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THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY

BEING THE MEMOIRS OF CAPTAIN ROBERT MORAY,
SOMETIME AN OFFICER IN THE VIRGINIA REGIMENT,
AND AFTERWARDS OF AMHERST'S REGIMENT

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

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ARGAND COURNAL

The most meagre intelligence came to me from the outer world. I no longer saw Gabord; he had suddenly been with drawn and a new jailer substituted, and the sentinels outside my door and beneath the window of my cell refused all information. For months I had no news whatever of Alixe or of those affairs nearest my heart. I heard nothing of Doltaire, little of Bigot, and there was no sign of Voban.

Sometimes I could see my new jailer studying me, if my plans were a puzzle to his brain. At first he used regularly to try the bars of the window, and search the wall as though he thought my devices might be found there.

Scarrat and Flavelle, the guards at my door, set too high a price on their favours, and they talked seldom, and then with brutal jests and ribaldry, of matters in the town which were not vital to me. Yet once or twice, from things they said, I came to know that all was not well between Bigot and Doltaire on one hand, and Doltaire and the Governor on the other. Doltaire had set the Governor and the Intendant scheming against him because of his adherence to the cause of neither, and his power to render the plans of either of no avail when he chose, as in my case. Vaudreuil's vanity was injured, and besides, he counted Doltaire too strong a friend of Bigot. Bigot, I doubted not, found in Madame Cournal's liking for Doltaire all sorts of things of which he never

would have dreamed; for there is no such potent devilry in this world as the jealousy of such a sort of man over a woman whose vanity and cupidity are the springs of her affections. Doltaire's imprisonment in a room of the Intendance was not so mysterious as suggestive. I foresaw a strife, a complication of intrigues, and internal enmities which would be (as they were) the ruin of New France. I saw, in imagination, the English army at the gates of Quebec, and those who sat in the seats of the mighty, sworn to personal enmities--Vaudreuil through vanity, Bigot through cupidity, Doltaire by the innate malice of his nature--sacrificing the country; the scarlet body of British power moving down upon a dishonoured city, never to take its foot from that sword of France which fell there on the soil of the New World.

But there was another factor in the situation which I have not dwelt on before. Over a year earlier, when war was being carried into Prussia by Austria and France, and against England, the ally of Prussia, the French Minister of War, D'Argenson, had, by the grace of La Pompadour, sent General the Marquis de Montcalm to Canada, to protect the colony with a small army. From the first, Montcalm, fiery, impetuous, and honourable, was at variance with Vaudreuil, who, though honest himself, had never dared to make open stand against Bigot. When Montcalm came, practically taking the military command out of the hands of the Governor, Vaudreuil developed a singular jealous spirit against the General. It began to express itself about the time I was thrown into the citadel dungeon, and I knew from what Alixe had told me, and from the gossip of the soldiers, that there was a more open show of disagreement now.

The Governor, seeing how ill it was to be at variance with both Montcalm and Bigot, presently began to covet a reconciliation with the latter. To this Bigot was by no means averse, for his own position had danger. His followers and confederates, Cournal, Marin, Cadet, and Rigaud, were robbing the King with a daring and effrontery which must ultimately bring disaster. This he knew, but it was his plan to hold on for a time longer, and then to retire before the axe fell, with an immense fortune. Therefore, about the time set for my execution, he began to close with the overtures of the Governor, and presently the two formed a confederacy against the Marquis de Montcalm. Into it they tried to draw Doltaire, and were surprised to find that he stood them off as to anything more than outward show of friendliness.

Truth was, Doltaire, who had no sordid feeling in him, loathed alike the cupidity of Bigot and the incompetency of the Governor, and respected Montcalm for his honour, and reproached him for his rashness. From first to last, he was, without show of it, the best friend Montcalm had in the province; and though he held aloof from bringing punishment to Bigot, he despised him and his friends, and was not slow to make that plain. D'Argenson made inquiry of Doltaire when Montcalm's honest criticisms were sent to France in cipher, and Doltaire returned the reply that Bigot was the only

man who could serve Canada efficiently in this crisis; that he had abounding fertility of resource, a clear head, a strong will, and great administrative faculty. This was all he would say, save that when the war was over other matters might be conned. Meanwhile France must pay liberally for the Intendant's services.

Through a friend in France, Bigot came to know that his affairs were moving to a crisis, and saw that it would be wise to retire; but he loved the very air of crisis, and Madame Cournal, anxious to keep him in Canada, encouraged him in his natural feeling to stand or fall with the colony. He never showed aught but a hold and confident face to the public, and was in all regards the most conspicuous figure in New France. When, two years before, Montcalm took Oswego from the English, Bigot threw open his palace to the populace for two days' feasting, and every night during the war he entertained lavishly, though the people went hungry, and their own corn, bought for the King, was sold back to them at famine prices.

As the Governor and the Intendant grew together in friendship, Vaudreuil sinking past disapproval in present selfish necessity, they quietly combined against Doltaire as against Montcalm. Yet at this very time Doltaire was living in the Intendance, and, as he had told Alixe, not without some personal danger. He had before been offered rooms at the Chateau St. Louis; but these he would not take, for he could not bear to be within touch of the Governor's vanity and timidity. He would of preference have stayed in the Intendance had he known that pitfalls and traps were at every footstep. Danger gave a piquancy to his existence. I think he did not greatly value Madame Cournal's admiration of himself; but when it drove Bigot to retaliation, his imagination got an impulse, and he entered upon a conflict which ran parallel with the war, and with that delicate antagonism which Alixe waged against him, long undiscovered by himself.

At my wits' end for news, at last I begged my jailer to convey a message for me to the Governor, asking that the barber be let come to me. The next day an answer arrived in the person of Voban himself, accompanied by the jailer. For a time there was little speech between us, but as he tended me we talked. We could do so with safety, for Voban knew English; and though he spoke it brokenly, he had freedom in it, and the jailer knew no word of it. At first the fellow blustered, but I waved him off. He was a man of better education than Gabord, but of inferior judgment and shrewdness. He made no trial thereafter to interrupt our talk, but sat and drummed upon a stool with his keys, or loitered at the window, or now and again thrust his hand into my pockets, as if to see if weapons were concealed in them.

"Voban," said I, "what has happened since I saw you at the Intendance? Tell me first of mademoiselle. You have nothing from her for me?"

"Nothing," he answered. "There is no time. A soldier come an

hour ago with an order from the Governor, and I must go all at once. So I come as you see. But as for the ma'm'selle, she is well. Voila, there is no one like her in New France. I do not know all, as you can guess, but they say she can do what she will at the Chateau. It is a wonder to see her drive. A month ago, a droll thing come to pass. She is driving on the ice with ma'm'selle Lotbiniere and her brother Charles. M'sieu' Charles, he has the reins. Soon, ver' quick, the horses start with all their might. M'sieu' saw and pull, but they go the faster. Like that for a mile or so; then ma'm'selle remember there is a great crack in the ice a mile farther on, and beyond the ice is weak and rotten, for there the curren' is ver' strongest. She see that M'sieu' Charles, he can do nothing, so she reach and take the reins. The horses go on; it make no diff'rence at first. But she begin to talk to them so sof', and to pull ver' steady, and at last she get them shaping to the shore. She have the reins wound on her hands, and people on the shore, they watch. Little on little the horses pull up, and stop at last not a hunder' feet from the great crack and the rotten ice. Then she turn them round and drive them home.

"You should hear the people cheer as she drive up Mountain Street. The bishop stand at the window of his palace and smile at her as she pass, and m'sieu'"--he looked at the jailer and paused--"m'sieu' the gentleman we do not love, he stand in the street with his cap off for two minutes as she come, and after she go by, and say a grand compliment to her, so that her face go pale. He get froze ears for his pains--that was a cold day. Well, at night there was a grand dinner at the Intendance, and afterwards a ball in the splendid room which that man" (he meant Bigot: I shall use names when quoting him further, that he may be better understood) "built for the poor people of the land for to dance down their sorrows. So you can guess I would be there--happy. Ah yes, so happy! I go and stand in the great gallery above the hall of dance, with crowd of people, and look down at the grand folk.

"One man come to me and say, 'Ah, Voban, is it you here? Who would think it!'--like that. Another, he come and say, 'Voban, he can not keep away from the Intendance. Who does he come to look for? But no, SHE is not here--no.' And again, another, 'Why should not Voban be here? One man has not enough bread to eat, and Bigot steals his corn. Another hungers for a wife to sit by his fire, and Bigot takes the maid, and Voban stuffs his mouth with humble pie like the rest. Chut! shall not Bigot have his fill?' And yet another, and voila, she was a woman, she say, 'Look at the Intendant down there with madame. And M'sieu' Cournal, he also is there. What does M'sieu' Cournal care? No, not at all. The rich man, what he care, if he has gold? Virtue! ha, ha! what is that in your wife if you have gold for it? Nothing. See his hand at the Intendant's arm. See how M'sieu' Doltaire look at them, and then up here at us. What is it in his mind, you think? Eh? You think he say to himself, A wife all to himself is the poor man's one luxury? Eh? Ah, M'sieu' Doltaire, you are right, you are right. You catch up my child from its basket in the market-place one day, and you shake it ver' soft, an' you say,

"Madame, I will stake the last year of my life that I can put my finger on the father of this child." And when I laugh in his face, he say again, "And if he thought he wasn't its father, he would cut out the liver of the other--eh?" And I laugh, and say, "My Jacques would follow him to hell to do it." Then he say, Voban, he say to me, "That is the difference between you and us. We only kill men who meddle with our mistresses!" Ah, that M'sieu' Doltaire, he put a louis in the hand of my babe, and he not even kiss me on the cheek. Pshaw! Jacques would sell him fifty kisses for fifty louis. But sell me, or a child of me? Well, Voban, you can guess! Pah, barber, if you do not care what he did to the poor Mathilde, there are other maids in St. Roch."

