emerged from the shadow of the overhanging trees she saw that all the faces were strange. She had not noted the newcomers in the camp, having been kept in seclusion, and it also being her choice. Now a chill of terror ran over her. Noting the aspect of two of the rowers more closely, she saw to her dismay that they were Hurons. One man had his head turned from her and bowed down.

“Why do we go so early?” asked Renée. “And we have had no breakfast.”

“I do not know,” tremblingly.

“And why did Elk Horn stay on shore?”

“Did he?” with a curious lift of the brows.

“Oh, yes; I saw him. And these men—oh, where are Pierre and Jules? But there is the young man who came and talked to us. Oh, Wawataysee, shall we never stay anywhere again? How can we get back to St. Louis?”

“Hush, dear; hush!”

“But I am getting hungry. And I am so tired of sailing.”

She leaned her head down on Wawataysee’s lap. Every moment the Indian girl grew more terrified. True, Elk Horn and his men might come on. But these Hurons!

The boat glided along. The sun rose higher and made of the river a band of gold and gems, where

each little wavelet dazzled in strange colors. They passed great plains where grass grew rank and waved in the wind like another sea of green. Then a belt of pines or walnut, the first standing stiff and strong, the others mound-like.

The bowed figure had straightened itself and spoken to the men, but not turned his face. Now he gave an order and the boat swerved in toward the shore, grating a little on the pebbly beach. The other one in advance turned also. Some food was distributed. He spoke in the Huron language, and said they must make Bear Creek by night.

It was dreadful to go out in the broiling sun again, but presently a cooling breeze blew up. They passed a chain of boats well laden, going down, the French sailors singing a merry lilt, and they gave each other greeting. The shadows began to grow longer and a reviving fragrance was wafted over from the shore edge. There were fields abloom with gay flowers, then shrubby clumps, and when the sun went down they had neared a little cove where one could see two rather dilapidated wigwams. Here they were to stop for the night.

The men began to make a fire, while provisions were brought out of the boat. The two girls had been left alone, but now the chief—Wawataysee knew he was that by his dress and a long black feather stuck through the topknot of hair—turned to her. Oh, then she was quite sure she had seen him before and her heart stood still. Yes, it was in that life she had fled from.

He addressed her in the Huron tongue; she answered irrelevantly in French. A frown crossed his brow, but he handed them both out of the boat with a firm grasp on the arm of each, and led them to the smaller tent of the two. Some fir and hemlock branches had been thrown on the ground and covered with a blanket.

“You and the child will be safe here. You will be well guarded,” with a cruel little smile. “Some supper will be sent you. Compose yourself.”

She gave no sign of recognition.

“You cannot deceive me, Firefly of the Hurons, even if some French blood does course in your veins and you are tricked out in this attire. Your brother’s anger was kindled against you when you made him break his word, when you ran off with a vile Frenchman. If you could have been found justice would have been swift and sure. And now you will go back. You will not be a wife this time, but a slave to your master and his other wives.”

“I am a wife already,” she answered proudly in his language, since it was no use to feign. “I have been wedded a year by a priest, and the Great Manitou will call down vengeance upon those who dare interfere with his ordinances. And what right have you to bring me here?”

“I bought you, Mistress Insolence. And I shall double my price when the Chief Pamussac hears that you will be at his service.”

There was a little dagger lying in a treasure box at home. Her husband had given it to her. If she had it here she would stab him to the heart.

“Well, what is your reply?” he asked in a tone of triumph. “Your white lord is dead. He cannot come at your call.”

“My reply is that we are both hungry and want some supper,” she returned in an impatient tone. “And then some more blankets,” glancing disdainfully at the pile of boughs. “You will hardly double your money if you starve or maltreat me. I may die on your hands.”

Black Feather was more than amazed at the effrontery of the girl. He stared at her, and his fingers worked as if he would like to clutch her by the throat. Yes, what she said was true enough.

Wawataysee knew well that an Indian despised any sign of weakness or cowardice, and that to secure good treatment she must put on the boldness of the soldier who does not fear even death, and from whom his persecutors can extort no groan.

“I will send you some supper. And guards shall be set to keep you from harm,” in a mocking tone.

“Take my thanks for that,” she flung out sharply. “I am mortally afraid of the wild beasts of the forests. And I would like some sleep after this hot, fatiguing day and the early start of the morning.”

“Oh, what did he say?” and Renée clung to her with desperation. “He was so fierce I thought he would kill us. And why are we here? Where is Elk Horn?”

“My little darling, it seems that we have been sold and are to be taken up north, unless the Great Manitou or the pitying Virgin listens to our prayers and sends us rescue. It is a long way and something may happen.”

Renée began to cry.

“Sweet, take courage. I do not know why, but I have a curious faith that overrides my fears, that

something will intervene. Elk Horn has dealt treacherously, after the fashion of his tribe. Oh, my darling! I know you will see Uncle Gaspard again, so dry your tears."

"I am so tired of the journeying and those fierce men. Do you remember the old Chief Neepawa and the women of the village? They seemed like ours at home."

"Ah, I wish we were there!"

The supper came in, and, in spite of their fears, they were hungry. The wind rose and the air was delightfully cool. Wawataysee spread the bed and the child was soon peacefully asleep. The tent pole was a tree that had been trimmed for that purpose, and the young girl leaned against it, watching the flicker of the fire without and the pine torches that had been lighted. Courageous as she had appeared, every pulse shrank and throbbed. But there was death. She would be no man's slave. Only Renée must not be left behind. She knew of poisonous plants for which there was no remedy. Oh, would she have the courage to take another's life?

She dozed at length, even in her uncomfortable position. Then something roused her, a rending crash and a glare that seemed to be the world on fire. She sprang up, and the next crash she knew was the storm that had broken over them with the wildest fury. Were there cries of beast and men mingled with it? The deluge seemed to sweep the ground, the trees writhed and groaned and crashed in the fury of the gale. In the intervals she could hear voices without. Presently the flashes of bewildering light ceased, though the mutterings of thunder could still be heard, and the trees were wind-swept by the fierceness of the mighty power. One and another came down, but her tent stood the storm and was sheltered by an angle of three trees.

The gray light of morning began to dawn sullenly. She watched the faint streaks stealing through the loopholes. Renée still slept. She went to the flap of the wigwam and raised it. The rain was pouring in torrents. There at her feet lay a body, the leggings and deer-skin breeches ploughed by a curious zigzag streak, scorched and torn, and the blanket shrivelled to fragments. Some figures were moving about like wraiths in the dusky light. It was a weird picture. She was not at all afraid. She was used to forest storms.

One of the figures came nearer. "Ma'm'selle!" it said in a whisper.

The familiar word was the sweetest music. She stretched out her hand.

"I never saw anything so terrible. And you—lived? Others have gone. Three are dead. One is drowned, and Black Feather—" Valbonais's voice trembled.

"Well!" with a long breath. Did she hope for his death?

"He ordered the men to look after the boats. They had been drawn up, but the ground was sloping, the rain a torrent, the blackness something fearful save when the blinding blaze of light came. He was there ordering, cursing, threatening. Then a tree crashed down and pinned him to the earth. He is badly hurt about the legs, but has voice enough left in him for four."

Wawataysee shuddered.

"Ma'm'selle!" in a breathless manner.

"Yes?" with eager inquiry.

"I am going to escape. There never can be a more favorable moment."

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried in a piercing tone.

"I shall find my way to St. Louis. Ma'm'selle, if you and the child dared and would trust me. For if I have heard aright, you are to be taken to some chief up in the straits. And if you shrank from going——"

"I shall never reach there alive. I know a swift, unfailing poison—" And her words came out sharply.

He gave her a half-horrified, half-entreating look.

"It will be a hard journey. But if we should start now there is not much chance of our being overtaken. Everything is in such confusion, and it may be weeks before Black Feather is able to move about. We would follow the river as well as we could, keeping out of sight if the other boats come up, as they are likely to do. For the rest we must trust to the good God. I shall take a gun. I have dreamed this over many times. And if you will go——"

"You mean to start now—in the storm?"

"It will clear up presently, by noon. Meanwhile, I could plan all the arrangements. Just now you are not a close prisoner. There is no telling what may happen to-morrow."

"That is true." Wawataysee studied the eager young face. The eyes had an honest, pleading look. "I will trust you," she said. "Tell me what to do when you are ready."

The party were too terror-stricken to think much of their captives. There were the three dead men lying out in the rain. They brought Black Feather up to the miserable wigwam and bound up his bruised limbs, finding that one leg only was broken. Black Feather had tabooed the company of women on these journeys, and had a half-breed that he had trained for a cook. Just now an old Indian nurse would have been very serviceable. Once he roused himself from his pain and suffering, cursing with true Indian passion.

“Look if the girl and the child are safe,” he commanded in threatening tones.

They had fared very well in the storm. Both they and the shelter had taken no harm.

Valbonais had gathered a sack of provisions and taken it down below the camp some distance, leaving it there with the gun. He had been very helpful all the morning, and his brief absence had not been noted.

At noon the rain ceased, though it was nearly an hour before the sun came out. Dinner was eaten, the boats were dragged up so as to be within sight, and two or three of the Indians were kept busy about their master. Two of the prisoners had been killed and one Indian. Black Feather ordered them buried.

Valbonais came to the door of the tent.

“Give me one of the blankets,” he said, “and send the child out to the back of the tent when you can do so unperceived. Then wrap yourself in the other and steal away. We will take the other side of the strip of woods. It is not wide.”

Renée ran out presently and seized his hand.

“Oh, are we going back to St. Louis?” she asked in a whisper, while her eyes were alight with joy.

“I hope so, little one. Come this way. Now you will not be afraid to stay here. Do not utter a cry or sound. Wrap the blanket about you—so.”

Then Valbonais waited and waited. He made one journey to Renée to comfort her. Then he saw Wawataysee struggling through an aperture she had made in the tent, and ran to her assistance.

“There were so many of them about,” she said breathlessly. “I pinned the tent flap down with a stout stick, so they may think I am asleep. Oh, let us hurry. I am so afraid,” and she trembled in her excitement, though she ran lightly along.

When they reached Renée he picked up the sack of food and slung it over his shoulder, took the gun and one blanket, while Wawataysee wrapped the other about herself, the gray making her more indistinct. Renée, wild with joy, danced and skipped, and could not repress soft gurgles of laughter as she kept on ahead of them.

Valbonais found Wawataysee fleet of foot and graceful as a forest nymph. The blanket did not seem to impede her skimming motion. The sense of danger and the thought of freedom inspired her, and hope swelled anew in her breast. Surely the good God would have François in His keeping and let them meet again.

CHAPTER X—IN THE WILDERNESS

The way was tolerably clear for a long distance, though shielded from the view of the Indians by the intervening trees. When the strip of woods failed them for shelter it was growing dusk, and, with the rise of the wind, they could hardly have been distinguished from the waving shrubbery. Valbonais paused and glanced back now and then, but no pursuers were in sight.

“Take it a little more moderately,” Valbonais said. “We must not lose sight of the river, or we may go astray. Though we have made a gain by cutting off this point that juts into the stream. Ah, if we only had any kind of a boat!”

“They might see us on the river.”

“Hardly at night, and not very clear at that. We must make for that dark line ahead of us, a bit of woods where we can camp for the night.”

It was quite dark when they reached it, and with some difficulty he made a light. It was largely scrubby pines and the soil was sandy, dry in spite of the tremendous rain, though evidently there had not been as much here. Valbonais found a dead, dry branch of pine, which he lighted, and began to explore. A short distance in was a pile of stones heaped up four or five feet, evidently some burial spot. He glanced at its capabilities, then began tumbling out the smaller ones that seemed to be largely at one side.

“What are you going to do?” asked Wawataysee.

“Make a sort of cave. Oh, you will see,” laughingly.

“But let me help,” she cried eagerly.

“No, no! Or, if you wish, will you take my knife and cut some pine boughs, the bushiest ones?”

He had stuck his dry branch in the sand and piled a few others around it. Renée stood by the fire, much interested.

Valbonais tore out the stones until he had a hollow place like a great chair. This he partly filled with the ends of the boughs Wawataysee had gathered.

“This will make a bed for you and the child. You will have to sleep sitting up; but you ought to be able to sleep anywhere.”

“Oh, look! look!” cried Renée, clapping her hands. “A golden baby moon down there in the sky! Is it not beautiful?”

The sky was of deepest azure, the stars mostly to the northwest. One was almost at the point of the crescent, as if lighting each other on the way.

“To-morrow or the next night it will be in her arms,” said the young fellow.

“A baby star in a cradle,” exclaimed Renée. “Oh, is it not wonderful? What is that?” and she suddenly shrank toward her companions.

“Only the cry of some night bird. These clumps of woods are not thick enough to harbor wild animals, thank the saints! Now, ma’m’selle, you sit here and try it.”

He had spread a blanket over the pine boughs. She sank gracefully into the seat and leaned back her head with a certain air of luxuriance.

“Oh, it is splendid!” in a grateful tone.

Renée ran to try.

Valbonais stirred out the coals, took a piece of dried fish from his bag and some corn cakes and toasted both. They were hungry enough to eat without any demur—in truth, enjoyed it in the perfect freedom from fear.

“Now,” he said, “you must settle yourself for the night. I do not think we shall be molested. The small band will be busy with their chief and repairing damages. Then I found some of them were very superstitious about a woman being in the party.”

“But I was held only for the money I would bring Black Feather. Otherwise I would have been looked upon as a useless burden. They dropped off poor Mère Lunde on the way, and yet she could have done them good service. Come, Renée.”

“I am not a bit sleepy,” returned Renée. “It seems almost like being at home with no fierce Indians about; only if Uncle Gaspard were here, and M’sieu Marchand,” she was about to add, but checked herself.

“We must be up betimes to-morrow and on our way,” Valbonais said. “It will not do to loiter.”

“What will you do meanwhile?” inquired Wawataysee.

“Sit here and tend the fire,” he said. “I shall only keep enough to see about in case I have to defend myself from any midnight prowler.”

He folded the blankets around the two, who certainly looked comfortable in their rocky bed. He pushed his way through the thicket and ran down a short distance, where he had command of the river. Nothing was going either way. How sweet and tranquil it all was, after the terrors of last night! He could have stayed there hours watching the stars come out brighter and brighter, and the soft wind weaving strange melodies, whispering of hope.

Both girls were asleep when he returned. He sat down outside the enclosure and leaned his shoulders against it. His gun was by his side, his knife in his belt. He should have had a hatchet, too; that useful article no one scarcely travelled without, but in the excitement he had not thought of everything. Once he replenished the fire; then the fuel gave out and he fell asleep.

Nothing molested them. The singing of some birds in the thicket roused him. He hurried to the river; all was tranquil, silent, with no enemy in sight. Then he glanced down the long and arid space, where even grass grew sparsely in the sandy soil that held no moisture. They must start early so as to escape the mid-day heat.

Wawataysee had risen and smoothed her ruffled plumes.

“It is so beautiful!” she said, with heartfelt pleasure. “And, oh, to be free from horrid fears! I slept so tranquilly. Did you have any rest?”

“I forgot everything,” and he laughed with a glad sound. “I was not a very good watcher,

perhaps, but I think any unusual noise would have startled me."

"You are so good! What would we have done without you?" raising her beautiful, grateful eyes.

He flushed warmly. "We cannot have much variety for breakfast," with a gleam of amusement. "We may fare better to-night."

He lighted the small fire again, collecting the charred embers.

"Is it far to the river—and safe?"

"Not much of a run," he answered. "The shore is shallow. I had a reviving bath."

"Come, Renée," and she held out her hand to the child.

Meanwhile, Valbonais replaced the stones, wondering what hands had brought them there in the first instance, and whether white or Indian lay at rest beneath them. The girls were racing over the sand, bright, fresh and glowing, and they partook of their simple breakfast and started on their journey. The sun was not shining brightly, yet there was no indication of rain. It was as if Nature was indulging in a tranquil mood. Now and then a flock of birds went sailing over their heads, and a squirrel out of place ran nimbly across the sand.

"You have no idea how far it is to St. Louis?" their companion inquired.

"Oh, hundreds of miles!" cried Renée.

"Hardly that," said Wawataysee. "There have been so many delays. When I came from the straits it was with the fleet, and I hardly took note;" flushing as she recalled the delightful journey with her husband. "Yet it seems to me we cannot have gone so very far up."

"Is there any particular point that you can remember? There was the Indian settlement where we met, little thinking then that we should be mates on a return journey. Whether it would be safe to trust them——"

"There was another halt, up a little stream. A settlement of Peoria Indians, who are kindly and who have adopted many habits from the whites, are more intelligent than most other tribes. That is down farther still. It was our first stopping place. They were very generous with provisions."

"That will be one of our troubles. Still there will be small game to shoot and fish to catch."

Although there was considerable travel down the Illinois and some quite well-appointed stations, they were far between. The fur and trading fleets, if the lines of flat boats and canoes could be called that, carried abundant provisions. Roving bands of Indians and parties of adventurous hunters crossing the interior were the only travellers, and they often stopped at the forts.

They went farther out by the river. And suddenly there was a serious surprise. Around a wooded bend came a canoe filled with Indians. Then another and one of stores, and one figure was suspiciously studying the shore. They had hidden among the trees, but were peering out cautiously.

"Oh!" Wawataysee whispered, "it is Elk Horn and his party! See, he is standing up, looking this way! O Mother of God, come to the assistance of thy children!" and, sinking on her knees, she clasped her hands in supplication.

It was Elk Horn. He had sobered up and began to realize that he might have made a better bargain with his prisoners. He had secured some more arms and ammunition, and hoped now to overtake Black Feather. His glance around was not indicative of the slightest certainty. He could not have dreamed that the fugitives in the woods were the very ones he meant to quarrel and perhaps fight about when he met Black Feather.

Wawataysee scarcely breathed until the last canoe was but a dusky line on the river.

"We certainly are safe," Valbonais said. "Of course, they could not suppose we had escaped."

"I was so afraid they were in search of a landing place. Oh, if they had stopped!" in terror.

"Then we would have plunged farther in the woods, climbed trees even. I do not mean to be taken a prisoner again; and surely, it will go hard with me if you are, or hard with the abductor!" with a gleam of resolution.

"I am glad they have gone up the river," declared Wawataysee. "Now there is no fear of meeting them."

"If we could find some traders coming down——"

"And trust them?" There was a troubled light in her eye. "Oh, now that I know there are two people in the world, perhaps three, hungering for revenge on me, I am sore afraid at times. I shall never see a Huron without reading a menace in his eye."

Valbonais glanced at her inquiringly.

“You have heard part of the story. Let me join the tangled threads, and you will the better understand my misgivings.”

“Let us go on now. Every hour is precious. And it will delight me to listen to anything that has concerned thee,” bowing low to her.

So she told of her home and her affiliations with the French, being related on her mother’s side, and how she had always liked them the more, while her brother was proud of his Indian blood and his chieftain father. It was not until she had met and loved François Marchand and plighted her troth to him that she was informed of her brother’s intentions toward her, and she prayed to him for the liberty of choosing her own husband—admitted, indeed, that she had chosen him and could be the wife of no one else. Then he had sent a messenger to say that her escort was on the way with orders to bring him to her at once, and that preparations were being made for a grand marriage. The trading fleet was ready. She had only to step on board. At the first mission station they had stopped for the priest to marry them.

“So, you see, I could never, never be the wife of any other man. And this chief has two wives. He told my brother that I should be first: but Indian women do not always accept their dismissal so easily.”

There was a proud, steadfast light in her eyes, the bloom of courage and constancy on her soft cheek. How beautiful she was!

“And M. Marchand——” in a low tone, half inquiry.

“Whether he is dead or alive I do not know. But I am his in death as well as life,” with a firmness that bespoke the utmost devotion.

No, she would never let another wrest from her the holy bond she had given him with her sweet maidenhood love.

Night was coming on apace again. There was no cairn of stones to be transformed into a sleeping chamber. Renée was very tired and a little pettish.

“Is there nothing for supper but these dried, hard cakes and the fish?” she asked discontentedly.

“And not even that for breakfast,” Valbonais said lightly. “I must get up early and shoot some game. There is no corn matured yet, so if we came to growing fields the juicy ears would not be there. But I think I can find something,” hopefully.

This night they had to have a forest bed, but he found a place soft with a kind of dried turf, and spread out one blanket for pallet and left one to cover them with. Then he kindled a fire at some distance, for he had heard the cry of an animal. Farther off, then nearer, a stealthy creeping along. He reached for his gun and glanced cautiously around. Presently he caught the glare of two sparks of flame coming nearer, crouching down, and he fired.

“Oh, what is it?” Wawataysee sprang up in affright.

“Some animal. I think he is dead, however.” He lighted a torch and went nearer, touched the creature with his foot. The shot had hit him squarely, shattering his head.

“Only a poor fox. Nothing for our breakfast;” yet he gave a cheerful laugh.

“Oh, I am glad it was nothing worse.”

“Do not dream of trouble. The good God will watch over us.”

She pressed his hand. She was glad to be near a lightsome, courageous human being.

Presently she stole back to her bed. Nothing else came to startle them. When she woke again the sun was shining. Valbonais had kindled a fire, shot and dressed some birds and was broiling them before the coals.

“Was it a dream,” she asked, “or did you really shoot in the night?”

“Yes; and I have taken a part of the fox’s coat. It may be useful for moccasin soles before we are through.”

“Poor thing!” she said pityingly.

The breakfast was delightful, after the two days of dried fish. Then Renée found a patch of wild strawberries that the birds had not discovered. They were dead ripe and luscious. Now they went on with cheerful hearts, keeping the river in sight, but meeting nothing more alarming than a herd of roaming deer. It was useless to fire at them; birds would be more to the purpose. Toward night they struck a rude cabin, made by hunters, as it did not look like Indian workmanship. There had been a fire, but since that time it had rained. Inside was a table and a bed of dried

hemlock branches.

“I think we had better stay,” Valbonais announced. “It is a hunter’s cabin, evidently, and no one has been here for some time. There is a little stream of excellent water. We will trust luck, at all events.”

They had some supper and were glad of shelter, for it came on to rain, but no such terrific storm as that which had worked such havoc with Black Feather and his party. The soft patter on the leaves was delightful music, though for awhile the rustle of the wind seemed almost like the advance of human beings.

It was well they were under shelter, for it rained all the next day. No one came to molest them. Valbonais caught such an excellent supply of fish that he cooked some for the following day. If there was only any ripe fruit!

“It was late in May when we left St. Louis,” Wawataysee said.

“And now it is June. What day I do not know.”

“Let us count back.”

But their reckoning was not alike. They forgot, and then recalled incidents that had marked days, then lost count again. Renée was wretchedly tired.

“Poor little thing!” exclaimed Wawataysee. “She has been very good and courageous, but it is hard for her. And look at her poor little moccasins—out to the ground.”

“Then Mr. Foxskin will serve us a useful purpose. I have nothing to fasten them on with, but can tie them with strips of his skin to-morrow. And yours?”

She flushed. Hers were in the same plight.

“But I can stand hardships better,” and she smiled cheerfully.

Renée slept all the afternoon and woke much refreshed. It had stopped raining, and now they were full of plans for to-morrow. The moon came out—the baby star had travelled nearly across it.

“I am glad it is a new moon. We shall have some benefit of it the rest of our journey,” their guide said.

“Oh, when shall we get home?” cried Renée impatiently. “Do you suppose there have been any more Indian assaults?”

“You have been remarkably favored at St. Louis. To the east, towns have been burned, people taken captive by scores or murdered. And up north it seems to have been a regular battlefield, with the French losers every time. Think of the English holding our splendid Quebec and Montreal!”

“I have been in Quebec, monsieur,” declared Renée, with amusing dignity.

“And France, too,” added Wawataysee.

Then Renée found herself quite a heroine in the eyes of Valbonais, and was delighted to recall her experiences.

They left the cabin and journeyed on; slept in the woods that night and the next. There had been several feasts of berries; they saw some green plums and green wild grapes, but neither were tempting. Now, some way, it seemed as if they had lost their reckoning. The river certainly was to the west of them.

“And we must go southward.” said Wawataysee.

Their good fortune had failed them to-day. They had found nothing. They were tired and hungry. And if they were lost!——

They turned into an opening. Here ran a clear creek, at which they quenched their thirst.

“Let us follow it some distance at least. It must go to the river. It has quite a current.”

It suddenly widened out and grew larger as they went on. They glanced at each other in dismay.

“If it goes to the river, how can we cross so wide a stream? Could either of us swim with the child? I think it would be better to go back and cross where it is narrower.”

So they retraced their steps and found that it was fed by a rivulet on the other side, almost hidden by the grass. Valbonais paused a moment to enjoy the picture. Everywhere the most serene quiet. Songs of birds, the call of some animal, the rustle of a deer and the brown, startled eyes gazing at one. The green of the foliage with its light and varying shades, the long stretches

of wild grass dotted with various-colored flowers, and here and there a silvery streak of sand like a silver ribbon.

On and on, the creek growing narrower. The man's eyes caught sight of a young fallen tree.

"I think I can bridge it over. Let me try this," and he dragged the tree to the edge, stood it up, letting it fall with some force. It just touched the opposite shore.

"Now if I could find another. Why did I not capture a hatchet in my raid on the Indians!"

"The water is clear and deep," said Wawataysee; "too deep for one to wade."

"I could cross it with the child. Still I will see if there is not another dead tree."

This time it was a larger one. It took their united strength to raise it, but it went straight across, making quite a promising bridge.

"Would you dare?" He glanced at the Indian girl with an assurance of her courage.

"Would I dare?" She laughed melodiously. Then she looked steadily at it a moment, started like an arrow from a bow and in a flash was across.

"Oh, how beautiful! Can I try?" Renée clapped her hands, and her face was brimming with delighted eagerness.

"Wait a moment." Valbonais picked up the blanket and strapped his gun to his back, convoying them over safely and depositing them on the ground. "I wonder if we dare trust the child?"

"Oh, I think so. It is such a step," Wawataysee answered.

He went back to her. "You will not be afraid, little one? You can run swiftly, and if you can keep a steady head——"

"Yes, yes!" Wawataysee stood with outstretched arms and smiled. Renée started with a child's audacity. The round logs, instead of the flat surface, confused her and she hesitated, lost her balance and went down with a cry. Valbonais sprang into the creek, but missed his first grasp of her. The next brought her safely up and Wawataysee took her, frightened and half strangled. Valbonais shook himself and laughed.

"I would rather the clothes had not taken a bath. And she is wet, but not injured."

"It slipped and rolled," the child began, "and then I couldn't keep on. Oh, dear! I am all dripping."

"Roll her in a blanket. I am sorry it is so near dark and we cannot tell quite which way to go."

"We must keep on toward the Illinois," said Wawataysee. "Oh, and now I think we came up a creek to the Peorias' lodge. What if this should be the stream? Then we are nearer home than I thought."

Her eyes shone like stars, her voice was freighted with joy, for her thought was an inspiration.

"I do not see how we could have gone out of the way," he returned, knitting his brows.

"The river winds. We may have shortened our journey a little by it. And if we could find the lodge! Oh, I can't help feeling that we are all right!"

She was wringing Renée's garments and rubbing her with a blanket. Valbonais pressed the water out of his, and tried to catch the inspiration.

"Now we must go on. Renée, you must keep the blanket about you," the elder said.

"But it is so warm. I am most smothered."

"It will be cooler presently," in a consoling tone.

"And I am so hungry!" she said, half crying.

They had eaten nothing since morning.

"We are all hungry. And if we can find those kindly Indians they will give us a feast."

"I hope she is right." Valbonais thought.

They walked briskly onward for a while. The moon came up and shed its silver radiance, setting the little stream with gems and showering the trees with her effulgent flood. But to-night they could not enjoy it—could hardly keep hope alive.

"I am so tired!" Renée began to cry in earnest and stopped short. The reaction had come and she

shivered with a chill. Her slight frame was in a collapse.

“I will carry her,” said Valbonais. “We shall get along faster.”

Wawataysee took the other blanket and the gun. The summer night was growing chilly here at the edge of the creek. They waded through the other stream. Renée’s head drooped on the man’s shoulder. She had forgotten her troubles in sleep. But presently he had to pause with his burden.

“Let us sit here and rest awhile. And if you could sleep an hour it would refresh you so much.”

Wawataysee leaned against a great tree bole that was like a column. The relaxation was grateful. What with fatigue and hunger, nature was overpowered and they all slept. When Wawataysee awoke the darkness startled her. The moon had gone down. She stretched out her hand in half terror.

“You have had a nice sleep,” began Valbonais cheerfully. “I, too, caught a nap. It must be near morning. Do you feel that you can go on?”

“Oh, yes! And the child? How strong and courageous you are!”

He stood Renée down and she roused. “Oh, where are we?” she cried in affright.

“Here, dear.” Wawataysee took her hand. “We are going to the Indian lodge, where we shall get some breakfast. Can you walk?”

“Why, yes. But I *am* tired. Will we soon be there? And, oh, I wish it was not so dark!”

Still, she went on without further complaint. Darker and darker it seemed. She gave her other hand to Valbonais. They both felt she lagged a little.

Suddenly a rosy light shot up in the east, and out of it great spires of crimson and gold that set the heavens aflame. The stars hung low in the northwest, and one by one dropped out of sight. Countless birds filled the air with melody, and every tree and shrub shook out its fragrance.

“Courage!” Wawataysee said, but her voice was tremulous with her twenty-four hours’ fast. And the walk seemed interminable. Her feet were shodden with lead.

Oh, what was this? Fields of young corn, shedding its peculiar fragrance as the dew was vanishing in the drier air of morning. In the distance hooded wigwams, a palisade to the north for shelter, blue-gray curling wreaths going up from newly kindled fires. The barking of dogs and the curious, pervasive sense of human life.

It seemed as if an army of dogs rushed out. An authoritative voice checked them, and an Indian came forward to learn the cause of the alarm. Wawataysee sank down on a stone and the world seemed whirling round, while Renée, crying, fell into her lap.

CHAPTER XI—WAS EVER WELCOME SWEETER

It was, indeed, the lodges of the Peorias. The old chief, Neepawa, had long since given up rambling life, and with many of the elder people formed a settlement, where they had lived in peace with their white neighbors and seldom been molested by their red brethren. They were more industrious than many tribes. The main colony was about Ste. Genevieve, but these adored their old chief and his wife and enjoyed the smaller combination. They were kindly hearted and ready to hold out a helping hand, and enjoyed their seclusion.

Wawataysee had collapsed from fatigue and pure joy at the certainty that they would reach St. Louis once more. Of the next few incidents she kept only the vague remembrance of a dream. She was taken into one of the lodges and water brought to her, and when the woman saw how utterly exhausted she was, she bathed her face and combed her hair, then her poor feet, and brought her a cup of warm spiced drink, put her in some fresh garments and left her to sleep. Some other motherly hands had taken Renée in charge, who chattered with all the Indian words she had picked up and entertained her hostess extremely.

Meanwhile, Valbonais had related to the old chief his own mishaps, his meeting with Wawataysee and Renée in their captivity, the terrible storm and the disaster to Black Feather and his followers that had led to their opportunity of escape. Neepawa had heard of the attack on St. Louis, and the signal repulse the marauders had suffered. He admired the courage of the captives and was glad they had found a haven. From here they could easily be returned to St. Louis. But Valbonais also learned that they had narrowly missed an encounter with quite a large body of Sioux and Winnebagoes, who would no doubt have taken them prisoners again if they had followed the river more directly. They had made quite a wide detour, it seemed, and to that they owed their safety.

Renée seemed none the worse for her ducking and the fatigue when she had been bathed, put in dry clothes and had a bountiful breakfast. The Indian children and their plays interested her immensely. And there was so much strange and new about the settlement and other things that

suggested her first Indian friend, Mattawissa.

Wawataysee slept until past noon, when she awoke refreshed, and at the first moment so surprised that she could not imagine where she was. But the familiar faces of Renée and André Valbonais quite restored her. How warmly sympathetic these children of nature were! Ah, what if they had fallen into captivity again! and she shuddered.

They talked of starting, but the old chief would not listen to such a plan.

“You have had enough of travelling in the night,” he said. “To-morrow some of our young men will take you down. Until then be content.”

So they smoked the pipe of peace and amity, and talked of the mighty changes going on in the Continent, the new nation seeming a conglomerate of many peoples, sweeping everything before them with their resistless energy; of the towns springing up where different tribes had roamed about and slaughtered each other. Almost eighty years ago Neepawa had been born, when his race was ruler of nearly all the country.

The travellers were really loaded with gifts the next morning. Two young Indians were to row them down the river and return. With many thanks they parted from their kind entertainers, with promises of grateful remembrance.

Renée could hardly contain herself. Anywhere else she must have danced for joy. Of course, there would be Uncle Gaspard. And she almost believed Mère Lunde must have found her way home, since they had succeeded under such difficulties.

And now familiar sights met their eyes. Here was the Missouri River coming to greet her mighty mother; Fort St. Charles with its hamlets, the bend in the river, the islands, the old town itself, the towers, the fort, the palisade rendered much stronger since the attack; the bluff with its rocky ledge, and then the wharf.

Business was over. There was not much doing at this season, and nearly every one had gone home. A few parties were out canoeing or rowing on the river. The two Indians would return in spite of entreaties, and they bid their white guests good-by.

Down along the levee the two girls, holding hands tightly, ran with all their speed. One hardly had a chance to see their faces. They turned up by the Government House, where a group of men sat smoking and enjoying the late afternoon coolness. Valbonais followed wonderingly. This was St. Louis! What had Indians or British hoped to gain by attacking so small a place, for he had thought of it as resembling Montreal or Quebec. Up the Rue de la Tour—there stood the shop door open——

“Uncle Gaspard! Dear Uncle Gaspard! we have come back!” cried Renée, flying in.

It was not Uncle Gaspard, but François Marchand, growing white to the very lips at the apparition that met his gaze. Was it a dream? He hardly dared approach. The words died on his lips.

Renée dropped the Indian girl’s hand and rushed through the half-open doorway. There was Mère Lunde in a chair outside, half hidden in the nest of vines, knitting leisurely. That for the moment did not surprise Renée. She caught the elder woman’s shoulder and almost shook her.

“Where is my Uncle Gaspard? Tell me at once! Where is he? Where is he?” the child cried imperiously.

Mère Lunde let her knitting fall and stared with wild eyes. “He!” she exclaimed tremulously. “He! Have you not met him? He set out almost at once for you. Oh, the good God and all the angels be praised! Now we will be happy again. Oh, child, my heart has broken for you! How did you escape?”

All the color left Renée’s eager face. She stretched out her hands as if to clasp something. The eyes seemed dulled by some far, desperate gaze.

“Uncle Gaspard! Gone!” she faltered.

“Oh, did you not meet him? Child, he would not rest until he had set out. Is it thy pretty prank, little one? Is he staying behind to tell some one the story and then surprise us?”

“He did not come!” she wailed, her heart throbbing with passionate grief. “We have not seen him. Oh, mère, mère, the cruel Indians have captured him! And I was so sure.”

She sank in a little heap at the woman’s feet. After all the dangers and alternations of hope and fear, the fatigues, the last blow had been too much for her. Mère Lunde gathered the limp form in her arms, then laid her on the rustic settle, chafing the small hands and bathing the face with a fragrant concoction of her French skill. She drew slow breaths presently, but did not open her eyes.

François Marchand gazed on his wife, speechless with a curious doubt, as one in a dream. Then

he came nearer. She was thinner, the rose bloom had faded from her cheeks and there were dark shadows about her eyes. But oh, surely it was no ghost come to mock him!

He took her in his arms, and if the shape had melted into vague nothingness he would not have felt surprised. But it did not. It was soft flesh. He rained kisses on brow and cheek and lips; her sigh was a breath of perfume. Was it moments or hours?

“Thanks be to God and our good friend Gaspard!” he said presently. “Oh, my sweet blossom of northern wilds, my treasure, my queen, how I have feared and wept for thee! What lonely days! What sleepless nights! And I bound to the bed by wounds and fever and a broken limb, knowing thou wert in the hands of cruel enemies and I helpless to succor thee. And that brave soul came to thy rescue! How can we ever thank him enough?”

She could not speak at first, only return kisses for kisses. He found a seat and drew her close in tender embrace; felt the throb of the heart against his, though the whole slim figure was full of languor.

“And I was never certain if you were dead or alive. When they dragged me from you at the edge of the woods there was no motion to assure me. All night I dreamed of you, torn, perhaps, by some prowling beast, or lying there stark and stiff.”

“It was Gaspard who found me, who placed me in wise care and then set off. Oh, let us go and thank him. Every moment’s delay is ingratitude.”

“Is he not here?” She raised her head from his breast. “We have not seen him. We owe our escape and guidance to another captive—a young fellow considered a slave. But—we have not seen M. Denys.”

“Heaven send him safely back to us, then! He is a brave, noble friend. He believed you might be taken up to the straits and the child would be with you.”

She shuddered. She could not mar this happy moment by a relation of the dreadful fate which for a few days had hung over her and made her prefer death. Ah, how much harder the resolve would have been had she known of a certainty that her husband was living!

“After much tedious journeying we reached the Peoria settlement, back from the Illinois River, where the old Chief Neepawa governs a remnant of his tribe. They were most kindly and gave us rest and food until we were quite restored. Afterward they brought us home. Oh, my husband, my lord, my lover! To be with you once more is enough. I would have suffered twice the hardships and dangers for such a blissful end!”

He felt her frame tremble in his arms and pressed her closer in a transport of tenderness. Ah, the perfect content!

Then she bethought herself.

“The child,” she said, awakening to the more generous flow of sympathy that love for the time had overwhelmed. “The poor little Renée! She has looked forward every hour to meeting him again, and the disappointment will be bitter. It is more like a woman’s love than a child’s, though she is innocent of the deeper strivings of maidenhood. Come, let us go to her.”

Mère Lunde had to give the young wife a warm welcome. The tears of joy filled her faded eyes.

Renée lay on the settle, sobbing. Wawataysee bent over and would have taken her hand.

“Go away! go away!” she cried imperiously. “I do not want you. You have *him* to be glad with and I have no one, no one!”

The pathos of the tone was heartrending.

“Renée, my little dear, François is so glad.”

“Go away!” She turned her face to the wall and slapped impatiently with her hand. “I will not listen. The Indians have Uncle Gaspard, I know.”

Mère Lunde beckoned them. “She is very wilful at times, and now her heart is sore. But the good saints have led you both back. He has been north many a time and come home unharmed.”

“They will kill him this time!” the child almost shrieked. “There was that fierce Black Feather! Oh, he will never come back, never!”

The old woman waved them to the doorway and they turned and passed out. All the garden was abloom and sweet with the fragrance of growing fruit, tangled vines and flowers. The pale heavens had lost the light of day, and the blue of the night was hidden by a soft gray vagueness. Birds were singing good-night songs to each other and to sleepy nestlings. Marchand, with his arm around his wife, drew her into a secluded spot.

“Black Feather was a Huron,” he said, “mean, tricky, avaricious. Surely you were not in his

hands?" and his grasp tightened.

"Only a little while. Oh, I would never have been taken alive to the straits! And this young Valbonais was their captive. Oh, where has he disappeared to? He had an uncle in St. Louis, whither he was coming when they captured him."

"Tell me the story. I have had hundreds of fears for you, my darling, yet I kept trusting the All Father."

"Oh, not to-night!" she pleaded. "Is it not enough that I am restored, and that no evil has happened to me? Let us not mar the joy of this meeting."

So they sat until the white veil in the sky cleared away and all was a heavenly blue, with stars shining so bright they took on beautiful tints and twinkled as in a fairy dance. To the reunited hearts there had never been such a night of joy and splendor.

Renée sobbed herself to sleep, worn out with the pangs of disappointment. Mère Lunde would not disturb her. She set out a little supper for the other two, and they talked in low tones. Mère Lunde told of her wanderings, and that she had almost died of hunger and thirst.

"We who were so sadly bereft resolved to join forces," explained Marchand. "Gaspard Denys ought not lose everything by his generosity. So I have watched the trade and tried to fill his place as best I could, and Mère Lunde has kept the house, both praying and hoping. Several prisoners have escaped or been left by the Indians, who really did not want them and were afraid to practise the cruelties of other days lest a severe punishment might overtake them."

Renée was still dejected and inconsolable the next morning, and would receive no overtures from Wawataysee. The young wife understood. Not that Renée would have wished her any ill, but with the unreason of feminine things she could not endure the sight of their happy faces, the sound of the tender words they exchanged. She went out in the corner of the garden and made her moan, and would not be seen of the friends that came to congratulate the returned captives.

Nearly noon a young man paused at the gate, looking a little uncertain.

"It is André Valbonais!" cried Wawataysee, with delight. "I will bring him in and you must thank him with your full heart."

Valbonais was bright and smiling, his ragged clothes, that scarcely held together, replaced by a comfortable suit, if not new; his hair trimmed and in good order—a very attractive young fellow now, certainly.

"We were going to set out on a search for you," Wawataysee began. "In some unexpected manner we lost sight of you last night. How did you fare?"

"Oh, not badly," with a cheerful smile. "I knew you would go to friends who would be overjoyed to see you, and I wandered down a street, trying to find an inn, for I was not sure I would be allowed to stop in the street all night. So in my inquiry I met some one who knew my uncle, Pierre Valbonais, who, it seems, is at work in your great mill, and who lives beyond the court-house, in the Rue des Grainges. My faith, but you are a very hospitable folk," and his eyes shone with a joyous light. "This M. Pion would give me some supper and a bed, and we talked over my adventures smoking our pipes."

"I am glad you found a friend. It was our desire to take you in. And your relative?" with a slight hesitation.

"I found my way to the mill, and the uncle greeted me cordially. There is an aunt and some cousins, it seems, and I am to make my home with them for the present. Moreover, I find there is plenty of work to do and I shall be happy. Where is the little maid?"

Wawataysee explained Renée's grief at finding her uncle had not returned from his search. Then M. Marchand took him through to the shop, and was so earnest in his gratitude that it touched Valbonais deeply.

Renée came out of her garden corner as he was going away. Her pretty eyes were swollen with weeping.

"Oh, little one, you were so brave on the journey, amid all the hardships, that you must not lose heart now! And I hear your uncle has made many trips with the traders, so he knows about the Indians and is not likely to let them take him unawares. He will return, surely."

She cast her eyes down and made no reply. She would not be comforted even by him.

The Renauds came over in the afternoon, and though the girls followed her to the garden, she would not be amused with their chatter. What did she care about a new frock or a tea-drinking on the green by the fort, or games and plays?

"She is very disagreeable and cold," said Elise to Sophie as they were walking home. "I suppose because she has a 'de' before her name she thinks she can put on any airs. But I am older and

shall have a lover first. Of course, M. Denys will return. He always has before."

So everybody thought. And a child cannot be unhappy forever when every one joins to dispel her sorrow. She thawed out very slowly. André hardly knew what to make of her, she was so grave and indifferent.

He had found employment in the mill and felt quite elated. Madame Valbonais liked him very much. There was one son a trapper, though he did not take very long journeys. Then there were two bright girls who were not averse to having such an attractive cousin.

Through them he came to know the Renauds, and Barbe he thought extremely winsome. Before a fortnight had passed he was in the merrymakings and dances, and having a most enjoyable time. It did not trouble him now that he had been in more than one peril of his life.

The lieutenant-governor who had proved himself so unworthy was recalled. M. Cruzat was fortifying the town more securely than it had ever been, but for some time any body of Indians going back and forth roused a feeling of distrust and fear. Pleasure parties were careful not to trust themselves too far away.

Mère Lunde begged Wawataysee to remain with them, as M. Marchand was taking charge of the business. When Mattawissa came in with her pretty work and various articles, many of which went down to New Orleans, she and the young wife made very good friends.

"She will take every one away from me," thought the child with a swelling heart, and she grew more reserved. Even Mère Lunde had to yield to the sweetness of Wawataysee. Sometimes she sang really beautiful Indian songs and described vividly the dances and entertainments, though there were many in which only old women were allowed.

July began to ripen fruits and fill the farmers with joy at the prospect of abundant crops. But Renée counted the weeks sadly. She was growing pale and thinner, and roamed about like an unquiet ghost. She would not play with the children, but rambled desolately by herself and occasionally stole down to the end of the stockade and ventured out to see her grandfather. He seemed nearly always at home now, sitting outside his neglected-looking cabin smoking his pipe and patching his clothes or making moccasins, on which he put stout soles of skin. He would nod and occasionally push a stool to her, which was the round of a log, and motion her to be seated.

One day he said sharply: "Has anything been heard of Gaspard Denys? Some traders have come in."

She knew that. They had been at the shop.

"They have not seen him," she admitted sorrowfully.

"There would be news if he had been killed."

"Oh! oh!" A sharp pang went to the child's heart. To have another put her dread into words was like confirming it.

"That might be," said the old man. "The pitcher may go to the spring without spout or handle, but it gets an unlucky knock at the last."

She was silent.

"He made me give you to him. He bound me with signing a paper. Then if you are his, what he has comes naturally to you. There is the house and the garden. And the shop, with all its stores. Gaspard Denys has a strong box. There may be gold and silver in it. It belongs to you."

Renée stared at him. His skin was browner than ever, and his face wrinkled in every direction. His hair was unkempt, his eyes were so squinted up that they looked like two sparks merely.

"Oh," she cried, "what should I want with it all, and no Uncle Gaspard?"

"It will be a good dot. It will make you a good marriage when the time comes. And they must not get it away from you."

"They? Who?" in surprise.

"That man and his half-Indian wife. Ah, I have seen people before, men who can plan adroitly. And I tell you now he shall not have it. When the time comes I shall turn him out neck and heels, and we will see! I shall not have you cheated out of your rights, Renée de Longueville."

"I don't understand. If it is M. Marchand you mean——" and she eyed the old man resolutely.

"Who asked him to come in there? Gaspard Denys locked up his place, and he and that old woman opened it. They had no right, I say."

He struck the flat stone beside him with his fist, but it did not seem to hurt that member.

“It was Mère Lunde’s home. And she looks for him every day. Oh, if word came that he was dead we should both die of grief!”

Her lip quivered, her eyes filled with tears.

“Bah! No one dies of grief. And I will keep you out of that man’s clutches. I am your grandfather and I have some rights.”

Renée shuddered at the fierce old man. She had used to feel afraid of him, but it seemed of late that she did not fear anything, the darkness of the night nor the thunder storms, when it appeared as if the town would be hurled into the river. What if he should really claim her, if—if—Oh, she would a hundred times rather stay with M. Marchand, even if he was kissing and caressing Wawataysee half the time.

“I must go,” she said, rising. She had been trying to esteem him a little now that she was so lonely, but all the endeavor was like water spilled on the ground, and he had broken the bowl.

“You will come again. No one shall cheat you out of your rights,” nodding vigorously.

She turned away. First she thought she would walk along the river. It crept lazily to-day, yellow in the yellow sunshine. But when she reached the Rue Royale she turned into that. She did not care to pass the Renauds’—why was it that she could not love any one any more? that her heart seemed like lead in her bosom? So she went up to the Rue de l’Eglise straight on to the little church. She had not been Saturday afternoons of late. She knew the catechism and the prayers, and the children’s drawl seemed to spoil it for her. Sometimes people prayed for things and they came. Well, she was praying all the time for Uncle Gaspard’s return. Maybe it ought to be asked for in the church. She crept in softly.

The little old place was very, very plain. Even the altar and the high altar had but few decorations at this time. There was a candle burning and it shed a pale glow. There was a basin of holy water, and she reverently made the sign of the cross with it. Then she knelt down on the floor and clasped her small hands.

“O holy God,” she prayed, “O Christ, son of the holy God, listen to my sorrow, I beseech thee. Send back Uncle Gaspard, for my life is so lonely without him. Keep him safe from all danger.”

It seemed so different to pray here. She would come every day now. This was God’s house.

It was strange and she did not understand it a bit, but her heart felt lighter. The old garden was gay with bloom. Chatte came to meet her, arched his back and waved his tail like a flag, looking at her out of green, translucent eyes with a black bar straight up and down. She stooped and patted him and he began to purr with delight. He was as fond as she of sitting in Uncle Gaspard’s lap.

Mère Lunde was pounding green grapes, great, luscious wild grapes, into a mash. Then she would strain out the seeds and make a most delicious jam with maple sugar. How fragrant the room was with the spicy scent! She went up and kissed her tenderly, and tears came to the woman’s eyes at the unexpected caress.

Wawataysee sat by the open window doing some beautiful beadwork. M. Marchand was busy sorting goods and piling them up on the shelves, and whistling soft and low like the wood thrush. Well, why should he not be happy, now that he had Wawataysee back? And she had been almost angry about it—no, not angry, but hurt, and—perhaps she was selfish. Ah, think of her grandfather being here and turning things about, making it dismal and wretched! No, he should not order the place and turn out these two who had been so kind. Perhaps the Governor would know what was right. She would pray it might never happen. That would be another petition. And without understanding how religion comforted, she was happier.

CHAPTER XII—HER ANSWER

It was strange how petitions grew. Renée used to walk gravely up to the old church—the door was never fastened—and slip in and say her prayer. Once a woman came who had lost her little baby.

“Oh,” she said, when they had exchanged sorrows, “I think thou wilt be comforted. Gaspard Denys has come back times before. Many of our husbands and brothers have returned. But my little baby cannot return. I may live many, many years and grow old, and in all that time I shall never see him!”

Yes, that was a great sorrow, and a long waiting.

August came in. Pears and plums were ripening, and various articles were being put by for winter use. Sometimes the season was long and cold, and it was well to be prepared. Men worked in the fields to gather the early crops, and the young people had merry dances at night. The days began to grow a little shorter already.

Some one said as she stepped out of church one afternoon: “There is a small fleet coming down the river. Pierre Chouteau expects one of his in next week, but that will have a dozen or more.”

“That is only Latour’s. He has been up to St. Charles,” was the answer. “They have a great abundance of corn this season.”

Next week! Renée’s little heart beat with a great bound of joy. And after that boats would be coming in weekly, Indians with canoes full of furs, dried venison and fish from the lakes. If one of them brought Uncle Gaspard!

She went down to the rise of ground, almost like an embankment, long since worn away. She could see over the small throng. The first boat was moored; it had bales of something. The second had some passengers, women among them. A man was standing up, and suddenly he waved his hand. Who was it? It was waved again.

“Oh! oh!” She dropped down. All the air was full of sparks, and the river seemed turning round and getting mingled with the sky. When the mist cleared away she saw a confused throng of people, some leaping ashore, and a hurly-burly of voices. Had that brief vision been a dream? She felt strangely weak, then she laughed without knowing why and her eyes overflowed with tears.

A tall form came climbing up the hill with long strides, and then she was clasped in strong arms, she felt kisses on her forehead, she was lifted off her feet.

“Little one!” the voice said; and only one thing in her after life sounded as sweet. “Little one, oh, thank heaven you were saved!”

Then they sat down on the grass the sun had scorched into a dried mat.

“Did you come thinking to meet me?”

“I meant to come every time after this to meet the boats. Oh, you are alive! The fierce Indians have not killed you.”

How her voice trembled with emotion, and her hands were clasped tight about his arm!

“They have not had much chance.” How good it was to hear the old cheerful laugh. “And Wawataysee is safe, as well? Did Marchand recover? I have heard no news of the dear old town, but of you I heard long ago, and it made my heart as light as a bird mounting up to the sky. Perhaps it will please even your gentle heart to know that Black Feather, the treacherous Indian chief, is dead. You see, I hardly knew which direction to take and went wrong several times. Then I heard Elk Horn had sold some female captives to Black Feather, who had taken them up the Illinois River. When I reached an encampment where there had been a terrific storm I heard Black Feather had been seriously injured and had finally been moved to an interior encampment, where there was a medicine man. So, after a search, I found them. In spite of the medicine man the chief had died, and they had given him a grand funeral. His followers had dispersed. But I was told that, after the storm, some captives had escaped and he had been so angry he had two Indians put to death. So then I retraced my steps. Many a time I wondered if I should find you in the forests, dead from hunger and fatigue. Whether you had gone down the river—but you could not do that, unless some friendly boat had offered. I passed some lodges where they had not known of any wanderers, and at last met two Peoria Indians, who said the three escaped captives had reached them and been taken to St. Louis.”

He pressed the child closer, looked down in the fond, eager eyes that were shaded in a mist of emotion, and felt the eager grasp of the small hand. How much she cared, this motherless and well-nigh fatherless girl.

“It was Wawataysee they wanted, but your fate might have been as bad. They might have left you somewhere to starve—” Yet did not the pretty child’s face give evidence of coming beauty? only to an Indian this was not the rich, appealing beauty of his own tribes. And the present was so much to the red man, the triumphs, satisfactions, joys and revenges of to-day.

“Oh,” she said, with a long, quivering breath, “I am so glad! so glad! It runs all over me,” and she laughed softly. “And you will never go away again? They are building the wall all around the town and putting sharp-pointed sticks through the top. The children do not go out on the prairies any more; they are afraid.”

“I do not think we are in much danger. Farther to the east the Indians are joining tribes, stirred up by the English fighting the colonists. But we have nothing to do with their quarrels. And this attack was a mortification to them. Few, if any, of our friendly Indians were concerned in it. Oh, little one, thank God that you and Wawataysee are safe.”

“But M. Marchand thanks God for Wawataysee!” she said, with a touch of resentment.

He smiled at that. When she was older she would demand every thought of one’s heart.

“Shall we go down now?”

“Mère Lunde will be so glad.” She arose and hopped gleefully on one foot, holding his hand as

she went part of the way around him. The last rays of golden light in the sky made bewildering shadows and gleams about her and she looked like a fairy sprite.

The town was already lapsing into quiet. No one had need to grumble at the length of working days in this pastoral town and time. Others had come in from journeys, and in more than one home feasting had begun. The boats had been fastened securely, the river was growing dark with shadows, and purple and gold clouds were drifting across the heavens.

“Let us go this way,” Renée said.

This way was up to the Rue de l’Eglise, and she turned into that. Here and there a friend caught his hand and he had to pause for a few words of cordial welcome.

“What now, little one?” as she drew him aside.

She looked up with a sweetly serious expression, though a flush of half-embarrassment wavered over the small face.

“I went to church every afternoon to say a prayer for you that you might come home. I thought the good God would rather hear it in His own house—”

“Did you, my little darling?” he exclaimed, deeply touched.

“And now”—she hesitated—“I think I ought to go and thank Him. Men do that when the Governor grants their wishes.”

“Yes, yes! And I will go, too.”

Ah! there was much to be thankful for, and he felt a little conscience-smitten that he had not made more of a point of it.

The church was quite dark, with a candle burning on each side of the high altar. She led him clear up to the chancel steps, and there they knelt together. The little girl might not have understood all the fine points of belief that the world had fought over since Christ had died for all, and was still warring about, but her gratitude was sincere and earnest if not spiritual, at least in a devout spirit.

Gaspard Denys was moved by something he had never experienced before, and touched by the child’s tender, fervent faith.

Coming out, they met old Père Rierceraux, leaning on his cane. He had been godfather to little Mary Pion, the first child baptised by Father Meurin when there had been no church at all and only a tent in the woods. The rude little building was a temple to him, and thither he came every night to see that no harm was likely to befall it, and commend it to the watchful care of God.

“It is Gaspard Denys!” he said in a voice a little broken by the weight of years. “So thou hast come home from perils and hast devotion enough to thank God and the saints for it. There will be merry hearts to-night, quite unmindful of this. Ma’m’selle, I have noted thy devoutness also. The Holy Mother have thee in her keeping.”

It was quite dusk now and the houses were lighted up. At the Pichous’ they were playing already on the fiddles. Then there was this turn.

The good news had preceded Denys. The household had come out to meet him and there was great joy. Mère Lunde had already set a little feast, and they wondered at the loitering.

There had never been any welcome like this in his life before, no one to be greatly glad when he came or sorrowful when he went. It was like a new life, and his heart expanded, his pulses thrilled with a fervent joy. The beautiful Indian wife who smiled at him and then turned her eyes to her husband with an exquisite tenderness; the little girl whose gladness was so true and deep that her eyes had the soft lustre of tears now and then, and smiles that went to his heart; Mère Lunde’s happy, wrinkled old face, in her best coif and kerchief; and presently, neighbors coming in with joyous greetings. For in those days they shared each other’s joys and sorrows.

The remembrance of the cruel May day vanished. Flowers were growing over the graves of the dead in the little churchyard. Many of the captives had found their way back; some, indeed, lay in silent places far from kindred. They did not forget, but they were a light-hearted people, and their religion was not of the morbid, disquieting kind. Conscience with them had a few salient points of right and wrong, the rest did not touch their simple lives.

There was a gay autumn, with wine-making and brewing of spiced or plain beer, of meat and fish salted and dried, of corn gathered and wheat ground and the thrifty preparations for winter. All the meadow lands were abloom with autumnal flowers, the trees were gorgeous in all the coloring sun and winds and dew could devise, and the haze of the resplendent Indian summer hung over it all. There were nutting parties to the woods, but they were cautious and went well protected.

Trappers and traders came in, and the talk was of wilderness trails and Indian villages friendly

and unfriendly, of deer and mink and otter and beaver, sable, marten and beautiful fox and wolfskins from the far north. Many of the fleets went straight down the river to New Orleans, others came up from there with beads and gewgaws and spun silk and threads of various colors, calicoes and blankets and coarse thick stuffs for tents. There was much dickering, great supplies of arms and ammunitions, and then the crowd melted away and only familiar faces were seen again. The country round about put on its white coverlet of snow to keep warm the little earth children, streams and ponds were frozen over and all was merriment again.

François Marchand and his pretty wife set up a home of their own only a short distance away, but business had increased so much that it needed the attention of both. Next year they would buy some boats or have them built, and do some trading up and down the river.

André Valbonais was much pleased with his new home and the cordiality of his relatives. He soon attracted the attention of Colonel Chouteau, for he had considerable education, and was put in a clerkship, which gratified him extremely. But he often ran up to the Rue de Rive to chat with Denys and Marchand over their adventures, and to watch the pretty, dark-eyed girl who always sat so close to her uncle and held his hand.

And then came the winter gayeties. Throngs of children went out on the great mound when the snow had a crust on it, and the girls, gathering up their skirts, squatted down and were given a little push, and away they went, swift as an arrow. One would tumble over and roll down to the bottom, throwing about numerous little fleets, but they were so well wrapped in furs no one was ever hurt. The great achievement was to spin the whole length without a break.

It was merry again at Christmastide, and Renée enjoyed it much more than last year; but there was a tender devoutness in her worship. Then the great Feast of Lights, Epiphany and all the fun and frolic. André was chosen a king by one of the pretty girls. He was a fine dancer and a very good-looking young fellow.

Perhaps it made Renée more light-hearted to know that Barbe had a real lover, and that he hardly allowed her to smile at any one else. She was not quite betrothed as yet, but there could be no objections. He belonged to a good New Orleans family, and was in a trading house second only to the Chouteaus'. All the Guions said it would be an excellent match, and Barbe was plenty old enough to marry. Bachelor girls had not come in fashion, and when one had passed twenty the younger girls really flouted her and thought she ought to step in the background.

She danced once with Gaspard Denys. No, he had never been a real lover. But if he had not gone to Quebec after this little girl—well, all things might have been different. And as well Jean Gardepier as any one. She would go to New Orleans with him when he went down on trading expeditions, and the gayety would delight her. She would have some fine clothes and jewels, still she sighed a little when Denys took her back to her sister.