Voban paused a moment then added quietly, "How do you think I bear it all? With a smile? No, I hear with my ears open and my heart close tight. Do they think they can teach me? Do they guess I sit down and hear all without a cry from my throat or a will in my body? Ah, m'sieu' le Capitaine, it is you who know. You saw what I would have go to do with M'sieu' Doltaire before the day of the Great Birth. You saw if I am coward--if I not take the sword when it was at my throat without a whine. No, m'sieu', I can wait. Then is a time for everything. At first I am all in a muddle, I not how what to do; but by-and-bye it all come to me, and you shall one day what I wait for. Yes, you shall see. I look down on that people dancing there, quiet and still, and I hear some laugh at me, and now and then some one say a good word to me that make me shut my hands tight, so the tears not come to my eyes. But I felt alone--so much alone. The world does not want a sad man. In my shop I try to laugh as of old, and I am not sour or heavy, but I can see men do not say droll things to me as once back time. No, I am not as I was. What am I to do? There is but one way. What is great to one man is not to another. What kills the one does not kill the other. Take away from some people one thing, and they will not care; from others that same, and there is nothing to live for, except just to live, and because a man does not like death."

He paused. "You are right, Voban," said I. "Go on."

He was silent again for a time, and then he moved his hand in a helpless sort of way across his forehead. It had become deeply lined and wrinkled all in a couple of years. His temples were sunken, his cheeks hollow, and his face was full of those shadows which lend a sort of tragedy to even the humblest and least distinguished countenance. His eyes had a restlessness, anon an intense steadiness almost uncanny, and his thin, long fingers had a stealthiness of motion, a soft swiftness, which struck me strangely. I never saw a man so changed. He was like a vessel wrested from its moorings; like some craft, filled with explosives, set loose along a shore lined with fishing-smacks, which might come foul of one, and blow the company of men and boats into the air. As he stood there, his face half turned to me for a moment, this came to my mind, and I said to him, "Voban, you look like some wicked gun which would blow us all to pieces."

He wheeled, and came to me so swiftly that I shrank back in my chair with alarm, his action was so sudden, and, peering into my face, he said, glancing, as I thought, anxiously at the jailer, "Blow--blow--how blow us all to pieces, m'sieu'?" He eyed me with suspicion, and I could see that he felt like some hurt animal among its captors, ready to fight, yet not knowing from what point danger would come. Something pregnant in what I said had struck home, yet I could not guess then what it was, though afterwards it came to me with great force and vividness.

"I meant nothing, Voban," answered I, "save that you look dangerous."

I half put out my hand to touch his arm in a friendly way, but I saw that the jailer was watching, and I did not. Voban felt what I was about to do, and his face instantly softened, and his blood-shot eyes gave me a look of gratitude. Then he said:

"I will tell you what happen next I know the palace very well, and when I see the Intendant and M'sieu' Doltaire and others leave the ballroom I knew that they go to the chamber which they call 'la Chambre de la Joie,' to play at cards. So I steal away out of the crowd into a passage which, as it seem, go nowhere, and come quick, all at once, to a bare wall. But I know the way. In one corner of the passage I press a spring, and a little panel open. I crawl through and close it behin'. Then I feel my way along the dark corner till I come to another panel. This I open, and I see light. You ask how I can do this? Well, I tell you. There is the valet of Bigot, he is my friend. You not guess who it is? No? It is a man whose crime in France I know. He was afraid when he saw me here, but I say to him, 'No, I will not speak--never'; and he is all my friend just when I most need. Eh, voila, I see light, as I said, and I push aside heavy curtains ver' little, and there is the Chamber of the Joy below. There they all are, the Intendant and the rest, sitting down to the tables. There was Capitaine Lancy, M'sieu' Cadet, M'sieu' Cournal, M'sieu' le Chevalier de Levis, and M'sieu' le Generale, le Marquis de Montcalm. I am astonish to see him there, the great General, in his grand coat of blue and gold and red, and laces tres beau at his throat, with a fine jewel. Ah, he is not ver' high on his feet, but he has an eye all fire, and a laugh come quick to his lips, and he speak ver' galant, but he never let them, Messieurs Cadet, Marin, Lancy, and the rest, be thick friends with him. They do not clap their hands on his shoulder comme le bon camarade--non!

"Well, they sit down to play, and soon there is much noise and laughing, and then sometimes a silence, and then again the noise, and you can see one snuff a candle with the points of two rapiers, or hear a sword jangle at a chair, or listen to some one sing ver' soft a song as he hold a good hand of cards, or the ring of louis on the table, or the sound of glass as it break on the floor. And once a young gentleman--alas! he is so young--he get up from his chair, and cry out, 'All is lost! I go to die!' He raise a pistol

to his head; but M'sieu' Doltaire catch his hand, and say quite soft and gentle, 'No, no, mon enfant, enough of making fun of us. Here is the hunder' louis I borrow of you yesterday. Take your revenge.' The lad sit down slow, looking ver' strange at M'sieu' Doltaire. And it is true: he took his revenge out of M'sieu' Cadet, for he win--I saw it--three hunder' louis. Then M'sieu' Doltaire lean over to him and say, 'M'sieu', you will carry for me a message to the citadel for M'sieu' Ramesay, the commandant.' Ah, it was a sight to see M'sieu' Cadet's face, going this way and that. But it was no use: the young gentleman pocket his louis, and go away with a letter from M'sieu' Doltaire. But M'sieu' Doltaire, he laugh in the face of M'sieu' Cadet, and say ver' pleasant, 'That is a servant of the King, m'sieu', who live by his sword alone. Why should civilians be so greedy? Come, play, M'sieu' Cadet. If M'sieu' the General will play with me, we two will what we can do with you and his Excellency the Intendant.'

"They sit just beneath me, and I hear all what is said, I see all the looks of them, every card that is played. M'sieu' the General have not play yet, but watch M'sieu' Doltaire and the Intendant at the cards. With a smile he now sit down. Then M'sieu' Doltaire, he say, 'M'sieu' Cadet, let us have no mistake--let us be commercial.' He take out his watch. 'I have two hours to spare; are you dispose to play for that time only? To the moment we will rise, and there shall be no question of satisfaction, no discontent anywhere--eh, shall it be so, if m'sieu' the General can spare the time also?' It is agree that the General play for one hour and go, and that M'sieu' Doltaire and the Intendant play for the rest of the time.

"They begin, and I hide there and watch. The time go ver' fast, and my breath catch in my throat to see how great the stakes they play for. I hear M'sieu' Doltaire say at last, with a smile, taking out his watch, 'M'sieu' the General, your time is up, and you take with you twenty thousan' francs.'

"The General, he smile and wave his hand, as if sorry to take so much from M'sieu' Cadet and the Intendant. M'sieu' Cadet sit dark, and speak nothing at first, but at last he get up and turn on his heel and walk away, leaving what he lose on the table. M'sieu' the General bow also, and go from the room. Then M'sieu' Doltaire and the Intendant play. One by one the other players stop, and come and watch these. Something get into the two gentlemen, for both are pale, and the face of the Intendant all of spots, and his little round eyes like specks of red fire; but M'sieu' Doltaire's face, it is still, and his brows bend over, and now and then he make a little laughing out of his lips. All at once I hear him say, 'Double the stakes, your Excellency!' The Intendant look up sharp and say, 'What! Two hunder' thousan' francs!--as if M'sieu' Doltaire could not pay such a like that. M'sieu' Doltaire smile ver' wicked, and answer, 'Make it three hunder' thousan' francs, your Excellency.' It is so still in the Chamber of the Joy that all you hear for a minute was the fat Monsieur Varin breathe like a hog, and the rattle of a spur as some one slide a foot on the floor.

"The Intendant look blank; then he nod his head for answer, and each write on a piece of paper. As they begin, M'sieu' Doltaire take out his watch and lay it on the table, and the Intendant do the same, and they both look at the time. The watch of the Intendant is all jewels. 'Will you not add the watches to the stake?' say M'sieu' Doltaire. The Intendant look, and shrug a shoulder, and shake his head for no, and M'sieu' Doltaire smile in a sly way, so that the Intendant's teeth show at his lips and his eyes almost close, he is so angry.

"Just this minute I hear a low noise behind me, and then some one give a little cry. I turn quick and Madame Cournal. She stretch her hand, and touch my lips, and motion me not to stir. I look down again, and I see that M'sieu' Doltaire look up to the where I am, for he hear that sound, I think--I not know sure. But he say once more, 'The watch, the watch, your Excellency! I have a fancy for yours!' I feel madame breathe hard beside me, but I not like to look at her. I am not afraid of men, but a woman that way--ah, it make me shiver! She will betray me, I think. All at once I feel her hand at my belt, then at my pocket, to see if I have a weapon; for the thought come to her that I am there to kill Bigot. But I raise my hands and say, 'No,' ver' quiet, and she nod her head all right.

"The Intendant wave his hand at M'sieu' Doltaire to say he would not stake the watch, for I know it is one madame give him; and then they begin to play. No one stir. The cards go out flip, flip, on the table, and with a little soft scrape in the hands, and I hear Bigot's hound much a bone. All at once M'sieu' Doltaire throw down his cards, and say, 'Mine, Bigot! Three hunder' thousan' francs, and the time is up!' The other get from his chair, and say, 'How would you have pay if you had lost, Doltaire?' And m'sieu' answer, 'From the coffers of the King, like you, Bigot' His tone is odd. I feel madame's breath go hard. Bigot turn round and say to the others, 'Will you take your way to the great hall, messieurs, and M'sieu' Doltaire and I will follow. We have some private conf'rence.' They all turn away, all but M'sieu' Cournal, and leave the room, whispering. 'I will join you soon, Cournal,' say his Excellency. M'sieu' Cournal not go, for he have been drinking, and something stubborn got into him. But the Intendant order him rough, and he go. I can hear madame gnash her teeth sof' beside me.