"And here is Elise the second," said Madame Renaud gayly. "See what a tall girl she has grown. You must dance once with her. Oh, how soon they are women, and then it is lovers and husbands. Gaspard, are you going to stay single forever?" and Madame laughed softly.

"I'm such an old fellow now! I feel like a grandfather to these young girls," he returned jocosely.

But Elise thought him charming, and in her turn almost envied Renée.

Years unmarked by any special events pass on almost unheeded. Trade came and went. A few new houses were built. Young people were married, new children were born. Families came from across the river, not liking their English neighbors over well. Occasionally there was an Indian alarm, but St. Louis had the good fortune to live mostly at peace with her red neighbors, while many of the Illinois towns suffered severely.

One of the events of the summer that delighted Renée was the birth of Wawataysee's baby. It was a great marvel to her, though there were plenty of babies about. It was more French than Indian. It had beautiful large dark eyes and was a very fine specimen of babyhood. It was named for Uncle Gaspard, who was its godfather, and Wawataysee pleaded that Renée should be godmother.

"For you are the two people I love best after my husband," said the Indian woman proudly. "You are like a little sister."

Renée was very glad to be that now. She was learning to rejoice in the happiness of others.

Then Barbe Guion had a very pretty wedding, and the boat in which she was going to New Orleans was trimmed with flags. It was a long journey then, sometimes a dangerous one; less so at this season. And Barbe might be gone a whole year. There was a great turnout to wish her godspeed. She looked very bright and happy in her wedding gear.

Renée took Uncle Gaspard's hand and glanced up in his face, which was rather grave.

"Are you sorry?" she asked.

"Sorry? What a question, child! Why should I be sorry?"

“She loved you very much,” was the answer, in a low tone.

“Nonsense! I am old enough to be her father. And Barbe married of her own free will.”

“I wish you had been my true father,” Renée subjoined gravely. And strange to say, she pitied Barbe in her secret heart, yet she was glad she had gone so far away.

Renée went now and then to see her grandfather. It seemed as if he grew older and thinner and more morose, yet her sympathy went out to him curiously. She had heard the talk that he was suspected of being in league with the river pirates and supplying the Indians with rum, which was against the laws. One ship had been caught, the pirates overmastered, four of them sent to New Orleans in irons, and two had been wounded and drowned in an attempt to swim away. She felt a good deal troubled. He would not talk of the affair when she mentioned it.

“But you are so lonely here outside the palisade. Why do you not come in?” she inquired.

“It suits me well enough,” he answered roughly. “I did not ask you to stay here. And you need not come for my pleasure.”

“But if the Indians should attack you some time?”

“Bah! The Indians know me better,” with a scowl of disdain.

“Is Antoine Freneau my grandfather really?” she asked that evening as she sat in the moonlight with Denys.

“Why, yes,” in amaze at her question.

“Then it would be wicked not to—to have some regard for him,” she remarked unwillingly.

Gaspard did not answer at once. Antoine had dropped down year by year. He had not always been so churlish, though his discourteous, hermit-like ways were of long standing. He had never doubted but that he had been the father of the girl he loved, yet she had come up as a lily out of a quagmire. But how could Renée respect or regard him? And how little he cared for her!

“That’s a difficult question. We shall have to ask the good père some day. He understands these matters.”

“But—I belong to you, surely?”

“You belong to me!” He clasped her hand fervently.

“And I shall always stay here?”

“Always, until some young lover comes;” but he drew her closer, as if he disputed her being taken away.

“You shall be my lover,” with a gay laugh. “If ever I draw a bean at the king’s ball you shall be my king.”

CHAPTER XIII—PASSING YEARS

Renée de Longueville was fifteen and very fair to look upon, if not as beautiful as Madame Marchand, or perhaps as some of the belles of the town. She was slight and not very tall, and her hair had not grown much darker. Her eyes kept their soft wondering expression, sometimes a curious depth that told of vehement emotions, ardent joys and a capacity for suffering. But most people looking at the gay young face when it smiled would only have read archness and mirth and a great capacity for enjoyment.

Some curious events had been happening. The colonies had beaten England and won their freedom, their recognition. From the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River it was all America. This side of the river it was Spain still, a kind of French Spain. Commandant Cruzat was well-liked and very social. Madame was charming. There were balls at the Government House and at the handsome old Chouteau residence, that had been improved year by year. A long gallery ran around two sides above the first story, and it made a delightful place for dancers. The roof was high, with both ends cut off as it were, broken by two chimneys and two dormer windows. Downstairs a broad piazza also, and here the gentlemen would sit and smoke and discuss business and the changes that were going on around them, while within, Madame Chouteau dispensed charming hospitality.

St. Louis was still in an idyllic state, gay, joyous, friendly and hospitable, with much simplicity of living. Others besides the Chouteaus had enlarged their borders. Gaspard Denys had built two rooms and raised the roof of his house so as to make a storeroom and one little chamber, where Chloe, the slave, slept. Mère Lunde still took charge of the house, but Denys insisted she should have some help, and then no question was made of buying one. They were well treated and had good homes, and were not overworked.

One of the new rooms was Uncle Gaspard's, the other Renée's, while her old one was transferred to Mère Lunde, who at first thought she could never sleep on a bedstead. And Renée's room was quite a marvel of prettiness. Great strips of white birch bark on which dainty pictures were worked went from floor to ceiling, while between was soft gray plaster. Sometimes this was stained in various colors. Then there were shelves about on which were displayed odd bits of Indian work—a bowl, a vase, or a pretty basket. Many of these came from Mattawissa's hands and not a few from Wawataysee's.

Now Madame Marchand had a dainty little girl, christened Renée. Her gracious air, her refinement and beauty, and her romantic story as well, had made her many friends, and M. Marchand was one of the thriving business men, very much honored and respected. Not infrequently he and Gaspard were called into council on some important question.

And though the palisades and gates and towers were still looked upon as a means of defence, the inhabitants ventured to enlarge their borders without. Several bands of friendly Indians had settled toward the northern and western ends. Parties no longer hesitated to wander through the woods, and the children often went out to pick wild strawberries that grew so plentifully all about. Then there were grapes and a delicious kind of wild plum, pears and apples, and melons cultivated in the gardens, with various small fruits.

Renée de Longueville had come in possession of quite a fortune; at least, Uncle Gaspard held it in trust for her. And it made her quite a person of consequence.

Antoine Freneau had grown really afraid to carry on his illicit trade after the capture of the Red Rover. She had stores for him, and for weeks he trembled when he saw two or three men approaching his cabin. He was old and he resolved he would do no more at it. This he tried to explain to those who came for a supply. True, he brought up his whiskey and sold it as long as it lasted, but unfortunately the Indians used to securing their indulgence in that manner would not believe it. They brought furs, often stolen from the traders, and insisted that he should exchange. They always came after nightfall, and sped away again in the dark.

Angry at length at their repeated efforts, he would not open his door. The bar within was very strong and he felt himself secure. But the old stanchion had decayed at the ground point, and one night it gave way at their united efforts.

Antoine found himself defenceless against the angry mob. They bound him and began to ransack the place. Bringing to light one jug of whiskey, they were confident there was more. They searched every corner, every nook, but in vain. And then they fell upon the old man, beat him and tortured him until he was limp and lifeless they thought, when, taking a pack of the most valuable furs, they decamped.

It was not until noon of the next day that some one in passing noted the unusual appearance and halted at the cabin. The old man lay on the floor. He had revived from unconsciousness, but his hands were securely fastened behind him, his face was bruised and swollen and everything in disorder. He gave the alarm and some kindly neighbors came to his assistance. Then another went for Gaspard Denys.

Perhaps nothing could have happened that would have rehabilitated Antoine Freneau in the pity and good will of his fellow-men sooner. Unsocial and under suspicion for years, asking and taking nothing from them, seldom giving them a good word, his helplessness appealed now to their sympathy. Gaspard had his wounds and bruises attended to, the house made a little orderly, and found a slave woman who would care for him. That he had been robbed was evident. Even the puncheon floor had been torn up, and disclosed a sort of pit in which something had evidently been stored.

Old Doctor Montcrevier came, but he shook his head doubtfully. The old man breathed and occasionally opened heavy, wandering eyes. But on the third day he rallied.

"Gaspard Denys!" he moaned. "Send—tell him," and then he lapsed away again.

Denys came and watched with him through the night. Several times his name escaped the old man's lips. Gaspard gave him some brandy he had brought.

He opened his eyes again and gazed around piteously, resting them finally upon Gaspard.

"I cannot think," rubbing his forehead in a dazed fashion. "They were Indians. They wanted rum. I had none, only one jug I kept in case—in case I should need it. I am an old man, Gaspard. They —they beat me."

"Yes. Can you tell who they were? No strange Indians have been seen about."

Even here the old man's cunning came uppermost. He would not betray himself. He shook his head slowly.

"Some marauding parties. Perhaps from the river."

"The river! See if they are coming!" starting up in affright.

“No one is coming,” in a reassuring tone.

“Gaspard, am I hurt much? Oh, help me! I do not want to die. I hate death! I want to live;” and he tried to raise himself, but fell back exhausted.

“Would you like to have the priest?” Gaspard could think of no other aid in this extremity.

“No! no! I will not die! They come to your deathbed. Stay with me yourself.”

“What can I do?”

He was silent a long while. His breath came slowly and with effort, and shudders ran over him.

“Renée,” he said presently. “You have the child, Gaspard?”

“Yes; you gave her to me.”

“If you had died—your money——”

“I had made a will. Everything would have gone to her.”

“That was right—right. Gaspard, there is some gold—is any one listening?” moving his eyes in a frightened way.

“No, no!”

“There is some gold and silver put away. You might better take it. Thieves may come again. Carry me to the chimney.”

He was a heavy burden. Gaspard put him down on some blankets.

“See! Count the stones. The third stone.” The eyes were wild in their eagerness.

“This!” pointing. “Take it out.”

Gaspard worked with both strength and energy. It was fitted in very securely, but it gave way at length.

“The next one.”

When that came out a small iron box was visible, and Gaspard worked it loose.

“Take it with you. It will be hers when I die. There is no one else. But not until—I have the key—and—but I am not going to die!” with fierce energy.

“No, no,” soothingly. “Take a little of this cordial.”

But the signs of death were there and Gaspard read them truly. Could he warn? That was for the priest.

“You are very good.” His voice was much shaken, and shadows seemed to waver over his eyes. “And I was not good to you, Gaspard Denys, in that old time. You were but a boy. You had your fortune to make. She loved you and I meant to wean her away—and—I did not want her to know how I was—trading. The Count fell in love with her, though when the matter was most settled he wrung a dowry out of me, curse him! But she was a Countess. And he should have kept the child. What did he mean by sending her here?”

He had made many pauses and now lay back exhausted, his face growing grayer. Gaspard roused the nurse.

“Go up to the church,” he said, “the priest’s house, and bring some one. Quick! The man is dying.”

It was some time before he roused again.

“Renée,” he murmured, “you will be a great lady in France. Your mother’s mother was, and fled away because a king loved her. A king!” He laughed shrilly and a rattle came in his throat. “And you must go back to them, to your own kind. This wild life is not for you. As for that young stripling, he is dancing at the Guinolee and singing love songs to pretty girls. Thou art not the only pretty girl in St. Louis, Renée——”

Then there was a long silence. Once or twice Gaspard thought him dead, but he started and muttered both French and Indian words. It was near midnight when the good father came, and he shook his head sadly.

Gaspard roused Antoine a little.

“I fear it is too late,” in a regretful tone, while a look of pity crossed his face. “Still we must try to the last moment. Antoine Freneau, it is I, Père Lemoine. Listen! Death is near. Dost thou repent

of thy sins, which have been many, doubtless, hidden from man but not escaping the eye of God? There may yet be mercy vouchsafed."

The dying man clutched the blanket and stared dully, yet he seemed to listen.

"Oh, yes, yes!" he cried suddenly. "At St. Anne's down the river. Yes, we both confessed——"

Whether he understood any of the service was doubtful, but the good priest did his duty according to his conscience and the times. But before he had ended the last prayer both knew he was dead, and had passed without a struggle.

"I will stay the rest of the night with you," said the priest. "And since you have the child, I suppose you will be the proper person to take charge. It is supposed the old man had not a little wealth—if the marauders did not take it all away."

The woman came in to prepare the body. Round the old man's neck was a strong bit of wire like cord, and a key. Gaspard took this. It fitted the box.

After daylight they took a survey of the place. There were some firearms stored away, blankets, furs that were motheaten and of little value, some Indian habiliments; but it was evident the place had been pretty thoroughly ransacked.

So they buried Antoine Freneau, and for some days it was the sensation of the little town. Gaspard Denys now took the formal guardianship of Renée de Longueville. He had the record of her mother's marriage, her birth and christening. Some of the goods were worth saving, the others were distributed among the poorest of the Indians about.

In an old chest of curious workmanship Gaspard found a false bottom. In this compartment were some laces and embroideries, a wedding veil that Renée's grandmother had doubtless worn, the certificate of her marriage to Antoine Freneau and considerable valuable jewelry, with some unset stones. And when they examined the strong box it proved an unexpected fortune for Renée de Longueville.

Then the old house was suffered to go to ruin. Some Indians went there for shelter, but soon left. They had been roused at midnight by unearthly noises and seen the figure of old Freneau in its grave-clothes; so the story gained credence that the place was haunted. Even after it had fallen into an unsightly heap the mysterious noises were heard and no one would pass it after nightfall.

Renée was very much shocked at first. She had not loved her grandfather, but there had always been a curious pity in her tender soul for him in what she considered his loneliness. She went in the church and prayed for his soul, for she knew God was merciful. Had He not watched over Uncle Gaspard and sent him safely home?

And now Renée de Longueville was quite an heiress and had some really beautiful heirloom jewels, besides the laces and the exquisite veil. Her grandmother's people must have been of some account. But no one would have imagined Antoine Freneau a handsome or attractive young man, and a favorite among the pretty girls of Old New Orleans. The miser-like propensities had grown with the years, and he had found, he thought, an easy way of making money by being in league with the river pirates on the one hand and roving bands of Indians on the other. He had skilfully evaded detection if not always suspicion, and now that he had suffered almost martyrdom in the end, the generous, cordial people were not the kind to fling up these vague accusations.

So the sorrow was over and it was winter again, full of merriment and gayety, and lovers wooing young girls. Elise Renaud had been married and Sophie was quite a belle. Rosalie Pichou was the mother of two babies and had a comfortable home, though her husband traded with New Orleans and was often gone months at a time. They had to guard against the river pirates, who frequently sallied out from some peaceful-looking covert, hidden by woods or a bend in the stream. Occasionally there were Indians lying in wait, but the men always went well armed, and generally in quite a fleet, with the goods, the wheat and corn in barges or flat-bottomed boats, with several canoes for swiftness if they saw a chance of chastising their enemies. It was comparatively easy to go down the river, and as each boat had a mast and sails, they sped along beautifully in a favorable wind. But coming back was generally the trial, as the tide was against them. Sometimes two boatmen would walk along the river bank and pull a rope like the later towing line, while those on the boat steered and with long poles kept the prow from running into the bank and avoided the snags.

But before Christmas all the boats that were expected had come in; the others would remain at New Orleans until more favorable weather. And this year there was to be a grand ball at the Government House before the king's ball took place, for in the last trip up the river several young men had arrived. One was to be secretary to the Commandant. Two were on their way to Canada and would start when the spring opened.

Sophie Renaud had run in, full of the news.

"And you have so many pretty things to wear!" she cried half enviously. "Your uncle always seems to know, while you might as well ask a stick as to ask my father to bring you home

anything worth while. And the pretty frock Aunt Barbe sent me last summer is all in shreds. Ma mère declares I ought to have fawnskin, like an Indian girl. And did you see Madame Marchand's lovely feather cape on Sunday? It has a row of bluebird feathers around it that are dazzling."

Yes, Renée had seen the cape often while it was being made. Three years it had taken Wawataysee to collect the feathers. She had so many beautiful ideas.

"It would set me crazy to do such a thing!"

Renée laughed. Sophie always flew from one point to another, and delighted in attire.

"Wawataysee is coming to see what will be most suitable," returned Renée.

"And shall I have to wear the old white silk Cousin Guion gave me? It has been washed, but mother has pressed it like new. And one of the young men is very handsome. I saw him as I passed the court-house. Laflamme I believe he is called, and I predict he will set all the girls' hearts in a flame if he dances anything as he looks. I hope we all get a chance. And oh, what fun the king's ball will be! I just hope I shall be a queen!"

Renée tossed her pretty head. For the girls in those days gossiped pretty much as they do now, and were just as eager for pleasure.

André Valbonais dropped in as he often did. He was a great favorite, and now that he was doing so well under the very eyes of M. Chouteau, he could afford to have a steady sweetheart. Early marriages were much in vogue, and though a dot was very good, many a nice girl was married with only some household articles and bedding.

Truth to tell, André had been very much captivated with Madame Marchand. Her bravery through those wearisome days and nights of the return, her sweetness and patience with the little one, had made her an angel to be adored. M. Marchand's gratitude knew no bounds; indeed, he had been treated with brotherly affection by them both. Suddenly his eyes had been opened. It was an insult to any sweet, honorable woman to covet her, especially when she loved her husband as Wawataysee did. And André struggled to cast the sin out of his heart. She never even dreamed of such a thing, and for worlds he would not have incurred her displeasure.

But this it was that had made him care less for the young girls about. He could not offer any of them a heart that was half another's.

So in a certain fashion he had been devoted to Renée because she was such a child, and there was no danger he believed.

"There will be a great time, I suppose, at the ball," he said, sitting by the splendid log fire at Gaspard Denys'. "One of my cousins is to dance with the new Secretary, Monsieur Rivé. He came to the mill with the Governor."

M. Cruzat was often styled that, but the real Governor of all Louisiana had his capital at New Orleans. This was the Lieutenant.

"And is he very handsome?"

"Oh, good-looking enough," indifferently. "M. Laflamme will take the winning card. Renée, do not get a heartbreak over him. Take warning."

"I shall not get a heartbreak over anybody," with a saucy smile.

"Ah, your time has not yet come!" blowing out wreaths of delicate smoke.

"André, I want you to dance the first dance with me."

"I am at your service, ma'm'selle. But three new young men and a pretty girl—you do me great honor," and he made a bow, with an odd, amused smile.

"Do you suppose I am going to stand around and cast wistful eyes at these strangers?" she cried with pretty, mock indignation. "And I shall be in the very first dance, too."

"I am made supremely happy, ma'm'selle."

"And if there is any—if you see me looking—well, disconsolate, you will ask me again."

There was a charming imperiousness in her tone.

"I will obey, ma'm'selle, with great delight."

"And—André, who will be the prettiest girl there?"

"Merci! Little one, how can I make a choice?"

"I will tell you: Lucie Aubry, and she will dance with the Secretary the first thing."

“Lucie Aubry has not all the beauty of St. Louis.”

“Oh, if she had, what would be left for us?” and Renée made a mirthfully despairing face.

“You need not feel alarmed.”

“Oh, I don’t,” with enchanting gayety. “In the first place, I am not tall enough, not grand enough. Then my hair should be raven black, and it is such a funny no-color.”

“It is very handsome,” he replied decidedly. “Sometimes in the sun it looks as if it had gold dust sprinkled over it. And then I’ve seen it look as if the top of every wave was touched with silver.”

“That is very beautiful, André. I will try to recall the compliment when it looks to me like a gray-brown. And my nose, see——”

“Ma’m’selle, you wrinkle it up and it makes you look piquant, saucy. You couldn’t make it bad if you tried.”

“Oh, yes! Look!” She put her finger to the tip of it and gave it a tiny hitch and then laughed.

“That shows your curved lips and your lovely teeth. Even that wouldn’t make you a fright.”

“Oh, André, how good and comforting you are! But Wawataysee, with her little Indian blood, is a hundred times handsomer. Only—I am very glad I suit you and Uncle Gaspard. He thinks I grow like my mother.”

She had been half-dancing round the room in the blaze of the logs. Families often kept no other light. Now she came and sat down opposite him, demure as a nun. She had so many fascinating, changeful ways. He had always considered her a child, but now she was a charming young girl. This was one of the places where Valbonais felt entirely at home, because there was no danger of being misinterpreted by any watchful mamma. He was not quite ready to marry.

Denys came in and pushed his seat near Renée, who leaned her head on his shoulder. Now the golden lights shone in her hair—not yellow-gold, but the richer, deeper color—and a soft rose tint played over her cheek, while her mouth dimpled at the corners as if she was amused at something. There would not be many prettier girls at the ball, Valbonais thought.

Wawataysee looked over the “treasures” that one way and another had come into the possession of Gaspard Denys. True, it was a kind of idyllic time in the history of the town, so far as regarded society. Some of the families had a gown or a mantilla of lace and fringe that had been handed down, voyaged from Canada, or more directly from France and New Orleans. Such articles were only taken out on great occasions, a few times in the year. But the woman in plain attire had just as delightful a time if she was vivacious and sparkling and a good dancer.

For this was the chief amusement of the women. The men had their shooting matches, not only as a pastime but a good practice, where to be an excellent marksman was often a protection against Indians; but the hunts served to provide much of the family living. Many of these people had come of the better class peasant stock, who from time immemorial had danced on the greensward on fête days, and not infrequently on Sunday afternoon, their only holidays.

There were no theatres, few books, and many of the elder people read with so much difficulty that they lost interest in it. Oftener legends and family stories were told over on summer evenings when old and young sat out in the moonlight, ate little spiced cakes and drank birch beer.

CHAPTER XIV—AT THE BALL

Wawataysee fashioned a frock for Renée out of some silvery threaded stuff that had soft blue disks here and there, looking almost like bits of fur. Round the shoulders was a band of blue feathers from jay and marten and bluebird, skilfully arranged on a strip of cloth. Her full, girlish throat and arms were bare except for some bracelets and a string of pearls. Her hair was gathered up in a great knot on top of her head and fastened with a silver comb set with jewels. When she entered the ballroom leaning on her uncle’s arm half the assemblage turned to look at her.

The largest space in the Government House had been cleared for dancing. There were smaller connecting rooms, and all had been trimmed with evergreens. The warmth brought out their pungent fragrance. Here a cluster of scarlet berries, there a branch of brown-red oak, a handful of yellow hickory leaves bunched like a sunflower. Here was the Commandant, M. Cruzat, and his staff, with their military accoutrements much tarnished by wear, and the soldiers at the fort who had worn out those kept some little shred, perhaps the old buttons, to indicate their standing. But the young men were in noticeably fresh array.

Madame Cruzat and the elegant Madame Chouteau were on the other side with several ladies, bowing and smiling and making a place for some of the elders. Around the room were ranged seats of rough boards covered with blankets. In one of the smaller apartments was the band,

though it was composed mostly of violins.

The elders were to have the upper end of the room in the Court minuet, the younger people next and in the adjoining rooms. M. Laflamme, a distinguished-looking young man with an air of what we should call society, spoke to a lady standing near, who brought him over to Mademoiselle de Longueville. And at that instant Valbonais approached smiling and extending his hand.

She listened to the request with the most dainty modesty. “I regret, monsieur,” she said in a low tone, “but it is a previous engagement.” And now Lucie Aubry might have the pleasure in welcome. She would not throw over an old friend for a new acquaintance. She held her head up very proudly and danced the minuet as if she had been a queen.

After that the real pleasure began. Old and young, with little formality, yet with the kind of breeding the French never forgot, and took into the forests with them. André need not have watched for Renée’s half warning. If she could have danced with three in the same set, she had the opportunity.

M. Laflamme was a little piqued, but he captured her at last.

“Ma’m’selle,” in a pause, “you are a true French girl, name and all. You might have come from Paris.”

“As I did once upon a time,” smiling out of bewitching eyes.

“Ah! Can you remember?”

“I was there but one day. At the house of my father. A little child, eight years or so.”

“Not the Count de Longueville?”

“The Count de Longueville. At least, *one* Count. There may be many,” she replied, with drooping, mischievous eyes.

“But—he has a wife and two sons, the one I mean.”

“My own mother died,” and the grave tone was tenderly sweet. “I hardly knew her. Then I was sent to her people, my grandfather here at St. Louis.”

“Not—oh, no, not Monsieur Denys!”

“He is not old enough,” she replied, with a touch of vexation. “No. And now that relative is dead. Monsieur, tell me about my little brothers.”

“I never saw them, but know there are two. They are away somewhere being educated. Madame the Countess is at court, one of the handsome women that swell the Queen’s train.”

A sort of protest sped through Renée’s pulses. Her mother was lying in an unheeded grave. She remembered being taken to it several times. And the Count had forgotten about her; another stood in her place. They two were gay and happy.

“You would like to go back to France?” tentatively.

“No, monsieur,” and she raised her pretty head proudly. “I would not leave Uncle Denys for all France has to offer,” in a clear, decisive tone.

“You rate him very highly. I almost envy him, ma’m’selle,” bowing very low. “There is another dance——”

Uncle Denys brought up Monsieur Rivé, who had been merely presented to her in the early part of the evening, and he begged for the pleasure of dancing with her.

“I thought you were engaged,” said Laflamme in a quick tone to Renée.

“I did not say so, monsieur,” she replied in a low tone. “But it is not considered best to dance right along with one person. I do not quite know the fashion of courts,” raising demure, but fascinating eyes.

“She would do for a court,” he ruminated.

Renée meanwhile swam away like a graceful bird in a maze of sunshine. M. Rivé was delighted. He had been dancing with Madame Aubry, who had grown rather stout, and Madame Garis, who was always a little stiff, as she had descended on both sides from nobility, though it was long ago; but she desired to keep up a certain state. The mothers expected to have the young men pay them the compliment of at least one dance.

But what grace and elegance this young creature possessed! And the pretty, flower-like face was enchanting in its enjoyment.

“Do you often have such balls as this?” he asked presently. “I was quite averse to coming to St.

Louis, but I hardly dared decline the appointment. I thought you—" and he paused.

"Well, what did you think, monsieur?" with an arch look and in a merry voice. "That we were part Indian and lived in wigwams?"

"Oh, no!" coloring. "But we are quite gay at New Orleans. There are many Spanish people, and the creole women are very beautiful and exquisite dancers, though they seem a race quite by themselves. And we have a theatre. You see, it is the great port. So much trade comes to us—the vessels from Europe, and from some of the cities in the colonies that have so lately gained their independence."

"I shall go to New Orleans some time. My uncle has promised me. In the summer, perhaps."

"Oh, not next summer!"

"Why not?" with a dainty toss of the head.

"Because I am to stay here a year whether or no."

"Monsieur," with gay audacity, "I believe your business has something to do with writing letters and keeping accounts. I cannot help you there, so it could make but little difference."

"But we shall have the winter. What is this I hear about the king's ball? Or is it a series of balls?"

"Oh, monsieur, that is a delight!" She gave a brief description of it. "And there are four queens. Each chooses a king."

"I hope you will be a queen. But to have your high honor depend on so great a chance seems rather discouraging."

"Still, the king may choose you next time. Then it doesn't always depend upon a bean," laughing with gay softness.

"What an odd plan! Ma'm'selle, I hope I may be a king. I never thought of such an honor before. And I have chosen my queen already."

The violins dragged out a last slow note. The fiddlers had not learned to blow it out with a sort of ecstasy. Then André Valbonais came, for the next dance was his and he was very glad. If there was such a thing as an especial belle of the evening, it was Renée de Longueville. These new gay fellows must not crowd him out, he resolved.

There was a promenade after that. Renée fell out of the ranks and insisted upon sitting down a few minutes.

"Go and find Sophie Renaud for me," she said to André in a dainty tone of command.

"And leave you here alone?"

"I am going to crawl in this corner and rest a bit. And I wonder where Uncle Denys is?"

"He has been talking to the Governor. M. Cruzat is not above listening to the needs of the people. There are to be improvements along the levee."

She waved her hand in dismissal. Then she wondered, with a bit of feminine inconsistency, who would be first to find her out. This would be a lovely corner for a chat.

A voice caught her ear. She heard her name mentioned in a complimentary manner.

"She is very well born. Although you do not seem to make much of that here."

That was Monsieur Laflamme's peculiarly cultivated accent.

"Yes, on the one side. The other, her grandfather—well, no one is quite certain. But he left her a fortune and some handsome jewels. How he obtained both no one really knows."

"I suppose many things have to be condoned in this new country. In fact, they have to be in most places," laughing ironically. "The world is quite turned upside down, but money is on the top everywhere. And the uncle, he has several interests I have heard. He has no family."

"He is not a real relative, but a sort of godfather or guardian. She is like a child to him. There is a story that he was in love with her mother when they were children. Besides his trading business he has an interest in the lead mines. And it is said there are some wonderful discoveries of salt that hunters have found. We shall distance you more southern people some day."

"Then M. Denys is one of your prosperous citizens?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur! We are proud of him."

"And the young lady will be his heiress?"

“Most likely. It is hardly probable that he will marry now. Monsieur Laflamme, if you are looking for a wife with a comfortable dot, here is your opportunity. A pretty girl, too. Well spoiled; but a husband, if he has any sense, soon trains a girl aright when she is young.”

Madame Aubry laughed with an inflection of satisfaction. French mothers seem matchmakers by instinct. She had informed herself about the newcomers. The two travellers were men of no especial fortunes, and though she was pleased to have Lucie dance with them, she had other views for her daughter, who would have no great dowry. Genevieve had a pretty home near by, and she did not want Lucie to go away. She had her eye on a very well-to-do person who had already made the proper advances to her. She could afford to be generous with her neighbors’ maids.

Renée sprang up suddenly, her face aflush with anger. That any one would consider her fortune made her indignant. She had some fanciful ideas of love, gleaned largely from Wawataysee and her husband, who since the attack on St. Louis had guarded her with the utmost devotion, purchasing a strong, burly slave to be her guard and to watch over his babies. During his two journeys North she had lived at the Denys’s house. There had been other love matches as well, where the question of dowry had hardly been thought of, though every mother and father were delighted to have a hand in the bride’s plenishing.

She almost ran into M. Rivé. Then she laughed and drew herself up with a gesture of half dignity, half amusement. And there was Sophie Renaud and Valbonais, who looked from one to the other and wondered why Renée had sent him away. He fancied he read some confusion in her face.

“The gentlemen are invited to the office,” said a servant. “There are pipes and liquors and cards for those who love play. The ladies will be refreshed in the anteroom,” designating the corridor with a wave of his hand.

There were several tables spread here with delicacies that it was supposed men cared little about. Spiced wines and cordials, fruit dried and sugared, dainty cakes and various confections. No one thought of a great supper. The girls crowded by themselves and laughed and chatted, counting up the times they had danced and the captures they had made, and what their real lovers had said. In the simplicity of their enjoyment there was little heart-burning.

“Renée,” exclaimed one of the group, “we shall have to look out for ourselves! Why, you have only been a child hitherto, and here are all the men paying court and compliments to you! However, you cannot have my Jean, for he has spoken to the priest, and though maman thinks it but short notice, she will get me ready.”

Rose Boucher threw back her head and laughed, showing her pearly teeth.

“Oh,” said Renée merrily, “and last winter we had such nice times skating on the pond! Now you will not let him skate with us or help us up the mound or anything!”

The tone was so disconsolate and the face so full of mock despair that it was amusing.

“Not I, indeed! You’re not going to have the whole world, Renée de Longueville, if you have a rich uncle and have danced with all these newcomers, and had all the room looking at you in your beautiful gown and your high comb. Has it real diamonds? Dear me! It behooves us to get betrothed as soon as possible when these young things set up for admirers.”

So they teased her good-humoredly and she laughed in return, but it seemed as if she were two people instead of one—a girl enjoying everything and a woman fearing some things.

But presently they returned to the dancing. Monsieur Laflamme sought her out at once. Her first impulse was to decline with high dignity, then a gleam of mirth shone in her eyes and she accepted. If he wanted to begin wooing, let him. The inborn coquetry of her nature rose to the surface. She was bright with a certain childish audacity and her piquancy attracted him. If he chose he could win her very easily. People in this New World were making fortunes readily, but Paris would be the place to spend them.

Mothers began presently to gather up their charges and express their pleasure to Madame Cruzat. The fathers had a touch of gallantry as well. It was very gratifying to feel that the Commandant had their interests truly at heart and cared for the town.

André Valbonais came to find Renée.

“I am to see you safe home,” he said. “M. Denys is wanted in a little council they are having.”

The girl made no demur. How lovely they looked in their fur hoods, their cheeks still rosy, their eyes bright, their chatter full of joy. Laflamme studied them and wondered who Valbonais could be, with his unquestioning authority.

They went down the Rue Royale a happy, light-hearted crowd, crunching the snow under their feet and looking up at the stars that seemed to shine with unwonted brilliance, as if they had really usurped the place of the moon. And here was the Chouteau house, a great white mound, the dormer windows in the roof like some curious eyes. The throng thinned out. Renée and André

turned up their own street.

“And did you like those newcomers very much?” he began, as if they were continuing a conversation.

“They were nice dancers—yes, elegant dancers.”

“They’re much interested in the king’s ball. Renée, if you draw a bean, who shall you choose?”

“Oh, how can I tell? The handsomest man.”

“The handsomest are not always the worthiest.”

“That sounds like a grandam. Why should one care for a night? One dances for the pleasure.”

“But it may lead to——”

“To all manner of ills, such as falling in love. I suppose that is a very great ill. Were you ever in love, André?” laughing in a mocking mood.

“Oh, with you, a hundred times! Else I should not be so ready to do your bidding.”

“But with any one else?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“But you said you were in love with me.” Her tone had in it the daintiest bit of upbraiding.

“Yes, when I ran away with you and Wawataysee. When I watched over you day and night. When I do your bidding now as if I was your slave.”

“There’s another kind of love.”

“Ma’m’selle, that’s too sacred to talk about lightly.”

Dragon, the great hound, was watching at the gate. He made no objection when André opened it, but he looked up and down the street.

“Your master will come presently. He is all right,” said André. “Or, if you like to, go for him.”

Dragon signified that he did. André opened the door. Mère Lunde was asleep in her chair. She had piled several logs on the fire, and they had just burst into a blaze that glorified the apartment. Another hound lay half asleep in the warmth, but he beat his tail to let them know that he heard.

Renée threw off her wraps, took out her comb and shook her hair over her shoulders. What a shining mass it was! Her eyes were softly bright in their quartz-like glow. André thought she had not looked as beautiful the whole evening, and he was glad without knowing just why.

“Good-night,” he said abruptly. “Friga will see that no harm befalls you.”

“Thank you, André,” and she smiled upon him with a sweetness that he took outside with him.

“She will be a flirt,” he said to himself. “But, after all, she is only a child and she doesn’t know what deep, heartfelt love is. Heaven keep her from the knowledge until she has had her fling. The bright, winsome things have the most power.”

Renée was standing there when Uncle Gaspard came in. He put his arms around her and kissed her shining head and drooping eyelids.

“You had a nice time?”

“It was splendid!” in a joyous tone.

“I like that young Rivé very much. M. Cruzat is well pleased with him. Go to bed, kitten.”

The very next day, when a company were out skating, M. Laflamme and several others joined the party. If Renée had been lovely in her dancing gown, she was infinitely more bewitching in this half Indian skating attire. Laflamme had made some farther inquiries this morning and found Madame Aubry had not exaggerated. He had been something of a spendthrift and was now going to Montreal to get his portion of a family estate that had fallen in, but whether it could be turned speedily to money was rather doubtful. It was a long journey, he learned, and though he had begun it with a spirit of adventure, his courage in the matter was rather oozing out. What if he stayed here and wooed this charming girl who threw him a fascinating smile now and then, and knew so little of the world that she could easily be won? The journey in the summer would be more agreeable, and with her for a companion——

The next day was the New Year and the fun began early. The streets were musical with fiddles and songs. Lovers had puzzled their brains for pretty rhymes, and many, it must be confessed,

were rather lame; but the frosty air carried the melody, and no one was over-critical.

Renée had numberless serenades to her soft, love-inspiring eyes, her cheeks that would make roses envious, her ripe lips where kisses blossomed, her shining hair that was like a crown, her lithe figure, her feet that were not large enough to make a print in the snow.

Gaspard Denys sat one side of the broad fireplace, in the glow of the ruddy flame, and listened with amusement. The year before he had gone for Renée he had joined the merry throng. Barbe Guion was a pretty young girl, and the Renauds had invited him in. And somehow no one ever quite knew whether Barbe was happy or not. The first time her husband came up with the boats she could not accompany him on the severe journey. While he was in St. Louis her little boy was born and died. Once afterward Gardepier had taken the expedition, but Barbe was not well and had sent loving messages; was very happy with her little daughter. He wondered what led him to think of her this night!

Renée was restless as a bird. She listened to the singing. There was one very musical French song that was not as fulsome as the others, and she wondered a little about it. Then the voices in chorus cried out: “Good-night, master; may good luck be yours. Good-night, young mistress; may your dreams be sweet of your true love.”

Then the songs were heard in the distance, and presently André Valbonais came in.

“Did you hear Laflamme?” he asked. “He and Monette went out for the fun, but they sang some beautiful songs. M’sieu Denys, do you not think it time some of this foolishness was broken up? Not that I have anything against serenading, and really they did finely at the Commandant’s. But the soldiers were out, and that helped.”

“It’s an old habit. And the young fellows enjoy it.”

“André, are you getting too old for fun? Why, I think it’s quite delightful. I was sure I heard a new voice. And it is the first time I have been serenaded. Oh, dear! I wonder who I shall dream about?”

Yes, she had only been a child; now she was a young girl, not quite a woman, a gay, wilful, enchanting young girl. Did Denys know it? He was lazily stretched out, with his hands in his pockets, gazing at the fire, dreaming of long ago, and Renée Freneau, of another time and Barbe Guion.

André gave a little cough. “Of your true love, ma’m’selle.”

“There are so many,” with a laughable assumption of weariness. “And to doubt their truth would be cruel.”

“There can be only one true love.”

“But each serenader thinks his the true one.”

He had not joined in the foolishness.

“What they think does not so much matter, ma’m’selle. It is what is in the woman’s heart.”

“And she cannot go out serenading her true love.”

“Would you want to, ma’m’selle?”

“I should like to find out who he was,” and she laughed.

Denys roused himself suddenly and began to talk business. André was working his way up in the Chouteau mill and was in high favor with its owners. What would happen when the spring opened, for St. Louis was growing to be a larger business centre? England, the talk was, had ceded her rights to the river and all the eastern shore to the new colonial government, which would make fresh treaties with Spain. The Ohio River was another promising branch. In fact, everything seemed tending to strange and uncertain prospects.

Denys would have been more than amazed if a vision of fifty years later had crossed his brain there in the firelight. And a hundred years—that would have sent him quite crazy.

But the king’s ball was the next thing. They were such a pleasure-loving people at this time; indeed, the winters would have been very dreary without the pleasure.

So the merry crowd came and the cake was made. Everybody who could gathered as usual, and the children added zest in the early part of the evening, exchanging their gifts and eating their *étrennes*. The stately dances of the elder people, and then the gavotte, the airy *passe-pied*, and afterward the merry spinning round in all kinds of fancy steps, in which some of the young men excelled.

Then twelve boomed out and one of the matrons cut the cake, another dealt out the pieces just as they came, so there should be no favoritism. Renée’s had in it no bean—was she glad or sorry?

For two pairs of eyes watched her eagerly.

“I shall have to wait until next year!” she exclaimed, with a captivating *moue* of disappointment.

“Or the next ball,” said Laflamme. “I hope some one will take pity on me. I should like a taste of royalty.”

Sure enough he was chosen. Monsieur Rivé as well. Monette had been tempted by a hunting expedition. He was not so fond of merriment, and had left a sweetheart in New Orleans.

Laflamme was rather annoyed. He had to pay his devotion to his queen, but he would make up for it next time. André had no rival to fear then, though Renée was besieged with invitations.

Yet with all the apparent freedom, a young man waited to be asked by the head of the house before presenting himself to any young lady. And there was no madame here looking out that this rose should not be left on the household stem.

There are natures that opposition whets into ardent desire, and Laflamme’s was one of these. He had become a guest at Madame Aubry’s, but he was too well bred to ask so great a favor of her so soon. Yet at the night of the second ball he was impatiently waiting. As Renée emerged from the dressing-room he handed her the bouquet, and she accepted it with a smile, but she was a little vexed at heart. She would rather have had the compliment from Monsieur Rivé, but she was gratified to be a queen.

For somehow her heart rather misgave her. Out on the pond skating, or in the merry sledging parties, she had managed to evade any special overtures. There were other young men who considered her bright and pretty, but to them she was still an eager, rather spoiled child, hardly to be considered in a fair field for winning, though more than one had counted up her possible fortune. There was another virtue among these simple people, loyalty. One young man rarely interfered with another’s sweetheart. A peculiar kind of consent had given her to André Valbonais. He was doing well, a steady young fellow and high in favor with Pierre Chouteau, who entrusted a great deal of the business to his care. Then he was in and out at Gaspard Denys’, as no young man would be unless he was willing to give him his darling Renée.

Laflamme danced with her, and the grace and lightness of her step made it an exquisite pleasure. He glanced over the girls. There were many who were pretty with the charm of youth, some who were lovely with the finer dowry of beauty, that wifehood and motherhood only enhances. A few generations ago these settlers, many of them, came from peasant stock, and at least on one side *she* had fine blood. It showed in her with the many indescribable points that he could distinguish readily. Still, he would not have taken any woman with poverty unless it were some court favorite the King or Queen would dower.

True, Gaspard Denys might marry and raise up sons and daughters, but he would make sure that Renée had her portion of his wealth. And although this was a wild, uncultivated sort of life, there were possibilities of gain in it. The lead mines were believed to be inexhaustible, though the method of working them was imperfect. Denys had a share in the enterprise and sometimes spent weeks at Fort Chartres, as the lead was sent from there to New Orleans. At such times the Marchands came over to stay, or André Valbonais slept in the house.

Laflamme had enjoyed his bachelorhood extremely, and admitted to himself it would be a bother to have to think about a wife. But if his Montreal affairs should prove unsuccessful it might be a most excellent thing to have a dependence to fall back upon. And when it came to that he would not be really compelled to take Renée to France; he would, no doubt, return to America.

They had finished their dance, but M. Laflamme still kept Renée’s hand and held her attention by some amusing incidents until the music began again. Then she was fain to release it. No one had asked her for this dance—there had been no opportunity.

“I have you, little prisoner.” he said, with a meaning smile. “Come, this is too delightful to forego.”

“No, I would rather not dance,” hesitatingly.

“You cannot plead fatigue, since you have only danced once,” he declared insistently.

He impelled her into the line with a gentle firmness she could not resist, though every line of her face, every pulse in her body, protested against it. Two dances in succession were too pronounced, unless one was betrothed or likely to be.

In spite of it all she found herself whirling about the line, in a keeper’s charge she felt. The young men looked rather questioningly; the girls exchanged glances, the elder women nodded, as if this set the seal to their surmises. Renée’s face was scarlet and her eyes downcast. Would it never come to an end? She was growing more and more resentful, indignant.

“Now we will take a turn about——”

“Where is Elise?” she interrupted. Elise Renaud had been married long enough to play

chaperone. Madame Marchand had expected to attend, but in the afternoon one of the babies had been taken ill. And there were mothers enough to watch over the young girls.

“No, you do not want Elise,” mimicking her tone in a soft, yet decisive manner. “And I want you. I have something to say——”

“No! no!” she cried in alarm, wrenching her hand away, and she would have fled, but she almost ran into André Valbonais’s arms.

“Oh, keep me!” she cried under her breath. “Take me away—keep me from——”

“What is the meaning of this?” and he looked from the small, trembling figure in his arms to Monsieur Laflamme.

“Ma’m’selle de Longueville had a turn—I think it was the heat—or, perhaps we danced too hard. You in this new country take things so much in earnest. Then we came out here for a breath of air. She is better already. She is my queen for the evening. Ma’m’selle, when you are ready to go back——”

Laflamme was the embodiment of gentleness and perfect breeding, and as he gazed tranquilly at André, the young man felt the indescribable difference, and withal a certain power that was like authority over Renée. Oh, what if—and suddenly André Valbonais knew the child’s play; the pretty imperiousness of ownership had a deeper meaning for him. He would dispute this man’s claim. What was it but trifling? The two men were as transient guests in the town. They would go away as soon as the spring opened. But this one should not trifle with little Renée. Ah! he did not look like trifling. The resolution in his face startled André.

“Ma’m’selle Renée,” he began, “are you ill? Shall I take you home?” and André’s eyes questioned.

There was an ardent pressure on the small hand that said authoritatively, “Come! come!” It roused the spirit of wilfulness, of which she had quite too much. And what was there to be afraid of? She was suddenly courageous.

“I am better now,” she said. “We will go back. But I will not dance. Monsieur Laflamme, choose some other partner. One does not dance every time, even with a king. We rule our own court here and make our own laws. And I will lend the fair one my rose.”

She took André’s arm and smiled up in the other’s face with the most provoking nonchalance. Laflamme gnawed his lip. He was very angry.

“I shall not consent to that. I am not so easily transferred, ma’m’selle.”

“But you must go and dance. You will break the circle. Monsieur Valbonais and I will look on.”

She turned, her head held up haughtily. There was nothing to do but follow or make a scene, which was not to be thought of.

“And here is Lucie Aubry, the most queenlike girl in the room. You two look splendid on the floor. Ma’m’selle Lucie, will you take my rose?”

“Ma’m’selle Aubry does not need it. May I have the pleasure?” Laflamme placed himself between the two and led Lucie away.

CHAPTER XV—GATHERING THISTLES

“What happened?” asked André abruptly. “Were you ill, or—or offended?”

“I was dizzy and warm, that was all.”

“Renée,” he began presently, “that man is playing with you. He is endeavoring to win your affections, and he will go away soon and you will be left to get over it as best you may.”

“Get over what?” Her look and tone were so demure, so innocent, that he studied her in amaze.

“Why,” with some embarrassment, “if you care for him—and now I remember——”

A definite feeling that could hardly be called emotion swept over him. And he knew now he was cherishing a vague dream that some day she would love him.

“Well, what is it you remember?” in a sweet, half malicious, half mocking tone.

“He has been with you a great deal of late. On the ice and at sledging, and at the last dance. Men of his stamp love to flirt with pretty girls—yes, love to win their hearts and then leave them in the lurch. That is what he is doing. He is not in earnest.”

That vexed her. She flushed and looked prettier than ever, but tormenting as well, as a half-veiled touch of indignation seemed to pass from her shining eyes.

“As if I cared!” with a laugh like the softest ripple.

“Then—you do not—love him?”

André’s voice had the hoarseness of an unspoken fear in it. He was amazed at the boldness of his question.

“Why should I love him? Why should I want to go away from this dear home, from Uncle Gaspard?”

“But he will persuade you——”

“Will he?” She glanced up so daring, so defiant and resolute, that he gave a happy laugh.

“That is right. Oh, Renée, child, do not let any one persuade you! You are too young. And then, by and by—yes, you will know some one cares for you with his whole soul, will lay all that he has at your feet——”

“He had better not. I should simply dance over it. Now let us go back. I am all rested. You shall have the next dance with me.”

Monsieur Laflamme made no movement toward her, but seemed quite devoted to a new partner. Did he really care so much? Renée felt piqued with this display of indifference. This dance had a chain of persons going in and out and turning partners. As that gentleman approached she gave her rose a caressing touch and glanced up with eyes so alight and full of beseechingness that he pressed her hand in token that all was peace between them, and her wilful heart exulted.

“My charming queen,” he said in an appealing tone, “may I come back to my rightful place and sun myself in your smiles? Did I offend you?”

She was not used to such flowery speech, but it sounded delightful to her. And yet it did not seem quite sincere. But she waved her hand playfully to André and went with M. Laflamme to the head of the row of dancers. It was hardly likely she would be queen again after to-night.

André Valbonais looked on puzzled, confused. He danced with several other girls, he chatted with the mothers and fathers, but it seemed as if one side of his nature did not respond to anything. It was so curiously cold that the smiles Renée lavished on every one did not arouse any jealous resentment. It was like an ice-bound stream that would awaken presently; the spring sunshine never failed to burst the bounds.

They came to the end of the night’s pleasure. Several lovers were glancing at each other with confident, lingering smiles that mothers understood and did not disapprove of, even while they hurried their daughters away.

“There can be but one more ball, Lent falls so early,” said some one.

“True. Well, let us make it on Tuesday night.”

“Oh, you forget! That is the masked ball.”

“What matter, so long as there is dancing and fun?”

“But we are not all allowed at the masked ball. That is more for the older people. Oh, I hope next year I shall be a queen!”

So they chatted in their gay youth. André fastened Renée’s fur cloak and drew the hood over her face. Had she ever looked so sweet and bewildering before? Monsieur Laflamme wished her good-night and happy dreams, then bending low, whispered:

“But they must be of me. I shall dream of you.”

She colored vividly.

The quiet streets were filled with echoes of talk. Two or three dropped out here, a few more there. Renée and André called out good-night and turned in their square.

Gaspard Denys was smoking his pipe before the cheerful blazing fire, a picture of comfort.

“Oh, you lazy uncle!” Renée cried, but her voice had gayety, and not disappointment in it. “You did not come to see me as the queen. And I may never be that again.”

“A queen! And whose queen, pray?”

“M. Laflamme chose me. And M. Rivé was one of the kings. I don’t know why, but I believe I like him better. And he looked especially well to-night. Why didn’t you come?” with an enchanting pout of her rosy lips.

“I had a long list of accounts to go over. And then, pretty one, you had André to bring you home. Besides, I am growing old and, like Mère Lunde, love the chimney corner.”

“Oh, you are not old! I will not have you growing old. Why, the fathers with their grown-up children were there. And some women have grandchildren. Good-night, André,” nodding to him.

André took his dismissal cheerfully.

Renée crawled in Gaspard’s lap and put her soft arms about his neck, laid her cheek to his.

“Oh,” she cried in a tone of pathos, “I do not want you ever to get old! You are just right now.”

“My dear, do you want always to stay fifteen?”

“Yes, I should be glad to. Oh, what makes the world whirl round so! And I shall be sixteen in the summer, and then—no, I won’t go on. Can’t you take something, do something——”

“There was a man once who fell asleep and slept for years. When he awoke his friends were dead, or had gone away——”

“Oh, hush! hush! I do not mean anything so dreadful as that,” she entreated.

“Then we must go on and take all the pleasure we can to-day, or to-night—though I believe it is to-morrow morning now, and you must run to bed.”

She kissed him and turned slowly. She wanted to ask some curious questions, but they were vague and would not readily shape themselves into words.

He still sat and thought. Sixteen. It gave him an uneasy feeling. If she could always stay a little girl! If he might map out her life! André Valbonais had the making of a fine, trusty man, a good business man as well. If he could come here as a son of the house. If they three could go on together, and a merry throng of children grow up about them!

The dream was rudely broken to fragments the next day. The young man of six or seven and twenty who stood leaning against the counter, one foot half crossed over the other, with an easy, gentlemanly air that betokened training beyond what the average habitant of the new countries acquired, was well calculated to win a woman’s heart, a girl’s heart, perhaps too easily caught, satisfied with the outward indications of manliness. Gaspard Denys could not quite tell why, but in his heart he did not altogether approve of this fine gentlemen, for all his good looks, his well-modulated voice and excellent breeding.

And he had asked him for the pride of his eye, the idol of his heart, the dearest thing on earth, to take her away for years, perhaps forever, and leave him to the loneliness of old age! And, monstrous thought, he was persuaded that Renée would love him when he had spoken. He had seen indications of it. Last evening he had startled her by some vehemence, for in spite of her apparent gayety and merriment she was a tender, sensitive plant. He would woo her with the utmost gentleness after the permission was once given.

“She is so young,” Gaspard Denys began reluctantly. “Whether a girl at that time of life knows her own mind, is able to choose wisely——”

“But it is the guardians and parents generally who choose. A little advice, suggestion—and I think I can satisfy you on any point you desire. Ma’m’selle Renée would go back to the standing of her father’s family. She would have advantages, and I may succeed to a title. Still, now I only present myself, and rely upon no adventitious aids.”

“It would be—for her to decide. And I would rather have her here. Her father, it seems, cared little enough about her. No, I do not think I could give her up,” decisively.

“But it is not absolutely necessary that I return to France,” in a gravely gentle tone. “After my affairs in Montreal are settled, which I hope will turn out profitably, I should be free to do as I liked, or as another liked,” smiling affably.

“We will not decide this matter hastily. If you chose to go to Montreal, and the spring will soon open,” M. Denys said tentatively.

M. Laflamme thought he had only to ask to have. He fancied Gaspard Denys would be very glad to marry his adopted daughter into a good family—for, after all, her grandfather had not been held in high esteem. A little persuasion on Denys’s part, a little setting forth of the advantages, and he could manage to do the rest by flattery and cajolery. He began to half wish he had not taken a step in the matter, but he could not draw back now.

“I should like to know that my suit was favorably looked upon before I went,” was the rejoinder.

“Oh, you may soon know that. To-morrow, perhaps.”

“Meanwhile may I see Ma’m’selle de Longueville?”

“She is at the Marchands’.”

Monsieur Laflamme bowed. He did not care to subject himself to the clear, intent eyes of

Madame Marchand. They were too penetrating.

A fortune was not so easily won, after all. Fate was playing at cross-purposes. Renée and Wawataysee were skimming over the lake in an ice boat. If he had guessed that he might have walked home with her in the twilight.

Renée was brilliant with the bloom of the frosty air as she came in, and her eyes were like stars. A pang went to Gaspard's heart. Ought she not take her place on a higher round than this little town of traders and trappers and farmers, many of them scarcely knowing how to read? There might be beautiful, satisfactory years before her—years with educated, refined people. He knew something of the larger cities and their advantages; he could guess at many of the charms of the beautiful, fascinating, historic Paris, with its palaces and villas and works of art and wonderful gardens. Should she be shut out of all these and affiliate with the wilderness of the New World? No. If it broke his heart, she should be free to choose.

"You had a fine time!" he commented.

"Oh, splendid! Do you know, I shall hate to have the snow and ice vanish! Oh, you should have seen the sky to-night when the red sun dropped down behind the mountains and everything was illumined as from some mighty blaze. And then fading, changing to such gorgeous colors. Oh, what is back of it all? What wonderful power and glory?"

Yes, she was capable of appreciating higher and finer opportunities than any she would ever have here.

He went through to the shop. He could not enjoy the fire when Mère Lunde was clattering pots and pans. But he had his own, if the place was a conglomeration of everything. He had made himself a big, easy chair, and the great buffalo-skin thrown over it kept off drafts. The fire was poked up; the dry pine made an exhilarating blaze, and the pungency affected one like drinking wine—sent a thrill to the farthest pulse.

Renée came and stood in the light of the blaze, that made a Rembrandt picture of her. She watched the dancing, leaping flames. She smiled, turned grave, then smiled again, and presently caught sight of the serious face watching her.

"What is it?" she asked, dropping down on a log, fur-covered for a stool.

"Renée, I wonder if you would like to go away and visit wonderful, beautiful countries, where people have books and pictures and fine houses, and where there are elegant men and women ——"

"Why? Are you going?"

She took the rather rough hand in hers, soft as velvet, and gazed at him out of surprised eyes.

"Would you like to go?" studying her lovely face.

"Not without you," gravely.

"But if some one younger and handsome, well-informed, accustomed to a more refined life, should care for you, should want to take you, should——"

"Oh, what is it you mean? And who is it? And I could not go unless"—her face was scarlet —"unless he married me, I know that. And there is no one I would marry. Do you think I would go away and leave you, when I love you so, when you wanted me and no one else did? Why, I would not marry a king!" and she clasped her arms about his neck.

Then a sudden knowledge flashed over her. She recalled last evening.

"I know!" she exclaimed. "It is Monsieur Laflamme. And he dared——"

She clinched her small fist.

"Then he spoke last night? And you——"

"No, he did not speak. But you can make one understand. Perhaps he might have, but André came."

Renée rose suddenly and stretched up her full height.

"Then he did mean— André said he was only pretending. I should hate him still more if he could do that! But if he thinks I care for him and would go away with him to the fairest spot in the world—oh, you do not want me to!" and she threw herself into his arms, sobbing vehemently.

"Renée, child, there is no harm done. He was very gentlemanly. He asked for your hand as an honest man should. And we cannot blame him altogether," a spice of humor in his tone. "He fancied you cared for him. Men occasionally make mistakes."

Had she made him believe that? She had tried somewhat without considering the consequences. The little triumph *had* appealed to her girlish vanity. How could she explain it?

“I liked him a little,” she confessed brokenly. “And I was proud and delighted to be chosen his queen. But I do not want him to love me. I do not want any one to love me but just you. I shall never love any one else.”

It was a very sweet confession, but she did not know what it meant. So her mother had said, and he wanted to believe he had held *her* truest faith, and this had descended to her child.

“Then what am I to tell him? That you are too young to think about such things?”

“That I shall never think about him in that manner. Oh, make him understand that!”

“There, dear, it is not worth crying over. He is not the first man who has found the rose out of reach or been pricked by thorns.”

Gaspard turned up the sweet, flushed, tear-wet face and kissed it. He was so glad to have it back safe and innocent of the great knowledge that sooner or later comes to all womanhood. Some day it would come to her, but let him keep his little girl as long as he could.

So it was all settled, but Renée could not feel quite at rest about it. These people did not make tyrants of conscience; they were not analytical nor given to inquisitorial scrutiny of every feeling or motive. The priests were as simple-hearted as the people. True, some of them were considered rather lax when they had left their people open to Protestant influences. But here there were no Protestants, no religious arguments. To tell the truth, to be honest, just and kindly was creed enough for the women. Their hearts were not probed to the deepest thought. They confessed a bit of temper, a little envying, perhaps some laxness about prayers, and took a simple penance. Church-going was one of their pleasures.

Yet Renée had a kind of misgiving that she had thrown at Monsieur Laflamme some of those radiant looks that might mean much or little, according to one’s way of translating them. She put the thought of marriage far away from her. Some time a delightful, devoted man, like M. Marchand, might cross her path. He was so strong and yet so gentle. He was always thinking of what would please Wawataysee. Even now, with two babies, he went out rambling with her, and they came home laden with wild flowers or berries. Then it was out canoeing, of which the young wife was extremely fond.

But it did not seem as if M. Laflamme would be given to this kind of devotion. He would seek to bend a woman to his will. There were wives who cheerfully bowed their heads to their masters, but as a general thing these simple-minded French husbands were not tyrants.

She did not like him to come so near; it made her afraid. And, girlish contradiction, she had delighted in her power of bringing him near, of tasting the sweets of a certain kind of exaction. André always yielded to her whims and seldom had any will of his own.

She sat in the garden awhile listening to the birds and a pretty black-eyed squirrel, who kept running up and down the tree beside her and looking as if he would presently jump on her shoulder. Then she saw André coming up the path, and a tormenting impulse seized her. She skipped across the grass with a triumph of laughter in her eyes.

“André!” she cried gayly. “André, you were quite mistaken—” How should she word it?

“Mistaken! About what?” and he raised his honest eyes, half amused.