"When the door close, the Intendant turn to M'sieu' Doltaire and say, 'What is the end for which you play?' M'sieu' Doltaire make a light motion of his hand, and answer, 'For three hunder' thousan' francs.' 'And to pay, m'sieu', how to pay if you have lost?' M'sieu' Doltaire lay his hand on his sword sof'. 'From the King's coffers, as I say; he owes me more than he has paid. But not like you, Bigot. I have earned, this way and that, all that I might ever get from the King's coffers--even this three hunder' thousan' francs, ten times told. But you, Bigot--tush! why should we make bubbles of words?' The Intendant get white in the face, but there are spots on it like on a late apple of an old tree. 'You go too

far, Doltaire,' he say. 'You have hint before my officers and my friends that I make free with the King's coffers.' M'sieu' answer, 'You should see no such hints, if your palms were not musty.' 'How know you,' ask the Intendant, 'that my hands are musty from the King's coffers?' M'sieu' arrange his laces, and say light, 'As easy from the must as I tell how time passes in your nights by the ticking of this trinket here.' He raise his sword and touch the Intendant's watch on the table.

"I never hear such silence as there is for a minute, and then the Intendant say, 'You have gone one step too far. The must on my hands, seen through your eyes, is no matter, but when you must the name of a lady there is but one end. You understand', m'sieu', there is but one end.' M'sieu' laugh. 'The sword, you mean? Eh? No, no, I will not fight with you. I am not here to rid the King of so excellent an officer, however large fee he force for his services.' 'And I tell you,' say the Intendant, 'that I will not have you cast a slight upon a lady.' Madame beside me start up, and whisper to me, 'If you betray me, you shall die. If you be still, I too will say nothing.' But then a thing happen. Another voice sound from below, and there, coming from behind a great screen of oak wood, is M'sieu' Cournal, his face all red with wine, his hand on his sword. 'Bah!' he say, coming forward--'bah! I will speak for madame. I will speak. I have been silent long enough.' He come between the two, and, raising his sword, he strike the time-piece and smash it. 'Ha! ha!' he say, wild with drink, 'I have you both here alone.' He snap his fingers under the Intendant's nose. 'It is time I protect my wife's name from you, and by God, I will do it!' At that M'sieu' Doltaire laugh, and Cournal turn to him, and say, 'Batard!' The Intendant have out his sword, and he roar in a hoarse voice, 'Dog, you shall die!' But M'sieu' Doltaire strike up his sword, and face the drunken man. 'No, leave that to me. The King's cause goes shipwreck; we can't change helmsman now. Think--scandal and your disgrace!' Then he make a pass at m'sieu' Cournal, who parry quick. Another, and he prick his shoulder. Another, and then madame beside me, as I spring back, throw aside the curtains, and cry out, 'No, m'sieu'! no! For shame!'

"I kneel in a corner behind the curtains, and wait and listen. There is not a sound for a moment; then I hear a laugh from M'sieu' Cournal, such a laugh make me sick--loud, and full of what you call not care and the devil. Madame speak down at them. 'Ah,' she say, 'it is so fine a sport to drag a woman's name in the mire!' Her voice is full of spirit. and she look beautiful--beautiful. I never guess how a woman like that look; so full of pride, and to speak like you could think knives sing as they strike steel--sharp and cold. 'I came to see how gentlemen look at play, and they end in brawling over a lady!'

"M'sieu' Doltaire speak to her, and they all put up their swords, and M'sieu' Cournal sit down at a table, and he stare and stare up at the balcony, and make a motion now and then with his hand. M'sieu' Doltaire say to her, 'Madame, you must excuse

our entertainment; we did not know we had an audience so distinguished.' She reply, 'As scene-shifter and prompter, M'sieu' Doltaire, you have a gift. Your Excellency,' she say to the Intendant, 'I will wait for you at the top of the great staircase, if you will be so good as to take me to the ballroom.' The Intendant and M'sieu' Doltaire bow, and turn to the door, and M'sieu' Cournal scowl, and make as if to follow; but madame speak down at him, 'M'sieu'--Argand'--like that! and he turn back, and sit down. I think she forget me, I keep so still. The others bow and scrape, and leave the room, and the two are alone--alone, for what am I? What if a dog hear great people speak? No, it is no matter!

"There is all still for a little while, and I watch her face as she lean over the rail and look down at him; it is like stone, like stone that aches, and her eyes stare and stare at him. He look up at her and scowl; then he laugh, with a toss of the finger, and sit down. All at once he put his hand on his sword, and gnash his teeth.

"Then she speak down to him, her voice ver' quiet. 'Argand,' she say, 'you are more a man drunk than sober. Argand,' she go on, 'years ago, they said you were a brave man; you fight well, you do good work for the King, your name goes with a sweet sound to Versailles. You had only your sword and my poor fortune and me then--that is all; but you were a man. You had ambition, so had I. What can a woman do? You had your sword, your country, the King's service. I had beauty; I wanted power--ah yes, power, that was the thing! But I was young and a fool; you were older. You talked fine things then, but you had a base heart, so much baser than mine.... I might have been a good woman. I was a fool, and weak, and vain, but you were base--so base--coward and betrayer, you!'

"At that m'sieu' start up and snatch at his sword, and speak out between his teeth, 'By God, I will kill you to-night!' She smile cold and hard, and say, 'No, no, you will not; it is too late for killing; that should have been done before. You sold your right to kill long ago, Argand Cournal. You have been close friends with the man who gave me power, and you gold.' Then she get fierce. 'Who gave you gold before he gave me power, traitor?' Like that she speak. 'Do you never think of what you have lost?' Then she break out in a laugh. 'Pah! Listen: if there must be killing, why not be the great Roman--drunk!'

"Then she laugh so hard a laugh, and turn away, and go quick by me and not see me. She step into the dark, and he sit down in the chair, and look straight in front of him. I do not stir, and after a minute she come back sof', and peep down, her face all differen'. 'Argand! Argand!' she say ver' tender and low, 'if--if--if'--like that. But just then he see the broken watch on the floor, and he stoop, with a laugh, and pick up the pieces; then he get a candle and look on the floor everywhere for the jewels, and he pick them up, and put them away one by one in his purse like a miser. He keep on looking, and once the fire of the candle burn his beard, and he swear, and she stare and stare at him. He sit down at the table,

and look at the jewels and laugh to himself. Then she draw herself up, and shake, and put her hands to her eyes, and 'C'est fini! c'est fini!' she whisper, and that is all.

"When she is gone, after a little time he change--ah, he change much, he go to a table and pour out a great bowl of wine, and then another, and he drink them both, and he begin to walk up and down the floor. He sway now and then, but he keep on for a long time. Once a servant come, but he wave him away, and he scowl and talk to himself, and shut the doors and lock them. Then he walk on and on. At last he sit down, and he face me. In front of him are candles, and he stare between them, and stare and stare. I sit and watch, and I feel a pity. I hear him say, 'Antoinette! Antoinette! My dear Antoinette! We are lost forever, my Antoinette!' Then he take the purse from his pocket, and throw it up to the balcony where I am. 'Pretty sins,' he say, 'follow the sinner!' It lie there, and it have sprung open, and I can see the jewels shine, but I not touch it--no. Well, he sit there long--long, and his face get gray and his cheeks all hollow.

"I hear the clock strike one! two! three! four! Once some one come and try the door, but go away again, and he never stir; he is like a dead man. At last I fall asleep. When I wake up, he still sit there, but his head lie in his arms. I look round. Ah, it is not a fine sight--no. The candles burn so low, and there is a smell of wick, and the grease runs here and there down the great candlesticks. Upon the floor, this place and that, is a card, and pieces of paper, and a scarf, and a broken glass, and something that shine by a small table. This is a picture in a little gold frame. On all the tables stand glasses, some full, and some empty of wine. And just as the dawn come in through the tall windows, a cat crawl out from somewhere, all ver' thin and shy, and walk across the floor; it make the room look so much alone. At last it come and move against m'sieu's legs, and he lift his head and look down at it, and nod, and say something which I not hear. After that he get up, and pull himself together with a shake, and walk down the room. Then he see the little gold picture on the floor which some drunk young officer drop, and he pick it up and look at it, and walk again. 'Poor fool!' he say, and look at the picture again. 'Poor fool! Will he curse her some day--a child with a face like that? Ah!' And he throw the picture down. Then he walk away to the doors, unlock them, and go out. Soon I steal away through the panels, and out of the palace ver' quiet, and go home. But I can see that room in my mind."

Again the jailer hurried Voban; There was no excuse for him to remain longer; so I gave him a message to Alixe, and slipped into his hand a transcript from my journal. Then he left me, and I sat and thought upon the strange events of the evening which he had described to me. That he was bent on mischief I felt sure, but how it would come, what were his plans, I could not guess. Then suddenly there flashed into my mind my words to him, "blow us all to pieces," and his consternation and strange eagerness. It came to me suddenly: he meant to blow up the Intendance. When? And how?

It seemed absurd to think of it. Yet--yet-- The grim humour of the thing possessed me, and I sat back and laughed heartily.

In the midst of my mirth the cell door opened and let in Doltaire.

XV

IN THE CHAMBER OF TORTURE

I started from my seat; we bowed, and, stretching out a hand to the fire, Doltaire said, "Ah, my Captain, we meet too seldom. Let me see: five months--ah yes, nearly five months. Believe me, I have not breakfasted so heartily since. You are looking older--older. Solitude to the active mind is not to be endured alone--no."

"Monsieur Doltaire is the surgeon to my solitude," said I.

"H'm!" he answered, "a jail surgeon merely. And that brings me to a point, monsieur. I have had letters from France. The Grande Marquise--I may as well be frank with you--womanlike, yearns violently for those silly letters which you hold. She would sell our France for them. There is a chance for you who would serve your country so. Serve it, and yourself--and me. We have no news yet as to your doom, but be sure it is certain. La Pompadour knows all, and if you are stubborn, twenty deaths were too few. I can save you little longer, even were it my will so to do. For myself, the great lady girds at me for being so poor an agent. You, monsieur"--he smiled whimsically--"will agree that I have been persistent--and intelligent."