“About—Monsieur Laflamme. You said that he did not mean anything; that he only cared to win a girl’s heart and cast it away. It is not true. You were very unjust. He has been here. He has asked Uncle Gaspard for my hand. He would like to marry me. And I am not quite sixteen!” in a tone of exultation.

She mistook the fleeting color for a fit of vexation that he had been wrong, though people generally turned red when they were angry. It seemed to him all the blood rushed out of his body, whither he knew not, but left him as one dead. And there was a solemn tolling of bells in his ears.

She was enjoying his unlooked-for mood with a certain sense of triumph.

“Oh, the pity of the blessed saints, of the sweet Virgin herself! And you mean to marry him!”

“Well, if I did?” saucily. “I dare say there are girls who would jump at the prospect.”

“But you know next to nothing about him. He may have a wife already somewhere. Such things have been. Oh, Monsieur Denys cannot, will not let you go!”

That was like a strain of sweet music to her. Then she laughed and he looked puzzled.

“Oh,” with an airy toss of the head, “I don’t believe Uncle Gaspard would break my heart and make me miserable if I had cared a great deal for M. Laflamme. But I do not want to marry any

one. I do not want to go away. I am very happy here. Why, there isn't a man in the world like Uncle Gaspard!"

There was a great revulsion in every pulse. The warm blood came back to André's cheek and the strange look went out of his eyes.

"But you see you *were* mistaken. You gave him hard and unjust judgment. I suppose he must have loved me or he wouldn't have wanted to marry me. There is no lack of pretty girls in the town."

She held her head with triumphant assurance. Her eyes were brimming over, her red lips full of saucy curves, in which seemed to lurk budding kisses for some lover.

But André blundered, as inexperience sometimes will.

"It is not only the beauty, ma'm'selle. Laure Eudeline is like a picture, but without a sou or a silver spoon for her portion. Has M. Laflamme looked at her twice? And you have a dot that would make many men covet you. Every one knows it will only grow larger in M'sieu Denys's hands. And I dare say *he* would like the pleasure of handling it."

Renée had rarely thought of her fortune. And the most exquisite, the most romantic dream of a young girl is to be loved for herself alone. André had suddenly dashed this enchanting belief to fragments. Yes, there *was* the fortune, a hard, solemn fact. Must she suspect every one henceforward?

"André," she cried in passionate anger, "you are small and mean and suspicious! I hate you!"

It was the truth, since André had heard Madame Aubry and one or two others commend Monsieur Laflamme for his wisdom. Some man would marry Mademoiselle de Longueville in a year or two. But it was an unfortunate way of putting her on guard. And it stings a girl with mortification to hear a man belittled who has paid her the compliment of a marriage proposal.

The young fellow walked away. There was something fine and solid about him, she had to admit, angry as she was. Almost as tall as Uncle Gaspard and with a compact, yet lithesome figure, carrying his head well, stepping with decision and having an air of command with most people, but never with her, for she ruled him.

Her anger was short-lived, after all. When she quarrelled with him there always came up a procession of remembrances. She knew now what might have been her fate as a captive, and he had saved her from that. He had gone without food that she and Wawataysee would not lose their strength until they had reached some place of safety. He had carried her that last night. Yes, she was an ungrateful, exasperating little thing, and after all she did not *really* hate him. She would not even want him to go out of her life. Suddenly she thought she would not even like him to love some other girl.

He had a long conversation with Gaspard Denys that comforted him a good deal. Denys was like an older brother, taking a great interest in his advancement, advising him as to what was best to do with his savings, but as yet he had never said, "You had better marry some nice, thrifty girl." Somehow he was very glad of that.

She lingered around in the old garden and the happy light came back to her eyes, the balmy air soothed her ruffled temper. In her secret heart she believed M. Laflamme had really loved her. If there were other pretty girls in the world, there were other rich girls, too. In Canada, where he was going, there were real heiresses, though how much it took to constitute one she had no idea.

He did not come through the garden. Perhaps he meant to stay to supper. Then she would be rather grave and dignified, and show him that he had seriously offended her.

"Renée! Renée, *petite*!" called Mère Lunde.

There was a quick stride down the street. It turned the corner. She pulled a rose and unthinkingly pressed it to her lips.

"André!" she said in a rather appealing tone.

The tall figure bent over the fence, and the eyes were touched with an eager, responsive light.

"André, were you *very* angry? I was——"

"Oh, ma'm'selle, who could long be angry with one so charming?" and his whole heart was in his voice.

She gave him the rose. "I must run in to supper," and she vanished like a sprite.

"She kissed the rose," he said, pressing it to his lips. "Oh, ma'm'selle, no sweeter flower ever bloomed. But you are a rose set in thorns. The fragrance clings to you, the thorns prick others."

CHAPTER XVI—THE RISE IN THE RIVER

There was news enough at Madame Renaud's. Every year she grew a little stouter, a trifle more consequential. The grandmères always were. Elise and Louis both had little daughters. There had been sons before, but granddaughters were rather nearer, it seemed. She must make a christening cake for both, and she thanked the saints that the church had been freshened up a little and that the good Vicar-General had made a gift of a new altar cloth.

The other news was not so joyous. Barbe Gardepier had never been home since her marriage. Women travelled very seldom in those days. Once her baby boy had been born and died, then her little girl was just born. And now she had lost her husband, and was coming back to St. Louis to live.

Jean Gardepier had died early in the winter. But news was slow in coming. This had been sent with the first relay of boats, and she would be up in June with her little girl.

"And to think of the sorrow of the poor thing!" exclaimed Madame Renaud, wiping her eyes. "Here I have my good man Louis and my four children around me, three of them in homes of their own, and never a sorrow, while she is left alone to sup bitter grief! And not a relative near her! The saints be praised when it is possible for families to stay together. Then there is a friendly voice to console you."

They all remembered pretty Barbe Guion. The old grandmère had died—that was natural in old age—but aunts and uncles and cousins were living, so it was a family grief.

But the christening came to break the sorrow and there was a grand time. Spring had come late this year. With a rather hard winter, streams and rivers had been choked with ice, but now all was bloom and beauty and gladness.

There were always some special prayers and a mass said on Corpus Christi day, and it was kept with great seriousness at Gaspard Denys'. But the Indians all about were so friendly that fears were allayed, though the town was better protected now.

There had been very heavy spring rains, and this, with the sunshine, gave promise of abundant harvests. Farmers had begun to plant wheat and rye, which brought back old memories of pleasant life in sunny France when taxes and tithes were not too high.

Amid all this smiling content there was one morning a strange sound. Men paused at their work and listened. Sometimes in a high wind the sound came rushing over the prairie like the tramp of an army, and seemed to threaten everything with destruction. Occasionally the river rose, but since the founding of the towns no great harm had been done.

On it came, nearer, with a thundering boom that now could not be mistaken. Men rushed to the levee to be sure that the boats were made safe. They looked up the river, standing on the high ground. What was this terror marching toward them? A seething, foaming flood with great, dark waves tossing up a yellow-black spray, sweeping all before it.

"The river! The river is rising!" was shouted by terrified voices, and men looked at each other in fear. They had never seen anything like it. There had been freshets that had done considerable damage, torn out banks and sent down great drifts of broken and uprooted trees. There had been ice gorges, when the cakes of ice would pile up like Arctic mounds, crashing, thundering, and suddenly give way, dazzling in the sunshine like a fleet of boats and, sweeping down the river, crush whatever was in its way.

But this was a great wall, starting up no one knew where, swelled by the streams, expanded by the Missouri, sweeping all before it, submerging Gaboret Island, gathering momentum every moment, swirling at every point and curve, as if longing to beat them out of existence, and with an accumulation of uprooted trees so jammed together that many of them stood upright, a great army of devastation.

The current was very swift in any freshet. Although it was called the great river, that applied more to its length, for here it was not much over two thousand feet wide. But it was deep, with a dangerous power when it rose in its might, and fed by so many streams and tributaries that the *débris* was constantly washing down to the gulf at its numerous mouths.

They gazed in speechless terror at first, as if they would be helpless in the grasp of such a giant, and the roar was appalling. The spray seemed dashed up in the very face of heaven; the rending, tearing and crushing was terrific. The very trees shrieked as they were torn from their foundation. On it rushed, a great, dark, fierce wall, sweeping everything in its way, tearing out banks, booming like the roar of artillery, shrieking with madness, as if hundreds of people were crying out for help and safety. The crowd looked at each other in dismay. Some fled to the next higher range, many sank helplessly to the ground, others were on their knees praying. And when it struck the little town it seemed like a mighty earthquake, and the ground fairly shuddered as it rushed by furiously.

The boats that had been drawn up to a safe line, as was thought, were swept off to join the mad,

careering mass and add to the rending, deafening sound. And when the first accumulation had swept by and was whirling around the bend of the river another and still another followed. Was the whole north going to be precipitated upon them?

The curve in the river did the town this much good: it swept the fierce current to the eastern side, tore out, submerged, and by the time it turned it was below the town. They were not to be swept quite away, and some of the braver ones began to take courage and ventured to look at the levee below. That was gone, of course.

It was a day and a night of terror. The flood had submerged a part of the Rue Royale and some of the residents had moved their belongings to higher ground. Trading houses had been emptied of their goods. Gaspard Denys shrugged his shoulders with intense satisfaction. Up here past the Rue de l'Eglise all was safe and dry.

For days there seemed a spell upon the people. They could do little besides watch the receding river and view the wreckage it had left in its wake. Great caves and indentations on the opposite shore, bare spaces where trees had waved their long green arms joyously in the sunshine a few days ago. Yet they found they had not fared so badly. Everybody turned out to help repair damages.

What of the fleet of boats coming up the river? What of the towns below?

"And my poor Barbe!" cried Madame Renaud. "Why, they would be almost home, unless the boats were swept to destruction. Only a miracle could have saved them. And oh, then, where are they?"

True. The waters had subsided so much it would be safe to go in search of them. There were several coves less infested now with pirates than formerly, where boats sometimes put in to avoid the storms. Colonel Chouteau at once had two boats made ready and stored with provisions, in case of a rescue of any voyagers.

Then some trading fleets ventured from St. Charles. All along the shores on both sides were marks of devastation. Great chasms had been created here, and there mounds of broken trees and tons of river mud deposited over them. Gaboret Island began to show its head, but it had been swept clean.

The farther down the river went, the more appalling had been the destruction. The fate of the towns below they could only guess at, but the news came presently. Cahokia had been nearly swept out of existence. Part of Kaskaskia, the oldest part built on the river bluff, had been torn away by the resistless force. People were flying hither and thither, having lost their all.

André Valbonais had headed the rescuing party—if, indeed, there was anything to rescue. The mighty river had gone back to its normal state; the banks, encrusted with yellow mud, were drying in the sun. They found curious changes. Two of the little coves were filled with *débris* and gave no indication of sheltering any travellers.

They passed the Miramec River with no sign. That, too, had all its banks submerged, and the tough grasses and reeds were just rearing their heads. On again, here was quite a bluff. Just around the turn had been a noted pirate resort, broken up two or three times; at the last time with the cost of a number of lives.

"Do you suppose it will be safe?" queried the captain. "There may be Indians in hiding."

Valbonais reconnoitred awhile. "Up above there is the smoke of a fire," he said. "And I think I see a boat just beyond the turn. Get your arms, men, and be ready to back out if we are in danger."

They crept on cautiously. Now they could see two boats drawn up on a ledge. Farther up there was a cluster of men.

"They are not pirates, surely. They would have some scouts stationed if they were."

"They are making signs. Oh, no, they are neither Indians nor pirates," and the captain dug the pole in the soft bank, impelling the boat up a yard or two. And then he heard a joyful cry, which he answered by an encouraging greeting through the horn he carried.

It was, indeed, the stranded voyagers. The captain of the fleet came running down the winding path. He was a Spaniard, quite well known in St. Louis, Dessous by name.

As to his story, all had been fair sailing, with mostly fine weather until they had reached this point. At the first sight they feared a hurricane was upon them. The river began to seethe and swell, and the noise of its rush sounded the awful warning in their ears. The boats had been cordelled, and now the order was given to run them in the cove. Two had reached a point of safety when the sweeping torrent invaded this shelter and took with it the rest of the line to join the raging flood.

The few passengers were in the first boat, and were soon put ashore and bidden to run upon the high ground. Then an effort was made to save the two remaining boats. Now and then a swirl

nearly submerged them, but a mass of tree trunks and branches caught on some projection at the mouth of the cove, which turned the current and gave them a promise of safety. There was a cave, partly natural, and rendered more secure by the gang of pirates who had once made it their camping ground. But now it began to fill with water. So they carried some of their stores and blankets to a sheltered place up above to await the result. Even here they could hear the roar of the river.

When Captain Dessous thought it safe to venture, they examined the boats and found one with a large hole in the bottom where it had struck on the jagged rock. They had provisions and made a rude shelter for the women, three ladies and a maid, and a little child. It would not be safe to venture until the river had subsided, so they had waited. All could not go in the one boat, and to leave the others at the mercy of prowling Indians, or, it might be, a return of some pirate squad, was hardly safe. Still some of the more courageous men had agreed to remain, and they had decided to start shortly. It was full moon now and the night would be light enough for safety if they were caught in it, for no one could calculate the exact distance or the obstacles they would have to encounter.

Now all was joyous satisfaction. The stores from the injured boat were divided among the other two, and the women taken on board the rescue boat. They found their way out to the river, now flowing along serenely. But there would be the tide against them. Still they were delighted at the thought of soon reaching a safe harbor. The moon came out in its most resplendent beauty. The banks of the river were a series of bewildering pictures for any one with an artistic eye. The men sang songs in French and Spanish, and would have danced if there had been room.

“They are coming up the river!” some one shouted in the light of the golden June morning. “There is Captain Javelot and André Valbonais. I can make them out through the glass. And some women.”

One and another hurried down. Christophe Baugenon expected his sweetheart, and had been getting a nest ready for her. Madame Galette had come up to end her days with her two sons. Gaspard Denys was there as well, anxious to know how the peril had been escaped.

There was a lovely woman with a babe in her arms. The Spanish veil-like mantilla was thrown gracefully over her head and shoulders. Her soft, dark eyes glanced up and met those of Denys, who stretched out his hand past that of Valbonais in a heartfelt greeting.

“Barbe!” he cried. “Barbe!” forgetting she had any other name.

“Oh, Monsieur Denys, thank heaven!”

Madame Renaud came rushing down with a wild cry and flung her arms around her sister.

“Let me take the child,” Gaspard said, while the two women fell into each other’s embrace.

A pretty little thing of three or so, with rings of dark hair about her forehead and curiously tinted eyes, black with golden shades in them. She laid her hand confidingly on his shoulder. Children always trusted him.

“Marie! Marie!” called Madame Gardepier. “Take the little Angelique. Monsieur Denys, how can I thank you?”

She was lovelier than ever with her eyes full of tears. Elise had been crying over her.

Marie was maid and slave, about as much Spanish as African, slim and graceful, and with the beauty belonging to the mixed blood. The child made no demur, but bestowed a dainty smile upon him.

“Oh—it is nothing.” He had not come expecting to meet her, though he had wondered a little about her.

“But to be here again! To have a welcome from you, an old friend! Yes, it is joy indeed.”

Christophe Baugenon had his arms about his sweetheart. They were glad to have half the world share their joys, in those early days when honesty was more than style or culture.

“Come soon,” said Madame Renaud. “We are all such old friends. And Barbe will have so much to tell. And bring ma’m’selle: she can’t have forgotten. Oh, Barbe, she is a young lady now!” laughing cheerily.

Then they moved on, while his eyes followed them.

Already men were repairing the levee, or, rather, building it anew under Colonel Chouteau’s direction. Some other overflow in time would sweep this away, but this was the best of their knowledge then. And the unfortunate captain had his story to tell. He had saved his papers and bills of lading, and could tell upon whom the losses would fall. There were some shipments for Denys, but he was glad no lives had been lost. André was describing their share of the rescue in brief terms. So it was late when M. Denys returned.

“We waited and waited for you!” cried Renée. “And the breakfast was so good—the corn cakes Mère Lunde makes that melt in your mouth.”

And truly even those wilderness women, with no culinary magazines or housekeeping hints, concocted very savory dishes. Their grater was of the rudest kind. A strip of tin through which a sharpened bit of iron was driven to make holes, the rough side put upward as it was fastened to a piece of board. On this they grated green corn all the summer and autumn. During the winter they boiled it on the ear until it was soft, then prepared it the same way. The cakes were mixed with eggs and flour and baked on a hot flat stone in the heat of the coals. A syrup made of maple sugar would be poured over them.

“Yes, I am very sorry—and hungry,” laughing. “There was so much to talk about.”

“And was any one lost? Where did they find the boats?” Renée was all eagerness.

“There were only two. The rest were swept away. They took shelter in Pirate Creek, but the pirates have been cleaned out. It might have been worse. The losses can be recouped. Ah, you should have seen the joy of Christophe Baugenon over his sweetheart! Madame Galette, and Madame Gardepier with her little girl.”

“She is quite old now,” said Renée, with the assurance of youth that is its own hasty judge.

“Oh, no! Five or six and twenty. And her little girl is about three, a pretty child. Madame Renaud was wild with delight, as who would not be. And she begs that we will come soon.”

Renée had busied herself with a pretence of getting the meal, but it was Mère Lunde who had toasted the corn cake and the dried fish. It seemed to her as if a tiny shade had fallen over the world, but no, the sun was shining with extraordinary brilliancy. It made the leaves outside scatter its golden rays about as if they were sprites dancing.

“The blessed Virgin has been very good to her,” said Mère Lunde, crossing herself. “Such a fearful time! I hope there never will be another. And Madame Galette. I knew her years ago. She has two good sons left.”

An event like this made talk for days, especially as the men were busy repairing damages, and the captains had to tell their stories over and over. Then the next relay of boats came in with the news of the other towns, and that families were resolving to emigrate. Indeed, before cold weather set in quite a number of families had reached St. Louis, and many a winter evening was devoted to a recount of dangers and wonderful escapes, the destruction of many a small fortune.

There was not a happier heart in all St. Louis, perhaps, than that of Barbe Gardepier. If her marriage had not been altogether satisfactory, she would not at first confess it to her sister. New Orleans was very different from St. Louis. Pleasures were not so simple. There were cabarets where men spent evenings drinking and playing games, betting and losing. And there were balls where men never took their wives, but danced with beautiful creole girls who were outside the pale of their own people. True, the wives visited each other and gossiped about this and that, and went to church often, at times finding a choice morsel of scandal to discuss. She had longed for her own old home, and as the weeks and months went on she seemed to grow away from her husband rather than nearer to him. He had not appeared to mind the baby’s death much, while it had almost broken her heart.

She had been bitterly disappointed in the non-success of her second plan to visit home, as she still called the old town.

“It is too severe a journey,” her husband had said decisively. “And it is a dull little place at the best. I would not stir a step if I were not compelled to.”

For all that he seemed to find plenty to amuse himself with. Coming down the river, he had made a stay at Kaskaskia, where pretty girls abounded. When he did return there was a little daughter to claim his love; but he was not fond of babies. Girls were all right enough budding into womanhood, with a hundred seductive charms. Until then, the nursery and the convent.

Barbe might have found amusement and danced with the gayest, but she soon learned that her husband was jealous and could say very bitter things. So she kept to her little girl and poured out all her love on this sweet object. There were moments when she could not even bear to think that Jean Gardepier was her father.

One night he was brought home with a bad stab wound, the result of a quarrel. It did not seem dangerous at first, but he fumed and fretted and would go out too soon. He was quite ill again, and then it was found that the wound had penetrated his lung, and, after a few hemorrhages, he dropped quietly out of life. There was not much money left, but enough to take her home and keep her for awhile, and though she tried hard to moderate her joy at the thought, in her inmost heart she felt it was partly the sense of freedom.

And Gaspard Denys had been first to welcome her. The years had touched him lightly. His face had the same strong kindliness that had made her feel in her girlhood that he was a man to be trusted anywhere, a man one could rely upon. She had learned many things in these few years of

her married life. She had had a much wider experience than Madame Renaud with sons-in-law and daughter-in-law and the many years since she became a bride.

Neighbors came out to greet them. It was like a triumphal procession. Indeed, it seemed as if all the streets were full of gay, cheerful chatter. For in those days there was very little letter-writing; indeed, many fine housekeepers and excellent women did not know how to write.

Late in the afternoon the sisters were alone. Nearly every one had been discussed, and Barbe knew about most of the marriages and deaths, the new babies, the few newcomers and the general prosperity, as well as the losses.

“I was extremely pleased with that young Valbonais,” Barbe said. “He has improved very much. Is he connected in business now with Monsieur Denys?”

“Oh, no; he remains with the Chouteaus. But he is a frequent guest, and one can almost see how it will end,” laughing with a certain satisfaction.

“You mean—with the child?”

“Yes. She is a very pretty girl. She was at two of the balls last winter, though not a queen. There was a stranger, two of them, staying with the Governor. One cared little for gayety; the other was much smitten with the attractive Renée, and there was talk, but it fell through. It was said that he really did ask for her hand. But I think M. Denys would much rather have her remain here. She is like a child to him.”

Barbe nodded. “Still she is old enough to marry.”

“Oh, yes. Then her grandfather left quite a fortune, as I have told you. She is very young for her years, though—a child in some things.”

Barbe drew a long breath. “It is a little singular that M. Denys has never married,” she said indifferently.

“Oh, he may marry yet. There is always time for a man.”

Madame Renaud gave a meaning laugh. Barbe felt her color rising, but vouchsafed no reply.

That evening after supper M. Denys said:

“Let us go down to the Renauds’, my child, and welcome Madame Gardepier home.”

“Why, you saw her this morning! I thought everybody was giving her a welcome. She will be tired of so much,” was the rather careless reply.

“One is never tired of friendly appreciation.”

“Indeed?” almost saucily. “They may tire of other things, however. I was running races on the old mound this afternoon. I would like to sit and rest and talk.”

“Running races! And in the winter you were asked in marriage!” He laughed heartily and pinched her peachy cheek.

“Mère Lunde said sometimes princesses in France were asked in marriage when they were only a few years old,” she replied with dignity.

“That is true enough. Offered to this one and that. But I do not hawk my little queen about.”

“You love me very much?”

She uttered it with a soft sigh that was quite charming and touched him.

“Ah, you know that!” with fervor.

“But I like to hear you say it,” pleadingly.

“I love you very much.” He bent over and kissed the crown of her head, adding, “Then you will not go?”

“Stay with me,” she entreated. “You haven’t told me half the story of the boat coming in this morning.”

There was a light, youthful step on the floor.

“Ah, André!” Denys said, turning. “Come and tell this girl the welcomes that filled the air this morning, the finding of the castaways and all. You were there, and she can have it first-hand. Meanwhile, I will run down to the Renauds’ and see if Madame Gardepier is any the worse for her journey.”

Renée could have cried out with vexation. Denys did not even stop to light his pipe.

“Let us go in the garden, ma’m’selle. It is so beautiful in the starlight, and the air is fragrant with a hundred sweet scents. I wish you could have had the sail last night. It was the kind of thing to fill one’s soul with rapture.”

“I am tired!” she cried pettishly. “That was why I refused to go with uncle. And I don’t care so much about the rescue. People are crazy, as if nothing ever happened in St. Louis before. And my head aches. I believe I will go to bed.”

She sprang up impatiently.

“I am sorry——”

“There are plenty of girls who will be glad to have you talk to them,” she flung out, and the next moment had vanished.

André looked after her. He was very much in love with her now. He had been more than charmed with the young Indian girl. He had even thought if it was true M. Marchand was dead, he would try to comfort her, to win her. But when he witnessed her love for her husband, her entire devotion, and the tone in which she once said: “I think I must have had the hope in my heart all the time that my husband was alive, and that gave me strength when it seemed as if I must drop by the wayside. And if I had not found him I should have died, because there would have been no further desire to live,” he believed her then. He knew now that must have been the end. To be loved like that! Could Fate bestow anything better?

But last winter a different feeling had taken possession of him. First it was an effort to save Renée from a possible danger. He had seen considerable of Monsieur Laflamme and had no faith whatever in him. He was quite sure it was her fortune that had attracted him, for he was paying an equivocal sort of devotion to several others, or else he was just trifling with them all, taking what amusement he could in the simple pleasures of the place.

And now he knew that he had a desire quite for himself! True he would have saved her from any possible evil, but he wanted her, the smiles and the sweetness she lavished on Uncle Denys and Mère Lunde, the radiance and charm that she flung here and there. He would have liked to go about and gather them up as if they were tangible things. And yet—she did not care for him. Why, then, did she claim him in dozens of dainty ways? Why did she put him between herself and other gallants when their devotion became too pronounced?

André Valbonais was simple and straightforward, and had a very limited knowledge of the twists and turns in the feminine mind. Complex characters are not usual where people live truly rather than take continual thought about living.

He went out now and sat on the doorstep, talking to Mère Lunde. Some one was playing on a fiddle, interspersed with rollicking songs, and the sound floated up to them. There was a great deal of joy in the world, but his heart was heavy.

Renée flung herself on the bed and wept angrily, bitterly. Barbe Gardepier had come into her life again and was free. She had summoned Uncle Gaspard this first night to her side. Had he loved her a little long ago? Would she try to win him now? Oh, what a dreary outlook! And she had been so happy!

CHAPTER XVII—RIVALS

Gaspard Denys had wondered more than once about Barbe’s married life, and at Gardepier’s second visit to St. Louis he was quite convinced that he was not the kind of man to make a tender, clinging heart happy. Women throve and blossomed in an atmosphere of love; grew cold, pale and listless when this was denied. It was their natural sustenance. Had this hastened Renée Freneau’s death?

And when he saw Marchand’s devotion and Wawataysee’s delicious joy in it, he could not tell why, but he wished such a marriage had been Barbe’s good fortune.

He never asked himself what might have happened if he had not gone to Canada for Renée de Longueville. He had started adventuring first in a desperate frame of mind, and then grown to like it exceedingly. He had purchased the old house to assist a family in distress who had lost husband and father. On his way home with his little Renée he had resolved to set up a household, to keep the child under his guardianship, for he knew well Freneau would not want her. She was so clinging, so sweet. She was a part of the adorable girl he had loved. If he had been certain of her happiness he might have let her fade from his mind, but a fear had always rankled with a thorn-prick.

Did she know, would she know that he meant to lavish the love that should have been hers on the child? What was that country like? Surely the soul could not linger in the grave, and if it was given to one to have glimpses of those left behind, she must rejoice.

With his heart so engrossed he could not think, indeed, was not tempted to a strong feeling for

any other woman. Barbe was pretty and sweet—young men were attracted to her—and he felt quite old compared with her. Then there was so much business to occupy him, and presently Barbe was married without a sigh of regret on his part.

The little jealous feeling Renée displayed rather amused him. He hardly understood the child's passionate fondness, but was not her exclusive love something she inherited from her mother? He liked to think so.

Now she was half woman and still kept the child's eager fondness. She had no real lovers, even if she had been asked in marriage. And he did not want to give her up. When he sat in the fascinating blaze of the log fire and steeped his brain in the haze of his pipe, visions stole softly about him. He saw Renée a happy wife, the mother of sweet, enchanting children who would climb his knees, half strangle him with baby arms and press soft faces against his, prattle of their love in turn. No, she must never go away. And who would he like as well as André!

And she liked him, too, in spite of her wilful manner of flouting him. She was ready enough to put him in the face of any imaginary danger. He was a fine, generous, wholesome young fellow, with a good business. And he, Denys, could wait. He was not in so great a hurry to share Renée, but he felt there was no life, no joy to a woman comparable with wifehood and motherhood. And he wanted his darling to have the best of everything.

She was very quiet the next morning and stole furtive glances at him, too proud to make any inquiry as to whether he had passed a pleasant evening. After breakfast André came with a face of eager light, and yet perplexity.

"What is it now?" asked Denys.

"Matter enough. I am divided in two. I have just had an offer—command, I might say. And whether I am to take it—" looking up with uncertainty.

"Beating about a bush doesn't always thresh off nuts. There is the right season," and a glint of humor crossed the elder's face. "Is there a pretty girl in it?"

Was the world running after pretty girls? Renée frowned.

"You would not like me to go away, ma'm'selle?"

A sudden hope had rendered him incautious.

"It makes no difference to me," she replied coldly.

"What is it all about?" inquired Denys. "Where were you last night, that you are so incoherent this morning?"

"In the counting house with M'sieu Pierre Chouteau. In about ten days he starts for New Orleans, and must take some one with him. He proposes the post to me."

Denys gave a side glance at Renée. Her face was cold, impenetrable. Clearly she was not in love, much as she liked André.

"Come in the shop!" exclaimed Denys.

They seated themselves on bales of furs, done up ready to be transferred to the boats.

"It is a high compliment, André. And it may not be a bad thing for a young fellow to see a little of the world and learn how to make money in different ways. It's a much gayer place than this. And you will be in good hands."

"But—M. Denys, I do not want to go."

The young fellow's face was scarlet, and his eyes were full of unspoken hope mingled with fear.

"And why not, André Valbonais?"

"Oh, you must know, you must have guessed that I love Ma'm'selle Renée. Ever since last winter I have known that all my heart was hers, that I would not be satisfied until I had won her for a wife. And I do not think—you are averse——"

He looked so frank and sincere and honorable under the elder's scrutiny, though his face was flushed and the lines about his mouth were quivering.

Denys took his arm. There was something better than a smile on the face, a tender approval.

"No," Denys replied in a tone that went to the young man's heart. "I have had a little dream of the future. There is no one in St. Louis I would so soon take as a son. For look you, André, I do not want to give her up. The man who weds her must come here, must put up with me as I grow old and full of whims. I cannot be shut out of her happiness. I will tell you that I had a brief few months' love with her mother, and a dream like this. Her father parted us. The child is as dear to

me as if my blood ran in her veins, and her happiness is my whole study. If you can win her I shall be content. But women have to wait for a time to love. And it is not her time."