"So much so," rejoined I, "as to be intrusive."

He smiled again. "If La Pompadour could hear you, she would understand why I prefer the live amusing lion to the dead dog. When you are gone, I shall be inconsolable. I am a born inquisitor."

"You were born for better things than this," I answered.

He took a seat and mused for a moment. "For larger things, you mean," was his reply. "Perhaps--perhaps. I have one gift of the strong man--I am inexorable when I make for my end. As a general, I would pour men into the maw of death as corn into the hopper, if that would build a bridge to my end. You call to mind how those Spaniards conquered the Mexique city which was all canals like Venice? They filled the waterways with shattered houses and the bodies of their enemies, as they fought their way to Montezuma's palace. So I would know not pity if I had a great cause. In anything vital I would have success at all cost, and to get, destroy as I went--if I were a great man."

I thought for a moment with horror of his pursuit of my dear Alixe. "I am your hunter," had been his words to her, and I knew not what had happened in all these months.

"If you were a great man, you should have the best prerogative of greatness," I remarked quietly.

"And what is that? Some excellent moral, I doubt not," was the rejoinder.

"Mercy," I replied.

"Tush!" he retorted, "mercy is for the fireside, not for the throne. In great causes, what is a screw of tyranny here, a bolt of oppression there, or a few thousand lives!" He suddenly got to his feet, and, looking into the distance, made a swift motion of his hand, his eyes half closed, his brows brooding and firm. "I should look beyond the moment, the year, or the generation. Why fret because the hour of death comes sooner than we looked for? In the movement of the ponderous car, some honest folk must be crushed by the wicked wheels. No, no, in large affairs there must be no thought of the detail of misery, else what should be done in the world! He who is the strongest shall survive, and he alone. It is all conflict--all. For when conflict ceases, and those who could and should be great spend their time chasing butterflies among the fountains, there comes miasma and their doom. Mercy? Mercy? No, no: for none but the poor and sick and overridden, in time of peace; in time of war, mercy for none, pity nowhere, till the joybells ring the great man home."

"But mercy to women always," said I, "in war or peace."

He withdrew his eyes as if from a distant prospect, and they dropped to the stove, where I had corn parching. He nodded, as if amused, but did not answer at once, and taking from my hand the feather with which I stirred the corn, softly whisked some off for himself, and smiled at the remaining kernels as they danced upon the hot iron. After a little while he said, "Women? Women should have all that men can give them. Beautiful things should adorn them; no man should set his hand in cruelty on a woman--after she is his. Before--before? Woman is wilful, and sometimes we wring her heart that we may afterwards comfort it."

"Your views have somewhat changed," I answered. "I mind when you talked less sweetly."

He shrugged a shoulder. "That man is lost who keeps one mind concerning woman. I will trust the chastity of no woman, yet I will trust her virtue--if I have her heart. They a foolish tribe, and all are vulnerable in their vanity. They of consequence to man, of no consequence in state matters. When they meddle there, we have La Pompadour and war with England, and Captain Moray in the Bastile of New France."

"You come from a court, monsieur, which believes in nothing, not even in itself."

"I come from a court," he rejoined, "which has made a gospel of artifice, of frivolity a creed; buying the toys for folly with the savings of the poor. His most Christian Majesty has set the fashion of continual silliness and universal love. He begets children in the peasant's oven and in the chamber of Charlemagne alike. And we are all good subjects of the King. We are brilliant, exquisite, brave, and naughty; and for us there is no to-morrow."

"Nor for France," I suggested.

He laughed, as he rolled a kernel of parched corn on his tongue. "Tut, tut! that is another thing. We the fashion of an hour, but France is a fact as stubborn as the natures of you English; for beyond stubbornness and your Shakespeare you have little. Down among the moles, in the peasants' huts, the spirit of France never changes--it is always the same; it is for all time. You English, nor all others, you can not blow out that candle which is the spirit of France. I remember of the Abbe Bobon preaching once upon the words, 'The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord'; well, the spirit of France is the candle of Europe, and you English will be its screen against the blowing out, though in spasms of stupidity you flaunt the extinguisher. You--you have no imagination, no passion, no temperament, no poetry. Yet I am wrong. The one thing you have--"

He broke off, nodding his head in amusement. "Yes, you have, but it is a secret. You English are the true lovers, we French the true poets; and I will tell you why. You are a race of comrades, the French of gentlemen; you cleave to a thing, we to an idea; you love a woman best when she is near, we when she is away; you make a romance of marriage, we of intrigue; you feed upon yourselves, we upon the world; you have fever in your blood, we in our brains; you believe the world was made in seven days, we have no God; you would fight for the seven days, we would fight for the danseuse on a bonbon box. The world will say 'fie!' at us and love us; it will respect you and hate you. That is the law and the gospel," he added, smiling.

"Perfect respect casteth out love" said I ironically.

He waved his fingers in approval. "By the Lord, but you are pungent now and then!" he answered; "cabined here you are less material. By the time you are chastened unto heaven you will be too companionable to lose."

"When is that hour of completed chastening?" I asked.

"Never," he said, "if you will oblige me with those letters."

"For a man of genius you discern but slowly," retorted I.

"Discern your amazing stubbornness?" he asked. "Why should you play at martyr, when your talent is commercial? You have no gifts for martyrdom but wooden tenacity. Pshaw! the leech has that. You mistake your calling."

"And you yours," I answered. "This is a poor game you play, and losing it you lose all. La Pompadour will pay according to the goods you bring."

He answered with an amusing candour: "Why, yes, you are partly in the right. But when La Pompadour and I come to our final reckoning, when it is a question who can topple ruins round the King quickest, his mistress or his 'cousin,' there will be tales to tell."

He got up, and walked to and fro in the cell, musing, and his face grew dark and darker. "Your Monmouth was a fool," he said. "He struck from the boundaries; the blow should fall in the very chambers of the King." He put a finger musingly upon his lip. "I see--I see how it could be done. Full of danger, but brilliant, brilliant and bold! Yes, yes...yes!" Then all at once he seemed to come out of a dream, and laughed ironically. "There it is," he said; "there is my case. I have the idea, but I will not strike; it is not worth the doing unless I am driven to it. We are brave enough, we idlers," he went on; "we die with an air--all artifice, artifice! ... Yet of late I have had dreams. Now that is not well. It is foolish to dream, and I had long since ceased to do so. But somehow all the mad fancies of my youth come back. This dream will go, it will not last; it is--my fate, my doom," he added lightly, "or what you will!"

I knew, alas, too well where his thoughts were hanging, and I loathed him anew; for, as he hinted, his was a passion, not a deep abiding love. His will was not stronger than the general turpitude of his nature. As if he had divined my thought, he said, "My will is stronger than any passion that I have; I can never plead weakness in the day of my judgment. I am deliberate. When I choose evil it is because I love it. I could be an anchorite; I am, as I said--what you will."

"You are a conscienceless villain, monsieur."

"Who salves not his soul," he added, with a dry smile, "who will play his game out as he began; who repents nor ever will repent of anything; who for him and you some interesting moments yet. Let me make one now," and he drew from his pocket a packet. He smiled hatefully as he handed it to me, and said, "Some books which monsieur once lent Mademoiselle Duvarney--poems, I believe. Mademoiselle found them yesterday, and desired me to fetch them to you; and I obliged her. I had the pleasure of glancing through the books before she rolled them up. She bade me say that monsieur

might find them useful in his captivity. She has a tender heart--even to the worst of criminals."

I felt a strange churning in my throat, but with composure I took the books, and said, "Mademoiselle Duvarney chooses distinguished messengers."

"It is a distinction to aid her in her charities," he replied.

I could not at all conceive what was meant. The packet hung in my hands like lead. There was a mystery I could not solve. I would not for an instant think what he meant to convey by a look--that her choice of him to carry back my gift to her was a final repulse of past advances I had made to her, a corrective to my romantic memories. I would not believe that, not for one fleeting second. Perhaps, I said to myself, it was a ruse of this scoundrel. But again, I put that from me, for I did not think he would stoop to little meannesses, no matter how vile he was in great things. I assumed indifference to the matter, laying the packet down upon my couch, and saying to him, "You will convey my thanks to Mademoiselle Duvarney for these books, whose chief value lies in the honourable housing they have had."

He smiled provokingly; no doubt he was thinking that my studied compliment smelt of the oil of solitude. "And add--shall I--your compliments that they should have their airing at the hands of Monsieur Doltaire?"

"I shall pay those compliments to Monsieur Doltaire himself one day," I replied.

He waved his fingers. "The sentiments of one of the poems were commendable, fanciful. I remember it"--he put a finger to his lip--"let me see." He stepped towards the packet, but I made a sign of interference--how grateful was I of this afterwards!--and he drew back courteously. "Ah well," he said, "I have a fair memory; I can, I think, recall the morsel. It impressed me. I could not think the author an Englishman. It runs thus," and with admirable grace he recited the words:

"O flower of all the world, O flower of all!
The garden where thou dwellest is so fair,
Thou art so goodly and so queenly tall,
Thy sweetness scatters sweetness everywhere,
O flower of all!

"O flower of all the years, O flower of all!
A day beside thee is a day of days;
Thy voice is softer than the throstle's call,
There is not song enough to sing thy praise,
O flower of all!

"O flower of all the years, O flower of all!

I seek thee in thy garden, and I dare
To love thee; and though my deserts be small,
Thou art the only flower I would wear,
O flower of all!"

"Now that," he said, "is the romantic, almost the Arcadian spirit. We have lost it, but it lingers like some rare scent in the folds of lace. It is also but artifice, yet so is the lingering perfume. When it hung in the flower it was lost after a day's life, but when gathered and distilled into an essence it becomes, through artifice, an abiding sweetness. So with your song there. It is the spirit of devotion, gathered, it may be, from a thousand flowers, and made into an essence, which is offered to one only. It is not the worship of this one, but the worship of a thousand distilled at last to one delicate liturgy. So much for sentiment," he continued. "Upon my soul, Captain Moray, you are a boon. I love to have you caged. I shall watch your distressed career to its close with deep scrutiny. You and I are wholly different, but you are interesting. You never could be great. Pardon the egotism, but it is truth. Your brain works heavily, you are too tenacious of your conscience, you are a blunderer. You will always sow, and others will reap."

I waved my hand in deprecation, for I was in no mood for further talk, and I made no answer. He smiled at me, and said, "Well, since you doubt my theories, let us come, as your Shakespeare says, to Hecuba.... If you will come with me," he added, as he opened my cell door, and motioned me courteously to go outside. I drew back, and he said, "There is no need to hesitate; I go to show you merely what will interest you."

We passed in silence through the corridors, two sentinels attending, and at last came into a large square room, wherein stood three men with hands tied over their heads against the wall, their faces twitching with pain. I drew back in astonishment, for there, standing before them, were Gabord and another soldier. Doltaire ordered from the room the soldier with Gabord, and my two sentinels, and motioned me to one of two chairs set in the middle of the floor.

Presently his face became hard and cruel, and he said to the tortured prisoners, "You will need to speak the truth, and promptly. I have an order to do with you what I will, and I will do it without pause. Hear me. Three nights ago, as Mademoiselle Duvarney was returning from the house of a friend living near the Intendance, she was set upon by you. A cloak was thrown over her head, she was carried to a carriage, where two of you got inside with her. Some gentlemen and myself were coming that way. We heard the lady's cries, and two gave chase to the carriage, while one followed the others. By the help of soldier Gabord here you all were captured. You have hung where you are for two days, and now I shall have you whipped. When that is done, you shall tell your story. If you do not speak truth, you shall be whipped again, and then hung. Ladies shall have safety from rogues like you."

Alixé's danger told in these concise words made me, I am sure, turn pale; but Doltaire did not see it, he was engaged with the prisoners. As I thought and wondered, four soldiers were brought in, and the men were made ready for the lash. In vain they pleaded they would tell their story at once. Doltaire would not listen; the whipping first, and their story after. Soon their backs were bared, their faces were turned to the wall, and, as Gabord with harsh voice counted, the lashes were mercilessly laid on. There was a horrible fascination in watching the skin corrugate under the lashes, rippling away in red and purple blotches, the grooves in the flesh crossing and recrossing, the raw misery spreading from the hips to the shoulders. Now and again Doltaire drew out a box and took a pinch of snuff, and once, coolly and curiously, he walked up to the most stalwart prisoner and felt his pulse, then to the weakest, whose limbs and body had stiffened as though dead. "Ninety-seven! Ninety-eight! Ninety-nine!" growled Gabord, and then came Doltaire's voice:

"Stop! Now fetch some brandy."

The prisoners were loosened, and Doltaire spoke sharply to a soldier who was roughly pulling one man's shirt over the excoriated back. Brandy was given by Gabord, and the prisoners stood, a most pitiful sight, the weakest livid.

"Now tell your story," said Doltaire to this last.

The man, with broken voice and breath catching, said that they had erred. They had been hired to kidnap Madame Cournal, not Mademoiselle Duvarney.

Doltairé's eyes flashed. "I see, I see," he said aside to me.

"The wretch speaks truth."

"Who was your master?" he asked of the sturdiest of the villains; and he was told that Monsieur Cournal had engaged them. To the question what was to be done with Madame Cournal, another answered that she was to be waylaid as she was coming from the Intendance, kidnapped, and hurried to a nunnery to be imprisoned for life.

Doltairé sat for a moment, looking at the men in silence. "You are not to hang," he said at last; "but ten days hence, when you have had one hundred lashes more, you shall go free. Fifty for you," he continued to the weakest who had first told the story.

"Not fifty nor one!" was the shrill reply, and, being unbound, the prisoner snatched something from a bench near; there was a flash of steel, and he came huddling in a heap on the floor, muttering a malediction on the world.

"There was some bravery in that," said Doltaire, looking at the dead man. "If he has friends, hand over the body to them. This

matter must not be spoken of--at your peril," he added sternly.

"Give them food and brandy."

Then he accompanied me to my cell, and opened the door. I passed in, and he was about going without a word, when on a sudden his old nonchalance came back, and he said:

"I promised you a matter of interest. You have had it. Gather philosophy from this: you may with impunity buy anything from a knave and fool except his nuptial bed. He throws the money in your face some day."

So saying he plunged in thought again, and left me.

XVI

BE SAINT OR IMP

Immediately I opened the packet. As Doltaire had said, the two books of poems I had lent Alixe were there, and between the pages of one lay a letter addressed to me. It was, indeed, a daring thing to make Doltaire her messenger. But she trusted to his habits of courtesy; he had no small meannesses--he was no spy or thief.

DEAR ROBERT (the letter ran): I know not if this will ever reach you, for I am about to try a perilous thing, even to make Monsieur Doltaire my letter-carrier. Bold as it is, I hope to bring it through safely.

You must know that my mother now makes Monsieur Doltaire welcome to our home, for his great talents and persuasion have so worked upon her that she believes him not so black as he is painted. My father, too, is not unmoved by his amazing address and complaisance. I do not think he often cares to use his arts--he is too indolent; but with my father, my mother, and my sister he has set in motion all his resources.

Robert, all Versailles is here. This Monsieur Doltaire speaks for it. I know not if all courts in the world are the same, but if so, I am at heart no courtier; though I love the sparkle, the sharp play of wit and word, the very touch-and-go of weapons. I am in love with life, and I wish to live to be old, very old, that I will have known it all, from helplessness to helplessness again, missing nothing, even though much be sad to feel and bear. Robert, I should have gone on many years, seeing little, knowing little, I think, if it had not been for you and for your troubles, which are mine, and for this love of ours, builded in the midst of sorrows. Georgette is now as old as when I first came to love you, and you were thrown into the citadel, and yet in feeling and experience, I am ten years older than she; and necessity has made me wiser. Ah, if necessity

would but make me happy too, by giving you your liberty, that on these many miseries endured we might set up a sure home. I wonder if you think--if you think of that: a little home away from all these wars, aloof from vexing things.

But there! all too plainly I am showing you my heart. Yet it is so great a comfort to speak on paper to you, in this silence here. Can you guess where is that HERE, Robert? It is not the Chateau St. Louis--no. It is not the Manor. It is the chateau, dear Chateau Alixe--my father has called it that--on the Island of Orleans. Three days ago I was sick at heart, tired of all the junketings and feasting, and I begged my mother to fetch me here, though it is yet but early spring, and snow is on the ground.

First, you must know that this new chateau is built upon, and is joined to, the ruins of an old one, owned long years ago by the Baron of Beaugard, whose strange history you must learn some day, out of the papers we have found here. I begged my father not to tear the old portions of the manor down, but, using the first foundations, put up a house half castle and half manor. Pictures of the old manor were found, and so we have a place that is no patchwork, but a renewal. I made my father give me the old surviving part of the building for my own, and so it is.

It is all set on high ground abutting on the water almost at the point where I am, and I have the river in my sight all day. Now, think yourself in the new building. You come out of a dining-hall, hung all about with horns and weapons and shields and such bravery, go through a dark, narrow passage, and then down a step or two. You open a door, bright light breaks on your eyes, then two steps lower, and you are here with me. You might have gone outside the dining-hall upon a stone terrace, and so have come along to the deep window where I sit so often. You may think of me hiding in the curtains, watching you, though you knew it not till you touched the window and I came out quietly, startling you, so that your heart would beat beyond counting.

As I look up towards the window, the thing first in sight is the cage, with the little bird which came to me in the cathedral the morning my brother got lease of life again: you DO remember--is it not so? It never goes from my room, and though I have come here but for a week I muffled the cage well and brought it over; and there the bird swings and sings the long day through. I have heaped the window-seats with soft furs, and one of these I prize most rarely. It was a gift--and whose, think you? Even a poor soldier's. You see I have not all friends among the great folk. I often lie upon that soft robe of sable--ay, sable, Master Robert--and think of him who gave it to me. Now I know you are jealous, and I can see your eyes flash up. But you shall at once be soothed. It is no other than Gabord's gift. He is now of the Governor's body-guard, and I think is by no means happy, and would prefer service with the Marquis de Montcalm, who goes not comfortably with the Intendant and the Governor.

One day Gabord came to our house on the ramparts, and, asking for me, blundered out, "Aho, what shall a soldier do with sables? They are for gentles and for wrens to snuggle in. Here comes a Russian count oversea, and goes mad in tavern. Here comes Gabord, and saves count from ruddy crest for kissing the wrong wench. Then count falls on Gabord's neck, and kisses both his ears, and gives him sables, and crosses oversea again; and so good-bye to count and his foolery. And sables shall be ma'm'selle's, if she will have them." He might have sold the thing for many louis, and yet he brought it to me; and he would not go till he had seen me sitting on it, muffling my hands and face in the soft fur.

Just now, as I am writing, I glance at the table where I sit--a small brown table of oak, carved with the name of Felise, Baroness of Beaugard. She sat here; and some day, when you hear her story, you will know why I begged Madame Lotbiniere to give it to me in exchange for another, once the King's. Carved, too, beneath her name, are the words, "Oh, tarry thou the Lord's leisure."

And now you shall laugh with me at a droll thing Georgette has given me to wipe my pen upon. There are three little circles of deerskin and one of ruby velvet, stitched together in the centre. Then, standing on the velvet is a yellow wooden chick, with little eyes of beads, and a little wooden bill stuck in most quaintly, and a head that twists like a weathercock. It has such a piquant silliness of look that I laugh at it most heartily, and I have an almost elfish fun in smearing its downy feathers. I am sure you did not think I could be amused so easily. You shall see this silly chick one day, humorously ugly and all daubed with ink.