"But if I should go away—" The young fellow drew a long, sorrowing breath.

"It might be best, so that you come back."

"I must stay all winter. And if some one else wins her?" he questioned anxiously.

"That would be a grief to me. I shall try not to have it happen. Oh, you can trust me; only I shall not force her inclination. But there is some comfort to take with you in my full consent."

"You think, then, I had better go?" reluctantly.

"It is not every day a friend like M. Chouteau is given to a young man. And," with a vague smile, "you may even advance your suit by going. If she should miss you, so much the better. You have given her a great deal of devotion, perhaps too much. There are some gifts that are not appreciated if they come too easily."

André Valbonais felt as if his dream had been dashed to fragments like a bit of glass. He had resolved he would not go away; he *would* marry Renée. Yet down in his heart he knew she did not love him with the fervor of a sweetheart. But that might come when she understood how much in earnest he was, and that her guardian really wished for the marriage. Yet, much as he wished for it, he would not spoil his darling's life by any over-persuasion.

"Yes, it is a fine chance. You will be the envy of the town. And—I trust you to come back as honorable as you go. A year soon passes."

"It will be hard to go without speaking."

"It will do no good." Denys shook his head. "Trust me. I have seen more of womankind."

"Then I must be off. I asked to consult you, and I have your answer."

"Yes, yes! Go, by all means."

Renée was in her room, moving articles about in an aimless fashion, wondering how Barbe had looked and what she had said. She need not have worried. There were a dozen other neighbors, ready to talk of the narrow escape and compare their own town with the larger one.

Now and then she had exchanged a word with Denys, but it seemed as if every one talked at once. He had in his mind the picture she made in the morning, but she did not look like that now. There were lines of care in her face, and the prettiness had deepened into womanly beauty.

Not a question about her did Renée ask. After dinner she took some sewing and went to Madame Marchand's, as she often did. François had been to the wharf, hurriedly constructed again, to see when the boats were likely to go down the river, since it was now considered safe. André Valbonais had told him he was going.

"He came to see uncle this morning. I suppose that was what they talked about," said Renée.

The voice had the languor of indifference, and the little face, rather pale now, betrayed no emotion.

It was always a busy time when a fleet of boats went down. Now, there was more talk than usual. Some of the stock had been quite spoiled by the overflow; indeed, not a little of it had been swept out of the storehouses and it had been impossible to save it. But men took their losses philosophically; they would recoup themselves another year. And they now thought it wisdom to build higher up, and leave the muddy bank to itself.

André was very busy, and truth to tell, rather downhearted. He had been buoyant; it was his nature. But as he faced the actual now, and the careless demeanor of Renée, he felt like one roused from a dream and swung to the opposite verge. No, she did not care for him. Yet she had been so sweet at times! He was in and out. Mère Lunde was full of regrets. She was old and might never see him again. Renée said carelessly, "We shall all miss you. I don't know what uncle would do if he did not have M'sieu Marchand."

She and Madame Marchand had gone to the Renauds', as was proper. Wawataysee was charmed with the little Angelique, and they found Madame Gardepier quite different from the women of the town, except some of the higher ladies in the government circles, though she was very sweet and gracious.

Renée's heart swelled with a great jealousy. Barbe was beautiful and grand, she could not deny it. Her voice had a lingering cadence, like a rivulet in some forest depth, as if she might coax the heart out of one. Renée steeled hers in a sort of desperation. Surely she was distanced. She could not contend against these charms, any more than she could deny them. All her life was suddenly set in the shade.

So she could not feel much sorrow for André's going away; her own filled all her heart. He might have thought her quiet a sign of it, but his eyes seemed to have been curiously opened.

"You will give me good wishes?" he said the last evening he came. "And—will you not say that you shall miss me?"

"Of course, I shall miss you," but the dreariness in the tone was not for him. "I shall be so much alone."

"M. Denys will be here—" He was a little puzzled.

"Oh, yes! But, then——"

"Renée," impetuously, "you have some sorrow. You are not like yourself. What has happened?"

"Yes, I have some sorrow in my heart. I cannot tell any one," and the red lips quivered.

"And you were so gay a little while ago. Oh, my darling—" His full heart overflowed in his face.

She held up her hand in entreaty. "Don't," she said in a half-irritated way. "I shall never be any one's darling again. And," in something of her old imperious tone, "if I cannot have the love I want I will not have any!"

He looked at her in amaze. Did she love some one else, then? He was suddenly stunned. That had never entered his thoughts.

"Oh," she exclaimed with a burst of feeling, "you have been very good to me, André. You rescued me in that dreadful peril, and I shall always be grateful. And I wish you prosperity and happiness."

Then she vanished from the garden and shut herself in her room. When Uncle Gaspard begged her to come out, as this was André's last evening, she said her head ached and she could not bear the sound of voices.

They went down to see the boats off, and the air was almost rent with good wishes. This was always a great occasion. There in the foremost one was M. Pierre Chouteau and André beside him, both waving their hands in response to the "*Bon voyage!*" from a hundred throats. The Colonel stood beside his mother, who was a proud and happy woman, and who chatted in a charming fashion with her friends and had singled out Barbe, it seemed, who had come with her niece Sophie.

The line rounded the curve and began to take in the turn, and the sailors' shouts were mere echoes. To-day the water was tranquil enough, and the heavens so blue that all the atmosphere had an extraordinary brilliance.

Madame Chouteau invited some of the friends to come and dine with her.

"I do not want to," Renée said, shrinking back. "But you go, Uncle Gaspard, and take my excuse. I am not well. I shall go to bed and make Mère Lunde doctor me, and be right by to-morrow."

What was the matter with the child? She had grown pale and heavy-eyed. He had been much engrossed with the boats and André's perplexity, and the impression that she desired to evade him, so he had made it easy for her to do so. But if she were going to be ill!

She threaded her way homeward and sat for awhile under her favorite tree, looking at the vision of Barbe smiling and Uncle Gaspard listening to her attractive manner of talking and smiling back. For all the summer sunshine she was cold, and her temples throbbed with a dull pain. She did not want to cry outwardly, but within her heart seemed weeping bitter tears, and its beating was like the dull thud of pounding on lead.

She startled Mère Lunde when she came in so wan and spiritless. The good woman steeped some herbs, and she did really go to bed. Uncle Gaspard did not get home until almost supper-time, and some trappers were in the shop dickering about pelts.

He came and sat on the side of the bed presently and held her hands, wondering if it was a cold, and recalling the fact that he had heard there were some cases of fever about.

She was very languid for several days. He was down at the levee, supervising some of the new work; indeed, it seemed as if he was in great demand. She would curl herself up in the big chair at the corner of the fireplace, not on account of the cold, for the door stood open, as well as the heavy shutters, and the sunshine stole in the room, dancing about on the floor like groups of sprites. Mère Lunde would nod in her chair. Chloe was out in the garden, working. It was so quiet, the very silence appealed strangely to her, and her mind wandered off to the future.

Some day Barbe would come here from the church leaning on Uncle Gaspard's arm and looking up in his face with smiles, holding her pretty child by the hand. He would love it as he had loved her. He would carry it in his arms and hold it on his knee, listen to its chatter, just as he had done with her. And Barbe would have dozens of different graces and pretty ways to lure him

continually. Where would she, Renée, be? Not pushed aside, but left to her own devices, dropped out, half forgotten.

She wiped away some tears that overflowed her eyes. When André came back, if he wanted her she would marry him. It was comforting to think some one might want her. And if he never came back, if some pretty girl in New Orleans attracted him—ah, then, she would be lonely, indeed! Perhaps this was the way her mother had felt in the old château. And her grandfather had wanted *her* put in a convent—perhaps it would have been better.

If youth can make pleasures of its own, it can also make bitter sorrows, and in its waywardness longs to drain the cup to the last drop. Perhaps there may be some strength in the very bitterness, a tonic to work a cure.

Gaspard Denys came in and found her there, picked her up, and, seating himself, pressed her to his broad breast and encircled her with his arms. What an exquisite shelter it was!

“What can I do for you?” he asked. “You were never ill but once before, and that was the cold. But now you do not seem to improve. I wonder if you would like to have a change? It is dull, now that André is away, and I am so busy. Madame Renaud and Madame Gardepier are coming over to-morrow. And if you would like to spend a few days with them——”

“Oh, no! I am content here,” in a quick tone.

“Then some day we could go up the river and take our dinner. Some of the young people might like to join. Sophie Pion is so gay and good-humored.”

“I like the quiet,” she returned languidly.

“But it is not good for you, unless you were really ill.”

“I shall be better soon. I walked out in the garden to-day.”

“That is right. I can’t think what could have brought this about. Come, you must cheer up and be like your olden self. It makes my heart ache to have you so dreary.”

“Oh, does it really ache for me? Then I must try. Yes, I will try,” in a more cheerful tone.

“That is my own little girl,” and he kissed her fondly. Yes, he would always love her in a way.

The guests came up the next day. Madame Renaud was always bright and cheery. Madame Gardepier brought her little girl, who ran about and prattled and was like a bit of sunshine, sitting a moment in Mère Lunde’s lap, then off again chasing the two half-grown kittens.

Barbe was very charming and gracious and had a good deal to tell about New Orleans, and thought M’sieu Valbonais would enjoy it very much, though no doubt he would long for the old friends and associations. And was he not coming back in a year?

Renée admitted without any change of color that he was. There was no half secret in her face.

“And now you must see Ma’m’selle Renée’s room,” exclaimed Madame Renaud. “It is just full of prettiness and ingenuity.”

Renée led the way, and if admiration could have lightened her heart, surely all the heaviness would have vanished. They were very cordial, and quite insisted upon having a whole day’s visit from her. Uncle Gaspard promised that she should surely come.

As they were walking down the street Barbe said: “She does look poorly. I suppose she has been fretting after M. Valbonais.”

“I really wonder that Gaspard let him go. There was no reason why they should not marry.”

“And she has some fortune of her own. Why, yes, she could have gone with him. I hope he will not forget her. There are so many attractive women there.”

Wawataysee studied her earnestly a few days afterward, when she had been sitting in silence.

“What has changed you so, Renée?” she asked with much solicitude. “There is a surmise in the air that you are grieving after André. What happened between you? For I know he loved you sincerely.”

“I grieving?” Then Renée’s face went scarlet and she could hardly refrain from tears. “It is not André. I seldom think of him. Oh, how cruel and unjust! And it is not true.”

“But something troubles you,” in a tender tone.

Renée was silent.

“And you never have been so unhappy before. Why do you not tell your uncle?”

“No, I cannot,” and Renée shivered.

“Then, dear, why not go to the good father? I should if I had any sorrows. But what can I have to pain me, with such a good husband and my lovely children, who are like angels? And Father Lemoine said last month, ‘Madame, your confession is a thanksgiving instead.’ He is so kindly, that Father Lemoine. But you must find some relief, or you will waste quite away.”

“I shall get well at once. I will not have people quoting me as a love-sick girl,” a little resentfully.

Still Wawataysee looked doubtfully at her. She tried to be more cheerful that evening, and Uncle Gaspard smiled and called her his little girl. Would he always love her? She dared not ask him now. When she had sorrowed for him in his long absence it had been a comfort to go up to the little church and pray. But would it not be monstrous to ask God to keep Uncle Denys from loving Barbe? She was lovely and kind, and merry too, for that matter, and if Uncle Denys——

Ah, there was the sting!

There crept into her heart a curious dull ache, a sense of something she did not like, that she shrank from, just as one shuts one’s eyes to some unpleasant sight. And this time it was not Barbe. Some one nearer, one that she was answerable for, and she did not like the half consciousness. She had believed the sorrow all hers. What if it was wrong to cherish it and make it another’s sorrow?

She went up to the church one afternoon. There was no one about. The confessional stood open. She thought she would pray, and then she recalled a sentence, “Clean hands and a pure heart.” Was her heart pure, not desiring what might belong to another? And if she snatched at it with over-eager hands and a selfish heart?

She went out quietly and sat on the grass. The soft wind just stirred the trees and brought wafts of perfume and the distant sound of the voices of children at play. The sun was casting long shadows and burnishing the tree-tops out on the fields. A few insects were lazily droning.

A figure came out in the rusty black cassock with the cord around the waist, and the little round cap, where a few straggling locks, much threaded with white, fell below in a half-curling fashion. He glanced her way, then came over to her and she rose with a reverent obeisance.

“It is Ma’m’selle de Longueville. You were little Renée. I remember when you used to come and pray for your uncle that he might be returned in safety. Is there nothing left to pray for?”

The tone was wonderfully sweet, and the eyes gave her such a kindly, tender glance that her heart melted within her.

“I went in the church,” she began in a low tone. “I was troubled about something. I could not find the right prayer. There may be a need before the prayer,” and her voice trembled like a quivering note of music.

“Then let us go in and find it, daughter,” and he took her hand in his and gently led her back. She knelt in silence. The kindly hands were folded on her head in blessing.

What was it she wanted to say? “If one so coveted a love that it brought unhappiness if it was shared with any one else; if one had been first for years, and found another in the place, and then —” The sorrowful voice broke. It was flooded with tears and soft sobs.

“Is it a lover that has cast longing eyes on another?”

“Oh, no, no!” And then the poor little story came out in an incoherent fashion. It was selfish, it was covetous, it was unjust. She saw that, now that she put it in words, and it sent a pang of shame and anguish through her whole being. Was this the return for all the affection he had given?

“Child,” said the low, sweet voice, “I think he will not love thee less because another comes into his heart. It is a good, generous heart. I know it well. And thou must cast out the selfish fear and give love for love. God shares His with all His creatures, and asks first a devoted heart, then the wide love for one’s neighbor. No grudging heart ever yet had peace. And the more happiness one scattereth the more returneth to thee. The more Christlike thy heart becomes, the greater will be thy desire to do for others, and in this will come the recompense. Trust thy God and then thy trust will grow in all His creatures. Narrow thy life, and when the one light fails all will be darkness. Thou hast gone but a little way forward and there are many lessons to learn before thou wilt reach the end, but the divinest of all is unselfish love.”

Could she be brave enough to put aside her own intense, selfish love? If another love made Uncle Gaspard happier——

They went out on the step of the old church porch, and he said: “You will come again, daughter?” And she replied: “I will come every day and pray for a new heart.”

CHAPTER XVIII—A FINE ADJUSTMENT

Gaspard Denys was out by the gate waiting, quite at a loss to know what could keep his little girl, and wondering what had made her so quiet and indifferent of late. Had she really cared more for André than she knew? She must miss him, of course, for although he had touches of sentiment now and then, he was bright and very much given to the amusing rather than the serious side of every-day occurrences. But he was earnest enough where that quality was needed. And he had been Renée's devoted slave.

Her hands were clasped, her shoulders drooped a little and her step was slow. Gaspard went to meet her, touched by the piteousness of her aspect.

"My little darling——"

She had not been exactly weeping, but her eyes had filled and overflowed. He would not have seen it in the gathering darkness, but he kissed amid the tears on her cheek.

"Renée, where have you been?" in a gentle tone. "You were not at the Marchands'."

"I was up at the church with Father Lemoine."

Had she some confidence to give the priest that she withheld from him? And he thought he knew all her simple heart.

"Renée, what is the matter? You are not happy. You are not really ill, either. Something troubles you."

The girl was silent, but he heard her fluttering breath. He took her hand in his. It was cold and spiritless. It did not curl about his fingers in her usual caressing fashion.

"Has some one grown nearer and dearer than I? You need not be afraid——"

"Oh, no, it is not that! No one is so dear. And if I lost you—" Oh, she did not mean to say it, and stopped in her slow pacing.

"You are not likely to lose me. Who has been filling your head with nonsense?"

His tone was a little sharp.

"No one is to blame. It was all my fault. I have been selfish and grudging and"—it burst out vehemently—"jealous!"

He smiled, and was glad the purple gray of the waning light would not betray it to her wounding. It was the old story, Barbe Guion again.

"My dear little girl—" he began with infinite tenderness, clasping his strong arm around her.

"I want to tell you," she interrupted hurriedly, "it is right, and just now I have the courage. I don't mean ever to be so selfish again. It is wicked and ungrateful, and if anything can make you happier, I shall—try to rejoice in it."

And he knew she swallowed over a great lump in her throat. He was deeply touched as well.

"It is very wicked and selfish, but I couldn't bear to think of your loving any one else, and when Madame Gardepier came back so pretty and attractive, and—and you liked her so, it made me very miserable. I did not want her to come here to be mistress, to have your love, to be first everywhere, but I know now how odious and hateful it was, and I am sorry, when you have always been so good to me. And, Uncle Gaspard, if you want to marry Barbe and bring her here and be happy with her, I will be content and not envy her for your sake——"

She was sobbing softly then. He had his arm around her and led her through the open gate to the little arbor of wild grape vines and honeysuckle that was always in bloom, a nest of fragrance now that the dew had begun to fall. He drew her very close to him and let her sob out her sorrow and penitence. How simply heroic she was to give up a part of the best thing in her life, for he knew, as he had believed before, that Valbonais's love had not found the path to her heart.

"I was so miserable," she went on tremulously, "and I thought I would go to the church and pray as I used, when I asked God to send you back. Then I met the good father. And now I am going to begin. I shall not be unhappy any more, at least I shall strive against it. And I want you—yes," catching her breath, "I want you to have whatever pleases you best."

For a moment or two so deep was his emotion he could not steady his own voice. And as he held her there, felt the beating of her heart, the agitation of her slim figure, the sobs she was trying to control, a passion of tenderness swept over him and almost a desire to claim her as his and let her rest henceforth in the proud security of entire love. Yes, she would marry him if he said the word. But much as she loved him it would never be that highest of all wifely love. She was still a child, and he was more than double her age. He stood in the place of a father, and there would be

a question if the legal relationship would not be a bar in the sight of the Church.

And—Barbe? He was much interested in her and had a secret sympathy with her. Her eyes had confessed to him that her marriage had not been satisfactory. If he stood quite alone, perhaps that might be the ending presently, but it was no plan of his now, no desire, even.

Ah, Renée, you did not know what an unconscious rival you were! Barbe understood the situation much better, but she had a woman's wisdom.

It had all passed through his mind like a flash.

"My little dear," he said, toying with the soft hair, "set your heart at rest. I had not thought of marrying Barbe. And I could never give you up."

"But—if you were going to be happier——"

"I am quite an old fellow now. I like my own way. A smoke in the chimney corner is my delight, and a little girl who sits there weaving pictures and adventures in the blaze. I am happy enough."

Her heart gave a great bound. How could she help delighting in the confession! But that was selfish again. She would hold this exquisite pleasure on sufferance.

"Yes, I am happy enough at present. But I should like my little girl to marry some one who could be a son to me in my old age, who would not want to take her away, and we would keep step together when we turned the summit of the hill and were going down the decline. Only I shall have to sit on the top a good while waiting for you, there are so many years between."

There was almost a merry sound in his voice.

"And now is the unhappiness all gone?" pressing her fondly to his side.

"There is the shame and regret for naughtiness. Have I troubled you a good deal?" in a repentant tone.

"It would have been worse if you were really ill."

"I almost made myself so. I did not think that it might cause you anxiety. You see, I was only considering myself and heaping up sorrow where there was no real sorrow."

"But you will not do it any more?"

"No, not any more," she answered, with exquisite tenderness.

"And now shall we go in? What do you suppose Mère Lunde will say? And see, it is quite dark. There are two stars."

All above them was the vault of deepest blue, resting on the tree-tops or the vague, far distance where all was indistinguishable. The river lapped along, some night birds gave a shrill cry, and far off a whippoorwill was repeating his mournful lay.

"Come." He lifted her up in his strong arms and swung her around. The door stood wide open, framing in a vivid picture of the hearth fire, the big empty chair, Mère Lunde bending over some cookery. Every year her shoulders grew more round and her head was almost hidden between them.

Renée seemed to herself like one in a dream. She would not exult in this new possessorship. She would keep meek and lowly, remembering her indulgence in sinful feelings, her doubt and distrust.

"What has kept you so?" cried Mère Lunde. "The fish has dried to a crisp. And one never knows. It may be Indians or wild animals——"

"Nothing worse than sitting in the arbor, talking."

"And the child not at all well! When she comes down with a fever—and she looks like a ghost now."

That was true enough. The cool air had added to her paleness and her eyes had a softness in their brown depths, a mysterious expression, as if she had not shaken off the atmosphere of some far world.

"Go to the fire and warm up, even if it is a summer night. You should have known better than to keep her sitting in the chill dew," to M. Denys.

Then the good mère made her drink a cup of hot broth.

But she had not much appetite. Now and then she stole a shy glance at Uncle Gaspard, and if she met his eyes a faint color suffused her face. The happy, childlike trust was coming back. And though they sat together awhile afterward, the faint glow of the dying fire lighting the room,

neither fell in a humor for talking. She kept half wondering if it was true that he did not care to marry Barbe, half disbelieving it; and yet it did not give her the pang she had suffered from the cruel jealousy that had rent her soul. The tranquillity was very sweet, very comforting.

She was singing the next morning as she went about her duties a gay little French chanson André had taught her, and her voice was like a bird's.

"You are happy this morning, ma'm'selle," said Mère Lunde, with fondness in her old eyes. "Has there been news from the boats?"

"From the boats?" What had that to do with it? Then she colored scarlet—that meant André.

"No," she replied gravely. "Uncle Gaspard would have mentioned it if there was."

Still the embarrassing tint ran over her face. All this time had one and another been fancying that she was grieving for André Valbonais? Ah, they would see! She would be as gay as before. She would go out with the girls berrying, and gathering strange flowers that queer old Doctor Montcrevier was glad to press and put in a great book that he had. They were very little troubled by Indians now, yet they always went in considerable parties, and Friga was her guard.

Monsieur Denys took quite a party up the river in the boat he had been building, and they spent the night at St. Charles. Just beyond was another bend in the river, and the air was so clear they could discern the windings a long distance up. Everywhere there were still some signs of the great flood. But it had not been able to destroy the frowning bluffs, though it had left caves in different places, swept some islands out of existence or added them to others. The world was a beautiful place when the elements were at rest, and it was a blessed thing to live.

Renée was growing a little graver, a little more womanly and thoughtful, but Denys wondered at the added sweetness. She was quite a devout churchgoer now, and occasionally went up for a chat with the good father, that was not confession exactly, but helped her insight in some of the greater truths, made her more ready to share happiness with others.

It had been quite a trial at first to go cordially to the Renauds', though she did admire Barbe's little girl. Madame Gardepier was a person of some note now, and received invitations to the Government House, and was on delightful terms with Madame Chouteau and several of the more important residents. Sometimes Uncle Gaspard and Renée walked down of an evening, and the young girl always trembled a little, Barbe was so very charming.

Denys understood that he could win her if he cared. Was he really growing so old that he had not the necessary ardor? Had that one youthful love and sorrow sufficed him? He was touched by Renée's sweet demeanor now, though he could not see the quaking heart behind it.

Monsieur Pierre Chouteau came home to his family late in the fall, and a new Lieutenant-Governor accompanied him. There was strange and stirring news from France, from Spain, even from the colonies at the eastward which, having shaken off their old rulers, were still harrassed by Indian wars and the unwillingness of England to give up the places specified in the treaties.

They did not mind these disputes in the old town. Life ran on smoothly. They were like one big family; had their joys and few sorrows and took little heed for to-morrow. There was the winter pleasure and new marriages; there were young men who cast longing eyes at Renée de Longueville, who would have no real lovers. And now she was seventeen.

They were very happy together, Renée and her uncle.

"She will marry some time," thought the woman who longed for the place by his fireside when it should be vacant. Renée's demeanor puzzled her. She was no longer a third person. She often left them quite alone, and when occasion offered invited Barbe and her little girl to tea. Gaspard Denys was very friendly. He had the gift of being friendly with women.

The boats began to come up. There was some word about André. Pierre Chouteau came over and told Denys.

"I hope you will not be too much disappointed," he said, "but there is some important business on hand and he really cannot be spared. We made it an object for him to remain. Indeed, we should like him to take one of the head positions there. He is a fine, trusty fellow. He asked me to come and explain to you, lest you should think he had grown indifferent about old friends. But you need not fear that."

"We had counted on seeing him, but duty is duty, and one ought not to run away from it for pleasure," replied Denys, approvingly.

Renée was not going to give any one an opportunity to consider her a lovelorn maiden this time. She was gay and bright, joining the pleasure parties and dancing, ready for canoeing or rowing about on the old mill-pond in the races. She never summoned the young men to her side and bade them fetch and carry, as she used to André; she sent her admirers to this girl and that one, but somehow they always found their way back and gathered as bees about the sweetest flower. They would spend whole evenings with Denys for the sake of watching her as she sat so demurely

beside the fire, now and then raising her soft brown eyes that the flame seemed to burnish with gold, or smiling vaguely at some conceit of her own instead of what the visitor said.

When they were alone on rare occasions she would bring Uncle Gaspard his flute and often sing dainty little songs in the sweetest voice imaginable. Then he would listen and dream of her mother, and it seemed as if she came and sat beside them. He could see her shadowy form, he believed he could touch her with his hand. There was no sin in loving her now, since she was free from the Count de Longueville.

Then came winter again. Should they go to the king's ball?

"I'm too old," said Uncle Gaspard. "I found a white hair in my beard this morning."

"Oh, think of the fathers and grandfathers! And they dance, too. Old, indeed!"

She shook her slim finger at him.

"I've grown lazy. M. Marchand is such an excellent partner that I have very little to do."

"Oh, and you were out skating a few days ago and distanced many of the younger men! I shall not go unless you do," resolutely.

"And you have never been a queen in your own right," he remarked with a gleam of amusement. "You ought to try your luck."

"Before *I* get old and have to wear a coif," shaking her head in mock despair. "Oh, let us both go!"

She had to coax a good deal and insist stoutly that she would not stir a step without him. And, of course, he had to yield.

She listened to the songs and the solicitations, and sent Mère Lunde out with a generous contribution.

This time she did not care so much about her gown. It was pretty enough. She had a beautiful necklace that Mattawissa had given her, made of blue and white shells that came from the southerly Atlantic coast and were held in high esteem among the Indians and considered of great value in the way of trade, as they were used in wampums. They were ground in a peculiar fashion, with a small hole drilled in them and strung on a chain. In dancing, as they touched each other the jingle had a peculiar musical sound.

Madame Gardepier and one of her nieces cut the cake when the midnight bell sounded.

"You *must* have a piece, Renée," said Madame Elise Borrie, who was plump and smiling and the mother of three children. "But," in a mischievous whisper, "they will fight to be chosen king. We shall learn who is your favorite."

"I've never had any luck," returned Renée in a tone of mock disappointment.

"And *I've* never cut the cake before! Oh, you must take a piece from me! There will be luck in it."

Renée took the piece laughingly, spread out her handkerchief, and broke it in two or three fragments. Out fell the ring.

"Oh! oh! oh!" and there was a crowd about her. She slipped it on her finger and was handed her nose-gay.

Whom would she choose? There were eager eyes and indrawn breaths, smiles that asked in wordless language, young men crowding nearer.

She went over to Denys. "You always were my king," she said in a low, sweet tone that touched him immeasurably. "I am glad to give you the royal signet, a rose."

Gaspard Denys bowed like a young courtier.

"You know I must have done it besides my own desire," she whispered. "There would have been quarrels and heart burnings."

"Yes," nodding that he understood.

"Ma'm'selle Renée, that is hardly fair," declared an aggrieved one. "There are so many young men——"

"And other queens, and a room full of pretty girls. I will give you one dance."

His face lighted up with joy.

"It will end by a marriage, mark my words," said the mother of three daughters.

“No, it cannot,” returned Madame Gardepier, with secret exultation. “He was appointed her uncle and guardian by the Church. It would be unlawful.”

“True enough. But if she would settle upon some one in earnest the rest would stand a chance. I don’t know what there is about her. And she’s past eighteen. It won’t do for her to waste many more years.”

Renée and her uncle danced twice. Then she said, with the persuasive touch in her voice that he never could resist:

“Now you must dance with Madame Gardepier and some of the young girls, while I comfort the disconsolate. And we will go home early.”

But there was such an outcry she could not get away so easily. They were all as eager as if there had never been balls before and would never be one again.

Renée would not attend the next one. Gaspard grumbled at having to go by himself and meet the storm of reproaches.

“See, I will tie up my head—you can say you left me that way,” and she passed a folded handkerchief about it, that made her look more coquettish than ever. “Now—I might rub a bit of garlic over my eyes and they would look red enough.”

Gaspard laughed in spite of a little ill humor.

Renée settled herself in his big chair and wrapped her feet in the fur robe. How the wind blew without, though the moonless sky was brilliant with stars. The trees writhed and groaned, and she fancied she could hear the lashing of the river. Occasionally a gust blew down the chimney, driving long tongues of flame out into the room and scattering ashes about. But the house of split logs, plastered on the outside and within, was solid enough. She only laughed when the wind banged up against it and had to depart with sullen grumbling.

She loved to sit this way and live over the past. What had changed her so? Did wilfulness belong naturally to childhood? Or was it the lessons she had learned in the little old church from the good father? Life was finer and broader, and duties, real duties, were oftentimes a delight—not always, she admitted, with a little twinge of conscience—and there were sacrifices of inclination to be made.

What a curious, varied life hers had been! And now it flowed on tranquilly. Would it always be this way? Uncle Gaspard wanted her to marry, but who was there to suit them both? The pretty mystery, not quite a smile, but that always made her face enchanting, passed over it now. This one and that one had been mentioned, and she had scouted them with a dainty insistence that always amused him, though he would argue about their best points as if he was in sober earnest.