There is a low couch in one corner of the room, and just above hangs a picture of my mother. In another corner is a little shelf of books, among them two which I have studied constantly since you were put in prison--your great Shakespeare, and the writings of one Mr. Addison. I had few means of studying at first, so difficult it seemed, and all the words sounded hard; but there is your countryman, one Lieutenant Stevens of Rogers' Rangers, a prisoner, and he has helped me, and is ready to help you when the time comes for stirring. I teach him French; and though I do not talk of you, he tells me in what esteem you are held in Virginia and in England, and is not slow to praise you on his own account, which makes me more forgiving when he would come to sentiment!

In another corner is my spinning-wheel, and there stands a harpsichord, just where the soft sun sends in a ribbon of light; and I will presently play for you a pretty song. I wonder if you can hear it? Where I shall sit at the harpsichord the belt of sunlight will fall across my shoulder, and, looking through the window, I shall see your prison there on the Heights; the silver flag with its gold lilies on the Chateau St. Louis; the great guns of the citadel; and far off at Beauport the Manor House and

garden which you and I know so well, and the Falls of Montmorenci, falling like white flowing hair from the tall cliff.

You will care to know of how these months have been spent, and what news of note there is of the fighting between our countries. No matters of great consequence have come to our ears, save that it is thought your navy may descend on Louisburg; that Ticonderoga is also to be set upon, and Quebec to be besieged in the coming summer. From France the news is various. Now, Frederick of Prussia and England defeat the allies, France, Russia, and Austria; now, they, as Monsieur Doltaire says, "send the great Prussian to verses and the megrims." For my own part, I am ever glad to hear that our cause is victorious, and letters that my brother writes me rouse all my ardour for my country. Juste has grown in place and favour, and in his latest letter he says that Monsieur Doltaire's voice has got him much advancement. He also remarks that Monsieur Doltaire has reputation for being one of the most reckless, clever, and cynical men in France. Things that he has said are quoted at ball and rout. Yet the King is angry with him, and La Pompadour's caprice may send him again to the Bastile. These things Juste heard from D'Argenson, Minister of War, through his secretary, with whom he is friendly.

I will now do what I never thought to do: I will send you here some extracts from my journal, which will disclose to you the secrets of a girl's troubled heart. Some folk might say that I am unmaidenly in this. But I care not, I fear not.

December 24. I was with Robert to-day. I let him see what trials I had had with Monsieur Doltaire, and what were like to come. It hurt me to tell him, yet it would have hurt me more to withhold them. I am hurt whichever way it goes. Monsieur Doltaire rouses the worst parts of me. On the one hand I detest him for his hatred of Robert and for his evil life, yet on the other I must needs admire him for his many graces--why are not the graces of the wicked horrible?--for his singular abilities, and because, gamester though he may be, he is no public robber. Then, too, the melancholy of his birth and history claims some sympathy. Sometimes when I listen to him speak, hear the almost piquant sadness of his words, watch the spirit of isolation which, by design or otherwise, shows in him, for the moment I am conscious of a pity or an interest which I flout in wiser hours. This is his art, the potent danger of his personality.

To-night he came, and with many fine phrases wished us a happy day to-morrow, and most deftly worked upon my mother and Georgette by looking round and speaking with a quaint sort of raillery--half pensive, it was--of the peace of this home-life of ours; and indeed, he did it so inimitably that I was not sure how much was false and how much true. I tried to avoid him to-day, but my mother as constantly made private speech between us easy. At last he had his way, and then I was not sorry; for Georgette was listening to him with more colour than she is wont to wear. I would rather see

her in her grave than with her hand in his, her sweet life in his power. She is unschooled in the ways of the world, and she never will know it as I now do. How am I sounding all the depths! Can a woman walk the dance with evil, and be no worse for it by-and-bye? Yet for a cause, for a cause! What can I do? I can not say, "Monsieur Doltaire, you must not speak with me, or talk with me; you are a plague-spot." No, I must even follow this path, so it but lead at last to Robert and his safety.

Monsieur, having me alone at last, said to me, "I have kept my word as to the little boast: this Captain Moray still lives."

"You are not greater than I thought," said I.

He professed to see but one meaning in my words, and answered, "It was then mere whim to see me do this thing, a lady's curious mind, eh? My faith, I think your sex are the true scientists: you try experiment for no other reason than to see effect."

"You forget my deep interest in Captain Moray," said I, with airy boldness.

He laughed. He was disarmed. How could he think I meant it! "My imagination halts," he rejoined. "Millennium comes when you are interested. And yet," he continued, "it is my one ambition to interest you, and I will do it, or I will say my prayers no more."

"But how can that be done no more,
Which ne'er was done before?"

I retorted, railing at him, for I feared to take him seriously.

"There you wrong me," he said. "I am devout; I am a lover of the Scriptures--their beauty haunts me; I go to mass--its dignity affects me; and I have prayed, as in my youth I wrote verses. It is not a matter of morality, but of temperament. A man may be religious and yet be evil. Satan fell, but he believed and he admired, as the English Milton wisely shows it."

I was most glad that my father came between us at that moment; but before Monsieur left, he said to me, "You have challenged me. Beware: I have begun this chase. Yet I would rather be your follower, rather have your arrow in me, than be your hunter." He said it with a sort of warmth, which I knew was a glow in his senses merely; he was heated with his own eloquence.

"Wait," returned I. "You have heard the story of King Artus?"

He thought a moment. "No, no. I never was a child as other children. I was always comrade to the imps."

"King Artus," said I, "was most fond of hunting." (It is but a legend with its moral, as you know.) "It was forbidden by the

priests to hunt while mass was being said. One day, at the lifting of the host, the King, hearing a hound bay, rushed out, and gathered his pack together; but as they went, a whirlwind caught them up into the air, where they continue to this day, following a lonely trail, never resting, and all the game they get is one fly every seventh year. And now, when all on a sudden at night you hear the trees and leaves and the sleepy birds and crickets stir, it is the old King hunting--for the fox he never gets."

Monsieur looked at me with curious intentness. "You have a great gift," he said; "you make your point by allusion. I follow you. But see: when I am blown into the air I shall not ride alone. Happiness is the fox we ride to cover, you and I, though we find but a firefly in the end."

"A poor reply," I remarked easily; "not worthy of you."

"As worthy as I am of you," he rejoined; then he kissed my hand. "I will see you at mass to-morrow."

Unconsciously, I rubbed the hand he kissed with my handkerchief.

"I am not to be provoked," he said. "It is much to have you treat my kiss with consequence."

March 25. No news of Robert all this month. Gabord has been away in Montreal. I see Voban only now and then, and he is strange in manner, and can do nothing. Mathilde is better--so still and desolate, yet not wild; but her memory is all gone, all save for that "Francois Bigot is a devil." My father has taken anew a strong dislike to Monsieur Doltaire, because of talk that is abroad concerning him and Madame Cournal. I once thought she was much sinned against, but now I am sure she is not to be defended. She is most defiant, though people dare not shut their doors against her. A change seemed to come over her all at once, and over her husband also. He is now gloomy and taciturn, now foolishly gay, yet he is little seen with the Intendant, as before. However it be, Monsieur Doltaire and Bigot are no longer intimate. What should I care for that, if Monsieur Doltaire had no power, if he were not the door between Robert and me? What care I, indeed, how vile he is, so he but serve my purpose? Let him try my heart and soul and senses as he will; I will one day purify myself of his presence and all this soiling, and find my peace in Robert's arms--or in the quiet of a nunnery.

This morning I got up at sunrise, it being the Annunciation of the Virgin, and prepared to go to mass in the chapel of the Ursulines. How peaceful was the world! So still, so still. The smoke came curling up here and there through the sweet air of spring, a snowbird tripped along the white coverlet of the earth, and before a Calvary, I saw a peasant kneel and say an Ave as he went to market. There was springtime in the sun, in the smell of

the air; springtime everywhere but in my heart, which was all winter. I seemed alone--alone--alone. I felt the tears start. But that was for a moment only, I am glad to say, for I got my courage again, as I did the night before when Monsieur Doltaire placed his arm at my waist, and poured into my ears a torrent of protestations.

I did not move at first. But I could feel my cheeks go to stone, and something clamp my heart. Yet had ever man such hateful eloquence! There is that in him--oh, shame! oh, shame!--which goes far with a woman. He has the music of passion, and though it is lower than love, it is the poetry of the senses. I spoke to him calmly, I think, begging him place his merits where they would have better entertainment; but I said hard, cold things at last, when other means availed not; which presently made him turn upon me in another fashion.

His words dropped slowly, with a consummate carefulness, his manner was pointedly courteous, yet there was an underpressure of force, of will, which made me see the danger of my position. He said that I was quite right; that he would wish no privilege of a woman which was not given with a frank eagerness; that to him no woman was worth the having who did not throw her whole nature into the giving. Constancy--that was another matter. But a perfect gift while there was giving at all--that was the way.

"There is something behind all this," he said. "I am not so vain as to think any merits of mine would influence you. But my devotion, my admiration of you, the very force of my passion, should move you. Be you ever so set against me--and I do not think you are--you should not be so strong to resist the shock of feeling. I do not know the cause, but I will find it out; and when I do, I shall remove it or be myself removed." He touched my arm with his fingers. "When I touch you like that," he said, "summer riots in my veins. I will not think that this which rouses me so is but power upon one side, and effect upon the other. Something in you called me to you, something in me will wake you yet. Mon Dieu, I could wait a score of years for my touch to thrill you as yours does me! And I will--I will."

"You think it suits your honour to force my affections?" I asked; for I dared not say all I wished.