“Sometimes I think you really want to get rid of me, Uncle Gaspard,” she would retort, with an air of being provoked. “And what if I should never like anybody? I wonder if, after all, when I am old, say thirty, perhaps, I would have to go to Quebec and enter a convent, like Marie Guion?”

“Thirty! Well, you are a good way from that! And I am a good way past it, and you won’t hear to my being old.”

Then she would laugh and put loving arms about his neck, and he would think he did not mind the waiting. If it was God’s will, the thing he wanted would come about; but if it was not, one could not go against the great All-Father, whose right it was to give or to deny.

But he remarked that she had grown to like talking over the times when André Valbonais had come to her rescue and that of Wawataysee.

“And I would get hungry and tired and cold, and feel afraid of wild animals in the forest. I was so little, you know, and not wise and patient like Wawataysee. And I used to cry for you. André was very good not to get cross and scold, now was he not?”

“Oh, my little one, I never forget that I owe him a great deal. And I am glad he is prospering so well.”

“But suppose he should want to stay in New Orleans? It is so much gayer and finer than this little St. Louis. Our Place d’Arms is nothing compared to that handsome plaza, Barbe says. And the women dress so much, and there is the beautiful church, and the school for girls, and a theatre, and music everywhere on the balconies. Perhaps he will never come back.”

Did she sigh a little over her own prediction?

“We can go there some day——”

“If you think I am going to run after him,” with a charming show of indignation that made her cheeks bloom like the rose, “you are far out of the way. That would be on every one’s tongue. Renée de Longueville has gone to New Orleans after M’sieu Valbonais, because she cannot get a lover here. Why, he might stay there a hundred years before I would go!”

“There seems to be no lack of lovers here. Whether they come for me, or the good fire, or——”

“They like you, and they like to smoke and ask your advice. And don’t you notice that sometimes I go to bed, slip away softly, and they never miss me?”

At that Uncle Gaspard would nod, with an expression of incredulity in his eyes.

And on nights like these, when she happened to be alone, or in that long space of winter twilight when she curled herself up in the fur rugs like a kitten, she used to wander off in reveries about that almost dream-like episode, with its terrors, that made her shudder even now, because she realized their dangers so much more keenly. Oh, what if André had not found them? How could they have taken all that long journey with no care, no kindly treatment? And that tall, fierce Black Feather! He might have minded about Wawataysee, who was of some value to him, but she, a little child! And if André had said, “Oh, we cannot be bothered with her, we shall have to go so much slower,” and they had stolen away! Some tears always came in her eyes at this point. And there was that last night, when he had carried her and she had slept in his arms. Yes, she ought to be very grateful. And sometimes she had been wilful and treated him very badly. Of course, he had half-forgotten about her. Was the girl beautiful that he cared the most for? Did she dance with the grace of a fairy, and was her voice sweet and seductive, just as Barbe Gardepier’s was at times, a sound that both fascinated and vexed her, the liquid tone that made a man bend his head lest he should lose a note of its sweetness? And her parents would be very gracious to him; she knew how charming mothers could be.

After they had been married a long, long while she would go with Uncle Gaspard to visit them. She and Uncle Gaspard would grow old together, and she would have a stoop in the shoulders like Mère Lunde.

CHAPTER XIX—THIS WAY AND THAT

All the world was abloom and fragrant with later spring. The children were ranging out on the great mound, learning lessons of the sky, with all its variations; of the woods, with their many kinds of trees; of the flowers that were budding and blossoming; of the river winding about, guessing at other rivers and other countries and great lakes and frozen regions up at the far north where the white bear lived and the beautiful white and silver fox, whose fur was rare and held in high esteem. They peopled it with strange, fierce Indians, and sometimes the boys divided in two parties and fought. The girls made circles for wigwams, collected dried grass and sticks and built fires in the centre; and if there were but few books and no real schools, they were skilful in many things. They could shoot smaller game, they could manage a canoe, they could fish, and they acquired much useful knowledge by the time they were men and women.

Even to-day youth is attracted by the wild, free life, and the spirit of adventure still runs in the blood.

The line of boats were coming up north again. There had been much floating ice in the river this spring, which had delayed travelling. Flags were flying, so all was well. Down on the levee bells were ringing and horns blew out a welcome. Everything had a natural look again, only the new places were built higher up, and even some of these had been damaged by the crushing of ice cakes.

The men collected who had this sort of interest at heart. Many others and the slaves were out on the King’s Highway and beyond, tilling and planting fields. Women sauntered down the Rue Royale and chatted. The old market was full of eagerness and activity, and the air had a fragrance of cooked viands to tempt the palates of the sailors. Women in coifs and little shoulder shawls that gave them a picturesque look, men in close caps or a kerchief tied over their heads, their blue blouses with red belts and wide collars exposing brawny or sinewy throats, tanned already by sun and wind.

The leader, the most pretentious boat generally, carried some passengers; the others had loads of bales and bundles covered with coarse canvas or deers’ hide. They looked not unlike a funeral procession, the sails a dull gray, but the shouts and songs dispelled so sombre a thought. Some of the men remembered when the sad news of Pierre Laclede had reached them, when all had been silence.

The first boat unloaded the few passengers, valuable papers, and the slaves began with the cargo. One tall, fine-aspected young fellow sprang ashore and was warmly welcomed by the Chouteaus and several of the more prominent men, and then Gaspard Denys seized his hand, but neither of them spoke except with the eyes.

And now all was a brisk, seeming confusion. Rude barrows and a kind of hand-carts were loaded and run to the storehouses. Slaves, Indians and the lower class of French, many of them hunters as well, worked with a hearty will. Then there were groups of Indian traders who had been watching for days for the arrival of the boats, and were eager with their packs for trade. Others had already disposed of their pelts and taken notes with the signature of the Chouteaus, quite as good as gold or silver, and making trade easier, giving them more time to devote to their own selection. Squaws eager for blankets, calicoes, coarse, crash-like stuffs, beads and gewgaws,

chaffering in their guttural tones, and shrill French voices raised to the point of anger, it would seem, from the eagerness, but good-humored for all that.

Several men went into the counting house where the old sign still obtained, “Maxent Laclede & Company,” just as it still remained in New Orleans. It would look queer enough to-day, the small one-story log house with its rough inside wall built up to the ceiling with shelves, its great iron-bound boxes that served for seats as well as receptacles.

Andre Valbonais had a big buckskin bag full of papers and invoices, and he had much to say to his employers. Pierre Chouteau went in and out; he could hear the particulars afterward, and he was needed every few moments to tell where this and that should go.

There was a great commotion, to be sure. Millions of dollars in transactions could pass now without a tithe of excitement. But, then, when a town has been shut in all winter it is natural the outburst should stir like wine in the blood. The shops farther up in the town were deserted.

As for Renée de Longueville, she kept very tranquil.

“I suppose M’sieu André came up on this voyage?” Mère Lunde said as she was preparing dinner.

Renée had been working among her flowers; then she had kept in her room, busying herself with sewing.

“Perhaps so. There will be fleets in all the time now. And Indians and *voyageurs* and piles of pelts and evil smells, and such a confusion in the streets it will hardly be safe to go out unless one is willing to be jostled and pushed hither and yon.”

“And M’sieu Denys does not come home to dinner. It is all ready.”

“Let us have ours, then,” with cordial assent.

“Perhaps he may bring home M’sieu Valbonais.”

“Well, there may be something left. I am hungry, but I cannot eat all this bountiful meal,” with a gay laugh.

“It will be spoiled, ma’m’selle,” complainingly.

“The more need that we eat ours while it is just right,” she answered, with smiling emphasis. “Will it make them any happier to have ours less inviting?”

So she took her seat at the table with a merry audacity, and praised the cookery so heartily that Mère Lunde was good humored in a moment or two. Still there was no step on the path.

“They will not come,” in a tone of disappointment.

“But, you know, there is enough to get at the market in such times as these,” returned Renée, with a lightsome air. “Trust them for not starving.”

“Pah! It may do for sailors and *voyageurs* and Indians, but never for gentlemen, mademoiselle.”

When Mère Lunde was a little affronted she gave Renée the full length of the syllables.

Renée went out and looked at the flowers again, and up and down the street. “If there was any news,” she said to herself, “Uncle Denys would come and tell me.”

“Mère Lunde, I am going over to Madame Marchand’s with my work,” she exclaimed. “I do hope they have brought in no end of beads and spangles. What do you suppose the Indian women did before the French came here?”

That was beyond the simple mère’s comprehension.

M. Marchand was returning from his dinner.

“I just ran down to hear the luck, ma’m’selle; they had a splendid voyage and no mishap. And André Valbonais—you would not know him!”

She nodded indifferently, but would ask no questions. Wawataysee sat out under a pretty rose arbor that was heavy with pink buds. There were four babies now, sturdy Gaspard and Denys tumbling about on the grass, Renée, with her fair hair and her father’s deep blue eyes, much more French than Indian, and baby François. Wawataysee was more lovely than ever, Renée thought, but she did not understand that it was the largeness and sweetness of life so intimately connected with others.

“Did M’sieu Denys come home?” Wawataysee asked.

“No. I suppose it is all a hurly-burly down there. It is good to have something to stir up the town now and then,” Renée returned brightly.

“Yes. The trappers were growing very impatient. And I think there will be a good trade, an excellent thing for you and me,” with a grateful expression in her beautiful eyes. “Renée, I wonder if M. Denys ever realizes all that he has done for François, and good Mère Lunde nursed him through all his long illness. Men’s regard for each other has such a strong, true quality in it. And, then, M’sieu André—oh, Renée, what would *we* have done without him? I hope he came up on this voyage.”

“Yes,” returned Renée. “M. Marchand just told me so.”

“I am all impatience to see him. Almost two years! François declares sometimes that he is jealous, but that is for amusement. I wonder if he is much changed? He was very boyish, you know.”

“Was he?” commented Renée absently.

“You would not remark it so much. You were a child yourself. And how you used to order him about.”

“It was a habit of mine. Uncle Gaspard spoiled me. And now I have only to raise my finger and he does my bidding; but he knows there is no one I love so well.”

Would she always love him the best of any one?

“And I suppose we shall be glad to have a new store of beads and those lovely spangles that make the work glitter so, and the soft silk threads. Merci! What would we do but for the work?” laughing.

No books or papers to read, no letters to write, no large questions to discuss, not much of fashion, since garments were handed down through generations, no journeys about. It was no wonder they were so largely given to the gayety and pleasures of every-day life. There were loves and disputes and jealousies, yet they seldom reached the desperate point, and all, both men and women, looked forward to marriage, which was made happy by unfailing good humor and a clear sense of duty. It was, indeed, Arcadian simplicity.

They chatted and worked, then they took the children and went up on the mound, where they had a view of the busy hive below, and the conglomerate of nations, it seemed to their limited sense. Renée was in a most merry mood. She sang snatches of songs, she played with the children, she told the older ones Indian legends that were like fairy stories. Wawataysee studied her in a sort of amazement.

Renée had half a mind to go home to supper with her. That would look inhospitable. Gay as she had been, there was a curious unrest in her heart, a longing to have the first meeting over. Would André expect her to be *very* glad? Well, she would put on her finest dignity. She was quite grown up now.

The table was set for two.

“M’sieu Denys has sent word—they are to go to the Chouteaus’ for supper. Oh, I forgot! M. Valbonais has come,” glancing up to see if it pleasured her young lady.

“Yes, yes!” Renée nodded impatiently, and took her seat. “Of course, there is business. He is clerk of the great house, you know, and brings news not only of New Orleans, but France, and perhaps of the new colonies. I think I have heard there is some trade with them. You see, Mère Lunde, New Orleans is a wonderful place.”

But after all her exercise and apparent good spirits, she scarcely ate any supper. There was a hurt feeling lying heavily at her heart that she could not banish, with all her pride. If he had cared, would he not have found a few moments to announce his safe return? Perhaps he had left a wife behind. Then, of course, he had no right to think of any other woman.

She went out and paced up and down in the garden, trying to think what she would do to-morrow. She would go down to the mill-pond; there were always parties out boating. Then Sophie Borrie would be glad to see her. And the day after, the day after that—how long and lonely the procession looked!

There was a bright twinkling star emerging from a drift of white into a patch of almost blue-black sky. The night was serene, balmy, and there were but few sounds. It was not yet time for insects to begin their choruses. Steps sounded of people chatting gayly, but they were not the voices she knew. Something brushed against her forehead—she reached up and pulled a rose, sweet with the first greeting of its brief life. And then——

She hurried swiftly to the house. Mère Lunde was scolding Chloe, but through the rasping sound she heard the steps, the cordial greeting. It was quite dark within, and she was lighting the pine torch when the two entered and her uncle said:

“We have reached home at last. What a day! Renée, here is a guest,” and Uncle Gaspard gave his hearty, cheerful laugh.

“We were in the dark.” She rose in some confusion, the short curls drooping almost into her eyes, her face quite flushed, and turned, drawing a long, startled breath.

“The saints only know how glad I am to get home again!” and the strong voice was full of rapture.

“And you don’t know yourself?” she interrupted quickly.

“Ah, you must not take me up like that!” laughing. “I doubt if even the saints could understand my delight. No one but myself truly knows. Is that better?”

The torch began to flame, and its red light threw him out boldly. He seemed to have grown taller —no, it was not that, for Uncle Gaspard still towered above him, but he was stouter, and the way he carried himself had in it a new character and power. And the indescribable something in his face that no girl could read at a glance, the shaping and tone experience gives when one has been learning to rule his fellow-men and to depend upon himself.

She was silent and a warm color played about her face. He took both hands, drew her nearer to him, and suddenly she was afraid of the intense personality. Her rosy lips quivered, her eyes drooped, her breath came rapidly.

“Haven’t you a word of welcome for André?” asked Uncle Gaspard, surprised.

“I was confused by the light, and—you are quite sure it is Monsieur Valbonais?” turning to her uncle. “For he seems to have changed mysteriously.”

“And you have not changed at all. Nothing has changed. M. Denys, light your pipe and sit in the corner, and I will take this one. Ma’m’selle Renée, sit here in the middle.” He pushed the chair and placed her gently in it. “Now we can almost believe that I have not been away at all, only there is the great gladness of coming back.”

“Has the time passed so quickly, monsieur?”

There was the faintest suggestion of mischief in her tone.

“Mademoiselle, you have not outgrown all your naughtiness, I perceive. You find a second meaning in my simple words. No, there have been days that seemed like months—last summer, when I hoped to return, when I was homesick and heartsick. But what are you to do when the kindest employer in the world begs you to stay and there is no one to take your place, unless matters go at a great loss?”

“But New Orleans is gay and bright. And Madame Gardepier says the women are lovely, and there is music and light-heartedness everywhere.”

“When you are in a close and dark office or out on the muddy, crowded, vile-smelling levees with men of every nation shouting and hustling and swearing all about you, and you have almost to fight to get your bidding done, you have no thought for pretty women. But a man cannot always choose. And my greatest grief is that I must go back or disappoint my very good friends.”

“Oh!” with a toss of the head and a curve of the swelling lip that he longed to kiss.

“Ma’m’selle, let us not talk about that now. There are pleasanter subjects—all our old friends—for through the day it has been business, business, until my head seemed in a whirl with it. M. Denys will tell you. And we had to go to supper to finish, as if there would not be another day. But it is so lovely here. And the pretty Madame Marchand is well, and the Renaud girls, and the Aubrys with their husbands, and Madame Gardepier with her little one! Ah, I shall have a fine time presently, when I get a little leisure!”

What a new sound his voice had! A strength and resolution that swayed one curiously, a definite manner of stating opinions that somehow impressed one not only with a sense of security, but a sense of power that she was minded to rebel against.

They talked late. Why could she not slyly disappear, as she often did, and leave him with Uncle Denys, since he would remain all night?

But she shook off the mysterious chain with an effort and rose and wished them good-night in a timid sort of way, though she stood up very straight.

He caught her hand. “I am tempted to wish there could be no nights for a long while,” he said. “They are not good nights.”

“Think how sleepy we should get. And mine are always good,” laughing lightly. But she did not go across and kiss Uncle Denys.

There were several busy days, and friends that proffered André a warm welcome. The Valbonais cousins were wedded long ago, but they claimed him quite as cordially, and the old people were proud enough of him. The Marchands offered him their home, and were delighted to have him drop in. Then he was being asked to dine or sup with the Chouteaus, and he was at the Government House, for his intelligent understanding of other subjects besides commercial

matters made him a desirable guest.

Renée experienced a curious sensation, as if she was being neglected. She had lost her old power over him, which was mortifying. He teased her a little, then he let her trifle with him and say saucy things. But it was like a bird with a chain; he brought her back, he let her see it was only playing. Then she grew indignant and flounced away, met him coldly the next time, or was proud and silent.

Uncle Gaspard never raised a finger in the matter.

“I do not like him. I almost hate him!” she cried vehemently one day. “Of course, I know he saved me in that dreadful peril, but he has been thanked a hundred times over. And we do not owe him anything.”

“Oh, yes,” Uncle Gaspard said tenderly, as he pressed her to his heart. “I owe him a great deal. For if I had lost you——”

“And you could never give me to any one else?”

“Well, whoever wanted one would have to take both.”

Presently the trafficking was about over. The Indians had gone to their respective lodges, the *voyageurs* sailed up the river, and now only occasional boats and canoes came in. André was not so busy. He joined the parties on their rambles when he was certain Renée would be among them. He did not hesitate to make himself agreeable to other demoiselles. She could not help drawing contrasts. He had certain ways of the better class, though social lines were not strongly marked and few people knew what culture meant. He talked Spanish fluently; he was quite an adept in English, though he had acquired a little of that before. But the difference was largely one of manner, the small, delicate attentions that went to her heart and understanding. Uncle Gaspard always had some of them, M. Marchand also, and a few of the others. The rather rough good nature had much honesty, but it was not so flattering to a girl of Renée’s cast.

There were times when she was quite as jealous as she had ever been of Uncle Gaspard. Yet it was strange to be so shaken by his coming when she told herself she did not care for him, to have the touch of his hand thrill through every nerve, to have the steady glance of his eye conquer the spirit of rebellion until there was nothing left except the thin outside crust, that would surely fall at the next assault if she did not run away. This was cowardly, too, and she despised herself for it, but she was not the first who had escaped in this fashion.

He was amused. In the earlier days he had experienced a great terror at the thought of losing her. It might be the elder man’s wisdom had helped open his eyes. He liked her piquant independence, and he learned, too, there was a mood of most fascinating dependence as well. But she never wholly gave up.

“Is it true you are going back to New Orleans?” Renée asked one day in her charming, but imperious fashion.

“Yes, ma’m’selle. And I must start in another month.”

He looked so brave and dignified, his clear eyes shining, his shoulders thrown back, his head securely poised, as if he could lead an army. There was not his match in all St. Louis. Oh, yes, Uncle Gaspard and M. Marchand, and Madame Chouteau’s splendid sons, who had risked various dangers! And M. Marchand had carried off the pretty Wawataysee when he knew if they should be captured he would be put to cruel tortures and death. Well, had not André escaped with them both when a like fate would have awaited him in being taken?

“You care nothing for us now, André,” in her most plaintive tone, a hundred times more dangerous than her pride tinctured with sweetness. And the sorrow that flooded her beautiful brown eyes almost swept him from his standing-ground.

“Yes, ma’m’selle, I care a great deal. I love M. Denys as an elder brother. And you—” hesitatingly.

She blushed scarlet and her eyes drooped.

“No, you want the gayety and the excitement and the crowds of pretty women and the theatres. We are dull and simple here, yet I think we are good and happy and honest and true. And, then, you are all absorbed in money-making. Uncle Gaspard said you would be a rich man before you died. But they do dreadful things in New Orleans, and drink and carouse. You may be murdered some day, and then what will all the money be worth?”

She looked so aggrieved, so bewitching in her regret that, after all, was half assumed, though she would not confess it to herself even, that he had much ado to keep tranquil.

“Ma’m’selle, I go because I see it is quite necessary. A man who hopes for advancement must study the interest of those who have his welfare at heart and can favor him in many ways. Then I hold the key to much of the business at that end of the line, and I do not see who there is to put in my place. It is true the life here is simple and delightful. There one has a good deal of sharp

dealing to fight against, since he must meet men of all governments and all sorts of schemes. If M'sieu Chouteau could go—but he cannot. Do not for a moment think it is the gayety and the pretty women."

"Then you *will* go. There is no use in arguing."

She turned away. How distractingly pretty she was this morning in the old garden, herself a part of its bloom! Over the gate she had given him a rose, and renewed friendship after a dispute.

"I must go. I have passed my word. Renée—" in a beseeching tone.

She half turned, like a bird who wonders whether he will fly or not, but her lowered eyes had a laugh in them.

"Renée, you know I love you——"

"No, I do not." He could see the swelling of her bosom that sent a throb up to her throat. "You do nothing for me now. You are off with the men. You are—oh, so very charming to the girls!" with a cutting little emphasis. "And you are always talking to Uncle Gaspard about business——"

"And last night you ran away to bed without even a good-night!" with upbraiding in his voice.

"Oh, *did* you miss me? I never supposed you would. I was tired sitting there, thinking my own thoughts."

"Now we have plenty of time; tell them to me," and his persuasive tone penetrated her inmost being. What foolish things could she repeat? Her face was scarlet.

"You know now I love you. I have told you so in words. I have told it in many other ways. I confessed it to M. Denys before I went away and he bade me wait patiently. For two years I have carried you in my heart, yes, longer than that. You had your fling about other women; no one has ever moved me. Every night I said, 'One more day has gone, and at the last I shall go back to the little girl in old St. Louis that I carried in my arms all one night when she was worn out with fatigue and hunger and cold. Renée——"

"I cannot leave Uncle Denys. I have said hundreds of times I never would," and her voice was sweet with pathos that penetrated his inmost soul.

"But you need not. We have planned that. I will be a son to him in all his declining years. No, you need never be separated."

"Then you will stay!" exultingly. If she could once conquer she would be generous and consent afterward. Did not love yield everything?

"I *must* go. We three will go." His breath came in a gasp, his eyes deepened with fervor, he caught both her hands; he could have clasped her in his arms in a transport of rapture. Only—she stood up so straight and resolute.

"So you have planned all this!" she cried in a passion that had a pang for her as well as him. "And I am not anywhere. It makes no difference what I want. I am like any bale of merchandise tossed from one to the other. That is all a woman is worth! But you will find I am not to be bandied about."

She had lashed her emotion into tears, and pulled away her hands with an impatient gesture.

"Heaven above knows what you are worth to both of us. No one will ever love you more truly, more devotedly."

Renée de Longueville fled swiftly away.

CHAPTER XX—WHEN A WOMAN WILL

"What ails the child?" inquired Mère Lunde. "She has not been like herself the last fortnight. And now she is in there, crying as if her heart would break. It is all that André Valbonais, I know. Why does he not marry her and be done with it?"

"But if she will not?" Gaspard Denys shrugged his shoulders and drew his brow into a frown.

"In my time a man knew how to make a woman say yes. And a woman knew when she was going to get a good husband, which is of the Lord. Gaspard Denys, you have spoiled her!"

Yes, he had spoiled her. A man did not know how to bring up a girl. But she was so sweet in all her wilfulness, so loving in spite of little tempers and authoritative ways, so dear to him, that if she had wanted to walk over his body with her dainty feet he could hardly have refused her. He went into her room and took her in his arms.

"You are too good to me!" she cried presently. "And I am a miserable, hateful, quarrelsome,

selfish little thing, wanting my own way and then not happy or satisfied with it. Oh, how will you endure me years and years, getting queerer as I grow old! For now we will have to live here together always. I have sent André away. Oh, will you care?"

There was no use arguing. She had cried herself into an unreasonable passion. She had had her way. How much of it was regret? None of it was satisfaction.

"Well, dear, then we must get along," and his tone had a tranquillizing cheerfulness in it. "There is no one I would like as well for a son——"

"But you do not want to go to that wretched New Orleans?" in a tone of incredulity.

She raised her head from his shoulder. Her swollen eyes and tear-stained face melted his heart.

"You know we were going some time. It is well worth seeing. But we do not need to take André."

"Yet you like him so," with her old waywardness.

"Yes. And I am sorry you do not."

She hid her face again. She *did* like him. She felt it in the hot color that stained her cheek.

"He will be gone a year—that is not long," she said in a rather hopeful tone.

"Or, he might decide to stay longer. If he has nothing to call him back——"

They would be lonely without him. She would be lonely. After all, there were few young men to compare with him. And some time—if he was *quite* sure she did not care for him, he might marry. She never could marry any one else, but, then—men were different. Oh, here was one who had never put a woman in his first love's place! And André was all alone in the world. Yes, he would need a wife——

"Oh, Uncle Gaspard, I am not worth all this love!" she cried remorsefully.

"You will always be worth it to two men," he said in so gentle a tone that it pierced her heart. "I am much older than you, dear, and some day I shall be called upon to take the journey from which one never returns. Then you will be left quite alone."

What made her think of the little girl in the old château to whom the days were so long and lonesome? Yet, it would be very sad to be left alone. And—after all——

There are so many "after alls" in life. And so many things seem insurmountable when looked at in a moment of passion. Uncle Denys could never give her wholly away, had never planned to do that. Fathers and mothers were happy to have their children married, and here she would not do this for the best friend she had, nor for the man who loved her sincerely—that she loved—a little.

"You ought to shut me up in the loft and keep me on—on pemican, which you know I hate, and declare you would never let me out until—until——"

"A woman's love must always be a free gift, Renée, darling. And if you do not love André it would be sinning against him to marry him."

She knew down deep in her heart that she did love him, that she had waited these two years because there was no one like him to her. Of course, she had not really meant that he should throw up his fine prospects, but be willing to for her sake. And she knew now it was all very foolish and wicked, and that she deserved to be left alone for years and years and have them all full of sorrowful regret.

"I am going to turn over a new leaf, indeed I am," and she slipped out of Uncle Gaspard's arms. "See what a fright I have made of myself with red eyes and swollen face, and my hair frousled. Dinner must be nearly ready. Oh, what a long morning! And I have made you unhappy, when I love you so much," in accents of tenderest regret.

He kissed her and went away.

They were very silent at dinner. Mère Lunde grumbled because they ate so little. Then Uncle Gaspard went out. The boats were loading up with lead, as well as other materials, and he was interested in that, and needed as well.

No one came during the evening. She heard the violins and singing up the street, the fiddles and dancing down below. The fire was all out; no one wanted it after the cooking was done. There were some black charred ends and piles of ashes. It had a melancholy appearance. And then she fancied herself as old as Mère Lunde, sitting by the chimney corner, only Mère Lunde had married the man of her choice—it seemed now to Renée that every one must have done so—and though her two sons were dead, she had had them once; and everybody must die some time. But to die without having been very happy, that made her shudder. And, then, to know that one had cast it away rather than give up a whim of will.

So the next day passed and the next. Sunday she and Uncle Gaspard went to church. There would only be one Sunday more for André—ten days. For her—how many?

Coming down the path they glanced at each other. What wonderful languages live in the depths of the eyes! André came to her side, and then she colored and the hand he took trembled, but she did not withdraw it. They walked on homeward. She never knew whether any one spoke or not. Uncle Gaspard was lingering behind, giving thanks that he was likely to get his heart's desire.

They paused at the garden gate. He opened it for her to pass. There was midsummer richness and bloom in it, the homely every-day herbs giving out a sweetness in their plain flowering that was reviving. He followed her, but she made a little pause at the vine-clad arbor.

"I am wilful and delight in my own way," she began, and the words trembled on the fragrant air. "I am like a briar that pricks you when you would gather the rose——"

"But the rose is sweet for all that. And—I will take the rose."

Then he kissed her throbbing red lips, her fluttering eyelids, just as he had dreamed of doing many a time. And the bliss was sweeter than any dream.

There was not much time to waste. Mère Lunde protested at first at being left alone, but there would be Chloe, and the Marchands to look after her, and neighbors were kindly.

Not much fuss was made in those days over wedding trousseaus. Often one dress went through families, was even borrowed. But Renée had no need of that.

So they went to church on Sunday and heard the banns called, and every one nodded to his next neighbor with the confident air of having known it all along. The next day Gaspard Denys gave his darling away, and the priest joined their hands and blessed them. Madame Chouteau gave them the wedding feast, which was a mid-day dinner in the grand old house, much the finest residence in St. Louis. It had not the boisterousness of most weddings, for only the better part of the community were invited. Madame Chouteau could do that.

They drank the bride's health and gave her all good wishes. The men considered André very lucky and he thought himself so, but Renée's fortune scarcely counted, since he would make one for himself. Everything seemed sweet and solemn to Renée, and she was awed in a sacred sort of way as this new life unfolded before her.

They walked in quite a procession afterward. Gaspard Denys had Madame Gardepier. They talked a little about the bridegroom, then she said:

"Monsieur Denys, you have done a faithful duty toward the child. You will miss her much. One can never be quite the same again. Is it true you are going to New Orleans also?"

"Yes, madame. I have not been there for years."

She had hoped it was not so. If he were lonely, he might turn to others for consolation. And if the child went out of his life——

"But will her husband agree to share her love? Husbands are jealous sometimes," she commented rather gayly.

"He is like a son to me, and he knows it. You see, I am old enough to be his father also."

"Ah, M'sieu Denys, you should have had children of your very own, and a woman to love in your home. You have such a noble and tender heart you could have made some one so happy."

Her heart beat as she said it. Why could he not be roused to the hope even now?

"I think you know that I loved the child's mother, and that we were unfairly separated. If she had lived—but she died. And when I heard the little one was sent across the sea by her father, who had small regard for her, it was as if her mother, leaning over the wall of heaven, called to me, and I did what I knew would set her heart at rest."

"But she had heaven and all the saints. And in that land of the blest one cannot long for human loves. It is to those left on earth to whom they are precious," she returned, with a little longing in her tone. She had been waiting for Renée's marriage to take her out of his life. Why should the child have so much?