"What is there in this reflecting on my honour?" he answered. "At Versailles, believe me, they would say I strive here for a canonizing. No, no; think me so gallant that I follow you to serve you, to convince you that the way I go is the way your hopes will lie. Honour? To fetch you to the point where you and I should start together on the Appian Way, I would traffic with that, even, and say I did so, and would do so a thousand times, if in the end it put your hand in mine. Who, who can give you what I offer, can offer? See: I have given myself to a hundred women in my time--but what of me? That which was a candle in a wind, and the light went out. There was no depth, no life, in that; only the shadow of a

man was there those hundred times. But here, now, the whole man plunges into this sea, and he will reach the lighthouse on the shore, or be broken on the reefs. Look in my eyes, and see the furnace there, and tell me if you think that fire is for cool corners in the gardens at Neuilly or for the Hills of--" He suddenly broke off, and a singular smile followed. "There, there," he said, "I have said enough. It came to me all at once how droll my speech would sound to our people at Versailles. It is an elaborate irony that the occasional virtues of certain men turn and mock them. That is the penalty of being inconsistent. Be saint or imp; it is the only way. But this imp that mocks me relieves you of reply. Yet I have spoken truth, and again and again I will tell it you, till you believe according to my gospel."

How glad I was that he himself lightened the situation! I had been driven to despair, but this strange twist in his mood made all smooth for me. "That 'again and again' sounds dreary," said I. "It might almost appear I must sometime accept your gospel, to cure you of preaching it, and save me from eternal drowsiness."

We were then most fortunately interrupted. He made his adieus, and I went to my room, brooded till my head ached, then fell a-weeping, and wished myself out of the world, I was so sick and weary. Now and again a hot shudder of shame and misery ran through me, as I thought of monsieur's words to me. Put them how he would, they sound an insult now, though as he spoke I felt the power of his passion. "If you had lived a thousand years ago, you would have loved a thousand times," he said to me one day. Sometimes I think he spoke truly; I have a nature that responds to all eloquence in life.

Robert, I have bared my heart to thee. I have hidden nothing. In a few days I shall go back to the city with my mother, and when I can I will send news; and do thou send me news also, if thou canst devise a safe way. Meanwhile, I have written my brother Juste to be magnanimous, and to try for thy freedom. He will not betray me, and he may help us. I have begged him to write to thee a letter of reconciliation.

And now, comrade of my heart, do thou have courage. I also shall be strong as I am ardent. Having written thee, I am cheerful once more; and when again I may, I will open the doors of my heart that thou mayst come in. That heart is thine, Robert. Thy

ALIXE,

who loves thee all her days.

P.S.--I have found the names and places of the men who keep the guard beneath thy window. If there is chance for freedom that way, fix the day some time ahead, and I will see what may be done. Voban fears nothing; he will act secretly for me.

The next day I arranged for my escape, which had been long in planning.

XVII

THROUGH THE BARS OF THE CAGE

I should have tried escape earlier but that it was little use to venture forth in the harsh winter in a hostile country. But now April had come, and I was keen to make a trial of my fortune. I had been saving food for a long time, little by little, and hiding it in the old knapsack which had held my second suit of clothes. I had used the little stove for parching my food--Indian corn, for which I had professed a fondness to my jailer, and liberally paid for out of funds which had been sent me by Mr. George Washington in answer to my letter, and other moneys to a goodly amount in a letter from Governor Dinwiddie. These letters had been carefully written, and the Marquis de Vaudreuil, into whose hands they had first come, was gallant enough not to withhold them--though he read them first.

Besides Indian corn, the parching of which amused me, I had dried ham and tongue, and bread and cheese, enough, by frugal use, to last me a month at least. I knew it would be a journey of six weeks or more to the nearest English settlement, but if I could get that month's start I should forage for the rest, or take my fate as I found it: I was used to all the turns of fortune now. My knapsack gradually filled, and meanwhile I slowly worked my passage into the open world. There was the chance that my jailer would explore the knapsack; but after a time I lost that fear, for it lay untouched with a blanket in a corner, and I cared for my cell with my own hands.

The true point of danger was the window. There lay my way. It was stoutly barred with iron up and down, and the bars were set in the solid limestone. Soon after I entered this prison, I saw that I must cut a groove in the stone from stanchion to stanchion, and then, by drawing one to the other, make an opening large enough to let my body through. For tools I had only a miserable knife with which I cut my victuals, and the smaller but stouter one which Gabor had not taken from me. There could be no pounding, no chiselling, but only rubbing of the hard stone. So hour after hour I rubbed away, in constant danger of discovery however. My jailer had a trick of sudden entrance, which would have been grotesque if it had not been so serious to me. To provide against the flurried inquisition of his eye, I kept near me bread well chewed, with which I filled the hole, covering it with the sand I had rubbed or the ashes of my pipe. I lived in dread of these entrances, but at last I found that they chanced only within

certain hours, and I arranged my times of work accordingly. Once or twice, however, being impatient, I scratched the stone with some asperity and noise, and was rewarded by hearing my fellow stumbling in the hall; for he had as uncertain limbs as ever I saw. He stumbled upon nothing, as you have seen a child trip itself up by tangling of its feet.

The first time that he came, roused by the grating noise as he sat below, he stumbled in the very centre of the cell, and fell upon his knees. I would have laughed if I had dared, but I yawned over the book I had hastily snatched up, and puffed great whiffs from my pipe. I dreaded lest he should go to the window. He started for it, but suddenly made for my couch, and dragged it away, as if looking to find a hole dug beneath it. Still I did not laugh at him, but gravely watched him; and presently he went away. At another time I was foolishly harsh with my tools; but I knew now the time required by him to come upstairs, and I swiftly filled the groove with bread, strewed ashes and sand over it, rubbed all smooth, and was plunged in my copy of Montaigne when he entered. This time he went straight to the window, looked at it, tried the stanchions, and then, with an amused attempt at being cunning and hiding his own vigilance, he asked me, with laborious hypocrisy, if I had seen Captain Lancy pass the window. And so for weeks and weeks we played hide-and-seek with each other.

At last I had nothing to do but sit and wait, for the groove was cut, the bar had room to play. I could not bend it, for it was fast at the top; but when my hour of adventure was come, I would tie a handkerchief round the two bars and twist it with the piece of hickory used for stirring the fire. Here was my engine of escape, and I waited till April should wind to its close, when I should, in the softer weather, try my fortune outside these walls.

So time went on until one eventful day, even the 30th of April of that year 1758. It was raining and blowing when I waked, and it ceased not all the day, coming to a hailstorm towards night. I felt sure that my guards without would, on such a day, relax their vigilance. In the evening I listened, and heard no voices nor any sound of feet, only the pelting rain and the whistling wind. Yet I did not stir till midnight. Then I slung the knapsack in front of me, so that I could force it through the window first, and tying my handkerchief round the iron bars, I screwed it up with my stick. Presently the bars came together, and my way was open. I got my body through by dint of squeezing, and let myself go plump into the mire below. Then I stood still a minute, and listened again.

A light was shining not far away. Drawing near, I saw that it came from a small hut or lean-to. Looking through the cracks, I observed my two gentlemen drowsing in the corner. I was eager for their weapons, but I dared not make the attempt to get them, for they were laid between their legs, the barrels resting against their shoulders. I drew back, and for a moment paused to get my bearings. Then I made for a corner of the yard where the wall was

lowest, and, taking a run at it, caught the top, with difficulty scrambled up, and speedily was over and floundering in the mud. I knew well where I was, and at once started off in a northwesterly direction, toward the St. Charles River, making for a certain farmhouse above the town. Yet I took care, though it was dangerous, to travel a street in which was Voban's house. There was no light in the street nor in his house, nor had I seen any one abroad as I came, not even a sentinel.

I knew where was the window of the barber's bedroom, and I tapped upon it softly. Instantly I heard a stir; then there came the sound of flint and steel, then a light, and presently a hand at the window, and a voice asking who was there.

I gave a quick reply; the light was put out, the window opened, and there was Voban staring at me.

"This letter," said I, "to Mademoiselle Duvarney," and I slipped ten louis into his hand, also.

This he quickly handed back. "M'sieu'," said he, "if I take it I would seem to myself a traitor--no, no. But I will give the letter to ma'm'selle."

Then he asked me in; but I would not, yet begged him, if he could, to have a canoe at my disposal at a point below the Falls of Montmorenci two nights hence.

"M'sieu'," said he, "I will do so if I can, but I am watched. I would not pay a sou for my life--no. Yet I will serve you, if there is a way."

Then I told him what I meant to do, and bade him repeat it exactly to Alixe. This he swore to do, and I cordially grasped the good wretch's shoulder, and thanked him with all my heart. I got from him a weapon, also, and again I put gold louis into his hand, and bade him keep it, for I might need his kind offices to spend it for me. To this he consented, and I plunged into the dark again. I had not gone far when I heard footsteps coming, and I drew aside into the corner of a porch. A moment, then the light flashed full upon me. I had my hand upon the hanger I had got from Voban, and I was ready to strike if there were need, when Gabord's voice broke on my ear, and his hand caught at the short sword by his side.

"'Tis dickey-bird, aho!" cried he. There was exultation in his eye and voice. Here was a chance for him to prove himself against me; he had proved himself for me more than once.

"Here was I," added he, "making for M'sieu' Voban, that he might come and bleed a sick soldier, when who should come running but our English captain! Come forth, aho!"

"No, Gabord," said I, "I'm bound for freedom." I stepped forth. His

sword was poised against me. I was intent to make a desperate fight.

"March on," returned he gruffly, and I could feel the iron in his voice.

"But not with you, Gabord. My way lies towards Virginia."

I did not care to strike the first blow, and I made to go past him. His lantern came down, and he made a catch at my shoulder. I swung back, threw off my cloak and up my weapon.