"I think they know, those blessed ones. Ah, madame, if you had been dying, instead of your husband, and leaving the little one, would you not have pleaded with the very angels that some one might be raised up to care for her? And if that had been one to whom she would be doubly dear! So the child in one sense has been like my own."

And always her rival, Barbe Gardepier felt. Her last hope seemed to drop as one lets fall a withered flower that has been sweet and is still freighted with some dear remembrances.

They paused at her sister's house.

“You will come in and say good-by to-morrow?”

“Yes,” and he bowed.

Why should things go so wrong in the world? Renée Freneau defrauded of a lifelong happiness, of life itself, and she who had seen such a blissful possibility twice in her short life shut out from what would have been her brightest happiness.

He went his way thoughtfully. He had been so long used to a man’s liberty that he did not care to enchain himself with matrimony. And surely he would give Renée no rival to her children.

It was a gorgeous day and the fleet of boats glided out with music and many a “*Bon voyage!*” The little girl had vanished, but Renée remembered the first night she came, when in the bend of the river they passed the old ruined heap, and the old French post-house going to decay. Was it in some other life? She still had Uncle Denys, and she was glad. What a wonderful thing it was to love a woman’s memory all these years!

It was a pleasant journey, with only a few storms, one severe enough to make them run into an inlet to get out of the fierce sweep of the river. There was Cahokia, whose ruins were still visible. Kaskaskia, despoiled of much of its valuable front, the town high now above the river. Strange and curious sights to one who had been no farther than St. Charles.

How would St. Louis look when they went back to it? Renée wondered. For this to her was a marvellous city, more brilliant than any dream ever made it. It seemed as if the whole world must have been gathered in it when one heard the confusion of tongues.

They did not return the next summer, for still the business could not spare André. But Monsieur Chouteau came down, and there were journeys about to places of such bloom and beauty and mystery that one almost had to hold one’s breath.

Strange things, too, were happening in the world beyond the great river that seemed all to them. The colonies were growing more stable, being welded together by chains of interest and pride and patriotism into a grand country, but the Mississippi River would always be its boundary. It could not pass that, men thought.

Over seas there were tumults and wars, and France in the throes of a most fearful revolution. They heard a great deal about it here. How hundreds of the nobility were thrown in prison, the King and Queen executed and the mob quarrelling with its leaders.

Renée thought of the two little brothers in Paris that she had seen on the day of her journey. And the Count. He was among the nobility, and he was her father. She shuddered over the horrible doings. And here was her other father, bright and happy and always considering what would be for her pleasure.

Sometimes they read an unspoken wish in each other’s eyes.

“It is not quite St. Louis,” she would say, with a half smile meant to be gay, but was pensive instead.

“No. But we will return presently,” the eyes full of cheerful light and the tone hopeful.

“And never leave it again?”

“I am glad you cannot forget it.”

“Oh, there is no place like the home and the friends of childhood—the larger childhood, when everything is impressed on one’s heart. The old house and the shop and the wide chimneys and Mère Lunde, and the Marchands with their babies. I know what it is to be an exile.”

Still she and André were very happy, taking the leisure of life like two children, growing into each other’s souls, laughing over some of the old times. And she would say:

“How could you love me so well when I was horrid and provoking and tormented you so?”

“But you had moments of rare sweetness, ma’m’selle; and sometimes the bee works a long while before he can extract the honey.”

“And you have never once been sorry?”

“The sorrow would have come if I had not gained you—a lifelong sorrow.”

“And I like your strength, your determination, your resolution, André. Oh, I like you altogether. I would not have one thought or line of you changed.”

“You yielded so sweetly, ma’m’selle. It is the rose without the thorns. And such tenderness! Ah, I do not wonder Father Gaspard gave up all other women for love of you!” kissing the crown of her head, a trick he had learned from Denys.

“Not altogether for me,” smiling with the distant look in her eyes, as if she saw a heavenly vision. “For my mother as well. I wish I could remember her better, but I was so small. And do you know, André, I used to act like a fiend sometimes, I was so afraid he would love Barbe. And now and then a great wave of sorrow sweeps over me, thinking of all she has missed.”

“Madame Gardepier is a lovely woman. Still she does not look like those who have had their heart’s longing satisfied. There is something still needed.”

“And I could not even yet give up Papa Gaspard. I am still selfish. Are you jealous, André?” raising beauful, beseeching eyes to him.

“He gave you to me long before you gave yourself—the treasure of his life. I lost my father so young that I cannot tell what such a love would have been like, but I know it could not be any tenderer. One sees it in his eyes and the comfort he takes, the immeasurable content. But he is longing for home. Dear, we will never leave St. Louis again.”

They often made love to each other, she with a freedom that wifehood had given her which was enchanting. Gaspard Denys took deep satisfaction in his two children. There was one more dream, but that was for some after-day fruition.

There was a much greater spirit of energy in this queer, half-submerged town, with its muddy streets that sometimes were positive streams. The ambition of the outside world was stirring them, the interest that varied commerce brings. There were new boats being builded for the old firm, and in one of these Renée went up the river again to her old home.

There had been no great freshet since the one that had wrought such destruction, but the swift current of spring had torn away some of the old obstructions. Noble bluffs had settled to sunken ridges, banks had slipped into the river and formed other high places full of greenery and wild bloom. Caves of rocks swept out and left high in some other place. It was wild and curious with a peculiar beauty. Its partly ruined towns were recovering. There were little hamlets set so near the river’s edge one wondered people had the courage to plant them there. And there was all the Illinois side, the new country showing already the energy of the new race combined of many peoples.

Renée might have left St. Louis yesterday, so little had it changed in the two years. The levee was in a better condition, some new docks had been built. And, as usual, there was the throng to see the boats come in, pouring down from the Rue de la Tour and the Rue de la Place into the Rue Royale. Yet it was like an everyday sight at New Orleans. Only the welcomes gave it a rapture she had never known before. Madame Marchand had her arms about her. Other old friends of girlhood, wives and mothers now, voices so confused, yet so glad, that it was music to listen to them.

It was old St. Louis, but the little girl had gone forever. Madame Valbonais, prettier than ever and with a style that was foreign to the small town. Monsieur, grown a little stouter, fine and strong, yet smiling with a face of gladness. Gaspard Denys, keeping close watch over the mulatto nurse in gay coif and bright gown, who had in her arms the little son of madame.

A triumphal procession escorted her home. How curiously dry the streets were, and almost prim after the southern irregularity; the riotous tangle of vines, the balconies full of ladies with fans, chatting and waving to the passers-by, throwing coquettish smiles. The old French air that had grown settled in fifty years, the queer houses, and oh, yes, here was the garden, and Mère Lunde watching at the gate, more bent than ever, crying tears of joy, and in her broken voice repeating, “Oh, my little one! Oh, my little one!”

Yet it was strange, too, after all that luxuriance of growth and bloom and fragrance, queer, crooked, busy streets, gay wine shops with open doors and tables of men within playing cards or fiddling or singing songs. Birds of every color and richest plumage filling the air with melody, iridescent lizards creeping about winking with their bright black eyes, alligators sunning themselves in the ooze, snakes gliding about unmolested, throngs of almost naked children shining in their blackness, ready to sing and dance, turn a dozen somersaults or walk upside down for a copper—the vivid panorama still floated before her eyes and gave her queer, mixed impressions.

Most of the people seemed to have stood still. Two or three very old ones had died and several babies, but others had come to replace them. Not a new house had been built; the stockade was getting dilapidated. The Government House had been painted afresh, but the old court-house was dingy enough. The priest’s house had been repaired, the little garden was lovely with roses that were always blooming, and the Chouteau grounds were like a beautiful park, so well kept and thrifty.

“Oh,” André said, “I wonder if you will be sick with longing for all the gayety and loveliness we have left behind?”

“Why, then, we can go there again,” she answered merrily, with bright, contented eyes and a winsome smile. “It is so restful here. And Papa Gaspard is so happy.”

He was hale and hearty and had not turned the half-century yet. Then he was full of plans. They

would move the shop down on the Rue Royale and build a new room on to the old house. He had brought home some ideas of improvement and comfort, of larger living. It was not likely St. Louis would always stand still.

Madame Marchand was delighted to get her friend back again. There was a new little girl, but Renée kept her beauty and winsomeness. Wawataysee was still lithe and slim—it belonged to her tribe—and M. Marchand was as devoted as ever. Oh, what days of talk it took to make up all the past!

And Madame Gardepier had married and gone over to the Illinois side to live on a big plantation. Pierre Menard had a mill for sawing boards and a brewery for beer, no end of slaves and servants, full fifty years of age, and two grown sons married. He coveted the little Angelique Gardepier and sued hard for the mother, who would have a luxurious life.

“But thou wilt be an American truly,” sighed Madame Renaud.

There was still a great prejudice against the Illinois people. Their religion, or, rather, lack of religion, was a great stumbling-block. Then their roaming lives, their apparent disregard of home ties, that were so strong with the French.

But monsieur adored her in a very complimentary fashion, and she was fain to satisfy her heart with it. Sometimes when the red-gold splendors were fading from the sky, leaving the bluffs and pearl-gray spaces on the opposite side like long avenues where the light shone through, Barbe Menard would glance over and wonder what particular merit there was in Renée de Longueville that the good God should have given so much to her.

CHAPTER XXI—FROM ACROSS THE SEA

In the second year after Renée’s return two signal events happened. A new little boy was born. She had coveted a girl for Papa Gaspard to love as he had loved her, but one had to be content with what God sent, and the boy was bright and strong.

“No,” Papa Gaspard said when they were talking it over one day, “there will be plenty of time for girls. I am not sorry. But I shall ask a gift of you and André, now that little Gaspard’s place is filled. Give him to me. Let him take my name. It would be a grief to me to have it die out. Let there be a new Gaspard Denys growing up into a brave boy, a good, upright man, we hope. You have your fortune and André will make another. There will be enough to keep a dozen children from starving,” with a bright, amused laugh. “I will make a new will and give the boy what I have left. The lead interest is increasing and will be a fortune by itself. So if you and André consent. It is not as if I wanted to take him away; it is simply that he shall be Gaspard Denys. In the old time they put a St. to it, but that was in France. We are going to be a new people.”

“Oh, Uncle Gaspard!” and she hid her face on his breast, while her arms went around his neck. “The best out of my life is hardly good enough for you. I give you my boy with my whole heart.”

André Valbonais said the same thing. So the Governor and the priest settled all the legal points, and this, with the certificate of his birth and baptism and the will of his godfather, Gaspard Denys, were locked up in a strong box for any time that they might be needed.

A bright, sturdy little fellow was Gaspard, extravagantly fond of his grandfather and his constant companion. He had his mother’s soft brown eyes and her curly hair.

One afternoon when the sun had lain warm and golden all about, Renée Valbonais sat sewing on the wide porch that had been pushed out large enough for a room. Overhead and at the sides it was a cluster of vines and blossoming things that shook out fragrance with every waft of wind. The baby was tumbling about and chattering in both French and Spanish, for he picked up words easily. Sheba, the nurse, and Chloe were just outside in the garden. Mère Lunde was napping in her easy-chair. It was a pretty picture of comfort.

Renée merely glanced up as a young man entered the gate and looked about him with a touch of uncertainty. Some message from her husband, doubtless. It was so tranquil they might go out in the canoe. He came up slowly and then paused, glanced hesitatingly at her, taking off his cap and bowing. His attire was well worn, but different from the common habiliments. His figure and air was that of the cities—she had seen such young men in New Orleans.

“Is it—Madame Valbonais?” he asked.

The voice was cultured and with a peculiar richness. The hand that held the cap was slim and white as a girl’s. His complexion was clear, with the faintest suggestion of olive, but rather pale, though the warmth had given a tint of color to the cheeks.

“I am Madame Valbonais,” gently inclining her head with a charming graciousness.

“And a De Longueville by birth?”

The accent was such a pure musical French that this time she smiled as she nodded.

“You do not know—at least you may not remember, but a long while ago, it seems, you came to Paris and were being sent to the New World, America. You were at the Hôtel de Longueville, and there were two little boys——”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, her eyes dilating as a sudden suspicion—knowledge, indeed—seemed to electrify her. “Oh, you are—” and her voice failed.

“I am one of the little boys, the eldest, Robert de Longueville. And my father was your father also. Mine is a sad story, madame, though it began fair enough. I have come to the New World, where I have not a friend. All I knew was that you had a grandfather in St. Louis and were sent thither. You must pardon me, madame——”

His voice broke a little and his eyes were downcast.

The good and tender God had sent some one to her in her hour of need. She, too, had come a stranger to this new land. But she was not old enough to realize all the desolation.

Renée rose with gracious courtesy and put out her hand, moved by her own remembrances as well as his loneliness. He took it and glanced up. She saw his eyes were brimming with tears. His face and manner appealed to the tenderest side of her nature, and her affection went out at once.

“There are no words to thank you for this kindliness, madame. I am such a stranger to you, although the same blood runs in our veins. And I speak the truth. Ah, you cannot know——”

“Come and be seated. You look weary. Chloe,” she called, “bring a glass of wine and some cake.”

Then she pushed a chair up to the small table and put her work in the pretty Indian basket. His eyes followed the graceful form and took in the serene, lovely face. Something stirred within him that he had never known before. He had a French admiration and regard for his mother, but he could have knelt and kissed the hands of his sister.

Renée noticed now that his shoes were worn to the ground. He must have walked far.

“You came from New Orleans?” she ventured.

“Yes. The vessel brought me there. Then a boat was coming up to Fort Chartres. From there I have walked mostly. I am a poor *emigré*, madame. I will not invade your home under false colors. I spent my last sou to be rowed across the river. But in these troublous times you must have heard many sad stories.”

“We are largely out of the way. Yes, there have been sad enough times in France. And your brother——”

“He decided to stay in the monastery, though heaven only knows how long that will stand. All is terror and wildness, and no one’s life is safe. My father was—executed——”

“Oh, how terrible!” The tears overflowed her eyes.

The cake and wine came, and, after many thanks, he sipped the wine, but the cakes he ate like a hungry man. When she would have sent for more a gesture of his hand retained her.

“I thank you heartily,” he said, with a grave inclination of the head. “I am such a stranger that I ought to prove my identity. I have papers——”

“You may show them to my husband. I believe you. Why, I am your half sister, but with a whole heart, rest assured. Robert de Longueville. Yes, I remember you both. You were very shy, and I think I was very much afraid,” smiling as she recalled the old impressions that seemed like a dream.

“We used to talk of you. We never had any sister of our own. We were sent to school, and once a year came back to Paris. Papa was at court. I was a page for awhile, then I went to a military school. Honoré preferred books and a religious life. He was very sweet and gentle, while I liked life and stir and adventures. I do not think mamma quite approved Honoré, but she was proud that I was to be a soldier. And then the dreadful times began with the mob which first deprived the King of authority, and then cast him into prison with hundreds of others. Oh, it was indeed a reign of terror!”

“And your father?” in a low tone.

“They were both cast into prison,” and his voice fell a little. “My mother died there. It would have been better if my father had died with her. The Commune hated every vestige of royalty, abolished titles, confiscated estates. And then poor papa was one of its victims. Our school was broken up and we were driven into Paris. I don’t know what our fate would have been, impressed in the army of the rabble; but I would not have fought for the men who had murdered my father. I would have died first.”

Renée wiped the tears from her eyes. Until now it seemed as if she had never cared for her father. Surely he had expiated all mistakes and sins by his death.

“Then I ran away. I found my way to the monastery and Honoré and told them the sad tale. They were very kind and would have kept me, but there was no knowing how long they would be allowed their refuge. I resolved to escape to England, as every week or two refugees were flying thither. I found my opportunity. And there I heard many things about these new United Colonies. The English are not over-cordial to them, but the thought of a people who had fought seven years for liberty and conquered in the face of such odds fired my heart. I resolved to come to America. We had never forgotten you, madame, and Honoré wrote that if I found you I was to give you his love. He is a sweet, gentle fellow and will make an excellent priest, if there is any France left,” he added mournfully, drawing a long, pained breath.

She was glad they had remembered her and talked of her. She raised her sweet, sympathetic eyes.

“Then I came to New Orleans, as I learned from there I could reach St. Louis. It is queer, but all of you on this side of the river are under Spanish domination, and it is well for you, perhaps, even if you are French.”

“I know so little about it,” she replied gravely, “only that we are proud of being French. But the poor King and Queen, and—papa!”

“Honoré and I were thankful mamma died in prison, though we do not know what she suffered. And that is the whole of the sad story, madame. I am young and can work for my bread, surely, and it will not be so lonely since I have found you.”

Her tender heart went out to him. “Monsieur Robert,” she said, “I hope we shall be good friends. I am glad you came to me——”

“But I do not mean to be a burden on you,” he subjoined quickly. “I still think I should like to be a soldier, yet I have a fair education and I can make my living at something.”

In the light of the luxury of Paris all through his childhood, so differently aspected from this, he gathered that his sister was far from rich; but even if she had been, he had not meant to ask help from her. There was a good deal of pride in the De Longueville blood. He had not come as a suppliant for anything but love. She liked him none the worse for it. Then glancing up, she saw Uncle Gaspard and her child in the street.

“Excuse my absence a few moments and go on with your rest, for you look weary enough. Chloe, bring some more wine and cake.”

Then she glided down the path and met them at the gateway. Her face was flushed, her eyes deep and full of emotion.

“Come here in the little arbor,” she cried. “A strange thing has happened to me. I feel as if I had been reading it in a book, but it is all true. I hardly know where to begin. And, Uncle Gaspard, you must be kind and merciful, and forgive my father for his neglect. He is dead. He was one of the victims of that awful revolution because he was faithful to his King.”

“Renée, child, do not give way to such excitement. The grave covers all. We do not carry our grudges beyond it. And if he had loved you, you would never have come to me and I should have lost much, much!” And, picking up little Gaspard, he kissed him fondly and lifted him to his shoulder.

“Yes, I knew you would forgive, you are so generous. And”—she caught his free hand—“my brother, who has fled from those horrible scenes, who has lost both parents, has emigrated and is here—found me after some searching. Life has gone hardly with him.”

“Count de Longueville’s son!” The lines of Gaspard Denys’s face hardened, his eyes grew stern.

“Think of him as my brother only,” she pleaded. “We are to be kindly disposed to our enemies even. And, as you say, if he had been a fond father to me you would never have had me or little Gaspard. I think Robert will soon go away again. He has been partly bred for a soldier. And we ought not visit on him any sin of his father. That is left for God.”

“True.” It was gravely said, but not cordially. “Let us see what the young man is like. Renée, he never shall be any trouble to you.”

“Oh, you will feel so sorry for him presently.”

They walked to the porch—gallery, as every one called it. The young fellow had finished his food and wine again. He had eaten nothing since morning. He looked a little rested, but his eyes had a questioning glance.

He was not quite what Gaspard had looked for in a De Longueville. Barely medium size, though he was not yet twenty, refined and with a quiet dignity, he rather disarmed the critical eyes, and Gaspard experienced a touch of sympathy for him. Renée made him tell his pathetic story over again, which he did modestly enough. And when he would have gone, though whither he knew not, Denys bade him stay. There were no inns in the town.

He won André as well before the evening was over. And when they found he had no plans, only a vague desire to offer his services to the new government that in other days had aroused such an interest in France, they bade him remain with them. He had both seen and heard the Marquis de Lafayette after his return to France, when he had been full of enthusiasm for the new people.

“But, Monsieur Robert, you are French,” said André. “And in the turns of fate we may some day have a French country here. Anyhow, a man may earn his bread; and from what I hear, the colonies are not overstocked with prosperity. Better wait awhile and cast in your lot with us.”

Robert de Longueville was very glad to. He thought of the Reign of Terror with a shudder, and often wondered about Honoré, hearing at last that he was safe in an outlying district of northern France.

CHAPTER XXII—A NEW ST. LOUIS

Once again the French flag waved over St. Louis and hearts beat high with joy. Not that they had been unhappy or discontented under the Spanish *régime*, though the place had remained stationery. Except for the fur trade and the energies of the house of Maxent Laclede & Co. with their *entrepot*, it would still have been a little French hamlet. Even now it had scarcely two hundred buildings and less than a thousand inhabitants. Yet perhaps few places could boast of forty years of content and happiness and such peaceful living.

So down came the Spanish flag and up went the lilies of France. There was a night of rejoicing. People scarcely went to bed. Fiddles and flutes played old French airs, and songs were sung; but, after all, the people were decorous and there was no orgie. Most of these men had never known Parisian enthusiasm. Robert de Longueville marvelled at it and the simplicity.

It was well, perhaps, to have had those few hours of jubilation for men to talk about in their old age. For the next day a company came over from the fort and held a consultation with Lieutenant-Governor Dellassus. And then the royal lilies came down slowly, sadly, it seemed, and men’s hearts beat with sudden apprehension. What did it mean? They gathered in little knots and their faces were blanched.

Captain Stoddard raised the new colors—broad bands of red and white and thirteen stars on a blue field. The brave colonies had taken another leap and crossed the Mississippi. Here at the old Spanish quarters, March, 1804, the last vestige of hope fluttered and died in the French heart. The breeze caught the flag and flung it out and a few cheers went up, but they were from the Americans, and the salutes even had a melancholy sound.

“St. Louis,” said some one. “Will they take away the name, too? Are we to be orphans?”

Others wept. Some of the better informed tried to explain, but it was half-heartedly. No one was certain of what was to come. These conquerors, yes, they were that, spoke a different tongue, had a different religion, were aggressive, a resistless power that might sweep them beyond the mountains.

There was no rejoicing that night. There were no cabarets in which men could drink and discuss the change. They went to each other’s houses and sat moodily by firesides. Old St. Louis was lost to them and hearts were very heavy.

Spain had ceded the whole of Louisiana to France, and again France had sold her desirable possession. Napoleon, hating the English and wanting the money to carry on his war against them, had bargained with the United States. All the great country lying westward no one knew how far. And the mighty river was free from troublesome complications.

Yes, old St. Louis was gone. There was something new in the very air, an energy where there had been a leisurely aspect; a certain roughness instead of simplicity, pioneer life. No avalanche swept over them, but people came from the other side of the river, stalwart boatmen, stalwart hunters, with new and far-reaching ideas. Schools, poor enough at first, but teaching something besides the catechism and a little arithmetic. There were books to read, discoveries to make, mines to unearth, more profitable ways of labor. The old slow method of work in the salt licks was improved upon, as well as that of the lead mines. Upper Louisiana held in its borders some of the great wealth of the world. Spanish language dropped out, French began to be a good deal mixed, and men found it to their advantage to learn English. The stockade and the round towers dropped down, and no one repaired them, because the town was going to stretch out. New houses were built, but many of them seemed as queer at a later date, with their second-floor galleries approached by a stairs from the outside. The high-peaked roofs with their perky windows looked down on the old one-story houses of split logs and plaster. Laclede’s town, about a mile long, was old enough to have legends growing about it when men sat out on stoops and smoked their pipes.

Yet there was enough of the past left to still afford content and romance. Robert de Longueville proved himself a capable young fellow and turned his past education to some account. He had a truly French adoration for his half sister that presently won quite a regard from Gaspard Denys.

Robert was fascinated as well with the half Indian wife of M. Marchand, and never tired of the wild legends of fur hunting and life up at the strait. Then the ten children were a great source of interest as well. There were only two girls among them, the boys growing up tall, strong and fine-looking, proud of their mother, who kept curiously young and occasionally put on all her Indian finery for their amusement.

Renée was quite fair and rather petite, and with such shining eyes they often called her Firefly. Then Robert fell in love with her, and there was another Renée de Longueville to hand down the name, and very proud felt Renée Valbonais of the fact.

The little old church was partly rebuilt in the repairing, and was turned about. Then many years afterward it became the French Cathedral on Walnut Street. The high, stiff pews savor of olden time. There are still several paintings in it, one very fine, sent by Louis, the King of France. And there are the inscriptions in four languages, two modern and two ancient.

When Renée Valbonais knelt in her pew at the consecration her face was still sweet, her eyes brown, soft and smiling, but the hair curling about her forehead was snowy white. On this spot she had prayed for Uncle Gaspard's safe return, then she had prayed to be made willing to give him up if it was for his happiness. Now she had very little to pray for, so many blessings had been showered upon her by the good God. So her heart was all one great thanksgiving, and she felt that at the last she could "depart in peace."

When it was set off from Louisiana, when it became a Territory and then a State, St. Louis remained the capital. Brick and finished frame houses were built, stores and factories, a newspaper started, a steamboat came up the river, and that revolutionized the trade.

Then it was to change curiously again. The Americans had nearly superseded the French. Some of them went to the towns below, intermarriages became common as the prejudices died away. Then there was a great German emigration. The failure of patriotic hopes at home in the Old World sent many across to the New World. They were of the better class, educated, energetic and earnest for freedom of thought. Again in 1849 they were largely recruited after another unsuccessful revolution.

Eighty-three years after the founding of the town they held a grand celebration. Only one member of Pierre Laclede Liquist's company, who had planted and named the town, was living. This was the president of the day, Pierre Chouteau. The fine old madame, who had gloried in her brave sons, had passed to the other country. Four mounted Indians in full costume were the bodyguard of the venerable president, and in the carriages were a few withered-up, brown-faced Frenchmen, who had made themselves log houses along those early years and lived their simple lives, raised their families, danced in the merry-makings and now felt almost like aliens.

Gaspard Denys, still hale and hearty, was among them, past eighty, but clear of eye and steady of step. He had seen his godson, young Gaspard, grow up into a fine, manly fellow, marry a sweet girl and have sons to carry on the name. What more could a man ask than a well-used life and a certain share of happiness? But they had gone back on the next rise of ground, for business had seized with its inexorable grasp on the old home where Renée had sat and dreamed beside the great chimney and Mère Lunde had nodded.

Way out to the side of the old pond they had gone, where there was still a forest on one side of them. Great hickories, pecans, trees useful for food and fuel and building houses, long reaches of tangled grapes that made all the air sweet at their blossoming and again at their ripening, fields and meadows, the garden near by, the house with great porches, a wide hall and beautiful stairway, with no need of outside climbing.

"Here we will end our days," Gaspard Denys said to the child of the woman he still dreamed about, more vividly, perhaps, now than at middle life. For there was the wide stone chimney, the great corners in the fireplace. Sometimes on a winter night they stood a pine torch in the corner, and it gave the weird, flickering light they used to love.

Across the hall would be young people dancing. But there was no more Guinolee, no more anxious, eager crowds to see who would get the beans in the cake, no strife to be queens, no anxiety to be chosen kings; that, with other old things, had passed away.

"I wonder," Renée says, smiling absently, "if they have as good times as they used to in old St. Louis? There are so many pleasures now."

No one goes round on New Year's Eve singing songs, saying, "Good-night, master; good-night, mistress. I wish you great joy and good luck."

And this was to be all swept away by the imperious demand of the growing city; but it was true then that Renée and André Valbonais and Gaspard Denys had gone to that country which is never to know any change, for God is in the midst of it.

Before the century was half gone the dream of the old explorers had come true, and many a new explorer gave up his life, as well as De Soto and La Salle. For out on the western coasts, over mountain fastnesses, through gorges and beyond the Mississippi thousands of miles lay the land of gold; lay, too, a new road to India. Out and out on the high ground has stretched the great city.

The old mill and the queer winding pond went long ago. The Chouteau house, where there were many gatherings both grave and gay of the older people, is the Merchants' Exchange. Here and there a place is marked by some memento. But when you see the little old map with its Rue this and that, one smiles and contrasts its small levee with the twenty or more miles of water front, kept, too, within bounds, bridged over magnificently. And if its traders are not as picturesque as Indians and *voyageurs* and trappers in their different attire, they still seem from almost every nation.

Most of the French have gone. There is no exclusive French circle, as in New Orleans. Here and there a family is proud to trace back its ancestry and keep alive the old tongue. But the old houses have disappeared as well. Sometimes one finds one of the second decade, with its gable windows jutting out of the peaked roof, and one waits to see a brown, dried-up, wrinkled face in French coif and gay shoulder shawl peering out, but it is only a dream.

And surely the Germans earned their birthright with the loyalty of those days when the whole country was rent with the throes of civil war. There was a delightful, friendly, well-bred class of planters from the middle Southern States, who had lovely homes in and about the town, and who clung to their traditions, the system of slavery being more to them than a united country. But the patriotism of these adopted citizens, who had learned many wise lessons at a high price, was a wall against which the forces threw themselves to defeat, and again the everlasting truth conquered.

The youth of cities is the childhood of maturer purposes, knowledge, experience. Each brings with it the traditions of race, of surroundings, to outgrow them later on. Does one really sigh for the past, looking at the present? At the towns and cities and the wealth-producing inventions, where the silence of the wilderness reigned a hundred years ago, or broken only by the wild animals that ranged in their depths, and here and there an Indian lodge? And the new race, born of many others, proud, generous, courageous, men of breadth and foresight, who have bridged streams and hewn down mountains, made the solitary gorges familiar pictures to thousands, and have had their wise and earnest opinions moulded into public wisdom and usefulness, mothers who have added sweetness and wholesome nurture and refined daily living, children growing up to transform the beautiful city again, perhaps, though as one walks its splendid streets one wonders if there is any better thing to come, if the genius of man can devise more worthiness.

The new white city may answer it to the countless thousands who will come from all the quarters of the globe.

But the Little Girl and Old St. Louis had their happy day and are garnered among the memories of the past.

THE END.

THE “LITTLE GIRL” SERIES

A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD NEW YORK.
HANNAH ANN; A SEQUEL.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD BOSTON.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD PHILADELPHIA.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD WASHINGTON.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD NEW ORLEANS.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD DETROIT.
A LITTLE GIRL IN OLD ST. LOUIS.

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