Then we fought. My knapsack troubled me, for it was loose, and kept shifting. Gabord made stroke after stroke, watchful, heavy, offensive, muttering to himself as he struck and parried. There was no hatred in his eyes, but he had the lust of fighting on him, and he was breathing easily, and could have kept this up for hours. As we fought I could hear a clock strike one in a house near. Then a cock crowed. I had received two slight wounds, and I had not touched my enemy. But I was swifter, and I came at him suddenly with a rush, and struck for his left shoulder when I saw my chance. I felt the steel strike the bone. As I did so, he caught my wrist and lunged most fiercely at me, dragging me to him. The blow struck straight at my side, but it went through the knapsack, which had swung loose, and so saved my life; for another instant and I had tripped him down, and he lay bleeding badly.

"Aho! 'twas a fair fight," said he. "Now get you gone. I call for help."

"I can not leave you so, Gabord," said I. I stooped and lifted up his head.

"Then you shall go to citadel," said he, feeling for his small trumpet.

"No, no," I answered; "I'll go fetch Voban."

"To bleed me more!" quoth he whimsically; and I knew well he was pleased that I did not leave him. "Nay, kick against yon door. It is Captain Lancy's."

At that moment a window opened, and Lancy's voice was heard. Without a word I seized the soldier's lantern and my cloak, and made away as hard as I could go.

"I'll have a wing of you for lantern there!" roared Gabord, swearing roundly as I ran off with it.

With all my might I hurried, and was soon outside the town, and coming fast to the farmhouse about two miles beyond. Nearing it, I hid the lantern beneath my cloak and made for an outhouse. The door was not locked, and I passed in. There was a loft nearly full of hay, and I crawled up, and dug a hole far down against the side of

the building, and climbed in, bringing with me for drink a nest of hen's eggs which I found in a corner. The warmth of the dry hay was comforting, and after caring for my wounds, which I found were but scratches, I had somewhat to eat from my knapsack, drank up two eggs, and then coiled myself for sleep. It was my purpose, if not discovered, to stay where I was two days, and then to make for the point below the Falls of Montmorenci where I hoped to find a canoe of Voban's placing.

When I waked it must have been near noon, so I lay still for a time, listening to the cheerful noise of fowls and cattle in the yard without, and to the clacking of a hen above me. The air smelt very sweet. I also heard my unknowing host, at whose table I had once sat, two years before, talking with his son, who had just come over from Quebec, bringing news of my escape, together with a wonderful story of the fight between Gabord and myself. It had, by his calendar, lasted some three hours, and both of us, in the end, fought as we lay upon the ground. "But presently along comes a cloaked figure, with horses, and he lifts m'sieu' the Englishman upon one, and away they ride like the devil towards St. Charles River and Beauport. Gabord was taken to the hospital, and he swore that Englishman would not have got away if stranger had not fetched him a crack with a pistol-butt which sent him dumb and dizzy. And there M'sieu' Lancy sleep snug through all until the horses ride away!"

The farmer and his son laughed heartily, with many a "By Gar!" their sole English oath. Then came the news that six thousand livres were offered for me, dead or living, the drums beating far and near to tell the people so.

The farmer gave a long whistle, and in a great bustle set to calling all his family to arm themselves and join with him in this treasure-hunting. I am sure at least a dozen were at the task, searching all about; nor did they neglect the loft where I lay. But I had dug far down, drawing the hay over me as I went, so that they must needs have been keen to smell me out. After about three hours' poking about over all the farm, they met again outside this building, and I could hear their gabble plainly. The smallest among them, the piping chore-boy, he was for spitting me without mercy; and the milking-lass would toast me with a hay-fork, that she would, and six thousand livres should set her up forever.

In the midst of their rattling came two soldiers, who ordered them about, and with much blustering began searching here and there, and chucking the maids under the chins, as I could tell by their little bursts of laughter, and the "La M'sieu's!" which trickled through the hay.

I am sure that one such little episode saved me. For I heard a soldier just above me poking and tossing hay with uncomfortable vigour. But presently the amorous hunter turned his thoughts elsewhere, and I was left to myself, and to a late breakfast of

parched beans and bread and raw eggs, after which I lay and thought; and the sum of the thinking was that I would stay where I was till the first wave of the hunt had passed.

Near midnight of the second day I came out secretly from my lurking-place, and faced straight for the St. Charles River. Finding it at high water, I plunged in, with my knapsack and cloak on my head, and made my way across, reaching the opposite shore safely. After going two miles or so, I discovered friendly covert in the woods, where, in spite of my cloak and dry cedar boughs wrapped round, I shivered as I lay until the morning. When the sun came up, I drew out, that it might dry me; after which I crawled back into my nest and fell into a broken sleep. Many times during the day I heard the horns of my hunters, and more than once voices near me. But I had crawled into the hollow of a half-uprooted stump, and the cedar branches, which had been cut off a day or two before, were a screen. I could see soldiers here and there, armed and swaggering, and faces of peasants and shopkeepers whom I knew.

A function was being made of my escape; it was a hunting-feast, in which women were as eager as their husbands and their brothers. There was something devilish in it, when I came to think of it: a whole town roused and abroad to hunt down one poor fugitive, whose only sin was, in themselves, a virtue--loyalty to his country. I saw women armed with sickles and iron forks, and lads bearing axes and hickory poles cut to a point like a spear, while blunderbusses were in plenty. Now and again a weapon was fired, and, to watch their motions and peepings, it might have been thought I was a dragon, or that they all were hunting La Jongleuse, their fabled witch, whose villainies, are they not told at every fireside?

Often I shivered violently, and anon I was burning hot; my adventure had given me a chill and fever. Late in the evening of this day, my hunters having drawn off with as little sense as they had hunted me, I edged cautiously down past Beauport and on to the Montmorenci Falls. I came along in safety, and reached a spot near the point where Voban was to hide the boat. The highway ran between. I looked out cautiously. I could hear and see nothing, and so ran out and crossed the road, and pushed for the woods on the banks of the river. I had scarcely got across when I heard a shout, and looking round I saw three horsemen, who instantly spurred towards me. I sprang through the underbrush and came down roughly into a sort of quarry, spraining my ankle on a pile of stones. I got up quickly; but my ankle hurt me sorely, and I turned sick and dizzy. Limping a little way, I set my back against a tree, and drew my hanger. As I did so, the three gentlemen burst in upon me. They were General Montcalm, a gentleman of the Governor's household, and Doltaire!

"It is no use, dear Captain," said Doltaire. "Yield up your weapon."

General Montcalm eyed me curiously, as the other gentleman talked in low, excited tones; and presently he made a gesture

of courtesy, for he saw that I was hurt. Doltaire's face wore a malicious smile; but when he noted how sick I was, he came and offered me his arm, and was constant in courtesy till I was set upon a horse; and with him and the General riding beside me I came to my new imprisonment. They both forbore to torture me with words, for I was suffering greatly; but they fetched me to the Chateau St. Louis, followed by a crowd, who hooted at me. Doltaire turned on them at last, and stopped them.

The Governor, whose petty vanity was roused, showed a foolish fury at seeing me, and straightway ordered me to the citadel again.

"It's useless kicking 'gainst the pricks," said Doltaire to me cynically, as I passed out limping between two soldiers; but I did not reply. In another half hour of most bitter journeying I found myself in my dungeon. I sank upon the old couch of straw, untouched since I had left it; and when the door shut upon me, desponding, aching in all my body, now feverish and now shivering, my ankle in great pain, I could bear up no longer, and I bowed my head and fell a-weeping like a woman.

XVIII

THE STEEP PATH OF CONQUEST

Now I am come to a period on which I shall not dwell, nor repeat a tale of suffering greater than that I had yet endured. All the first night of this new imprisonment I tossed on my wretched bed in pain and misery. A strange and surly soldier came and went, bringing bread and water; but when I asked that a physician be sent me, he replied, with a vile oath, that the devil should be my only surgeon. Soon he came again, accompanied by another soldier, and put irons on me. With what quietness I could I asked him by whose orders this was done; but he vouchsafed no reply save that I was to "go bound to fires of hell."

"There is no journeying there," I answered; "here is the place itself."

Then a chain was roughly put round my injured ankle, and it gave me such agony that I turned sick, but I kept back groaning, for I would not have these varlets catch me quaking.

"I'll have you grilled for this one day," said I. "You are no men, but butchers. Can you not see my ankle has been sorely hurt?"

"You are for killing," was the gruff reply, "and here's a taste of it."

With that he drew the chain with a jerk round the hurt member, so that it drove me to madness. I caught him by the throat and hurled him back against the wall, and snatching a pistol from his comrade's belt aimed it at his head. I was beside myself with pain, and if he had been further violent I should have shot him. His fellow dared not stir in his defence, for the pistol was trained on him too surely; and so at last the wretch, promising better treatment, crawled to his feet, and made motion for the pistol to be given him. But I would not yield it, telling him it should be a guarantee of truce. Presently the door closed behind them, and I sank back upon the half-fettered chains.

I must have sat for more than an hour, when there was a noise without, and there entered the Commandant, the Marquis de Montcalm, and the Seigneur Duvarney. The pistol was in my hand, and I did not put it down, but struggled to my feet, and waited for them to speak.

For a moment there was silence, and then the Commandant said, "Your guards have brought me word, Monsieur le Capitaine, that you are violent. You have resisted them, and have threatened them with their own pistols."

"With one pistol, monsieur le commandant," answered I. Then, in bitter words, I told them of my treatment by those rascals, and I showed them how my ankle had been tortured. "I have no fear of death," said I, "but I will not lie and let dogs bite me with 'I thank you.' Death can come but once, it is a damned brutality to make one die a hundred and yet live--the work of Turks, not Christians. If you want my life, why, take it and have done."

The Marquis de Montcalm whispered to the Commandant. The Seigneur Duvarney, to whom I had not yet spoken, nor he to me, stood leaning against the wall, gazing at me seriously and kindly.

Presently Ramesay, the Commandant, spoke, not unkindly: "It was ordered you should wear chains, but not that you should be maltreated. A surgeon shall be sent to you, and this chain shall be taken from your ankle. Meanwhile, your guards shall be changed."

I held out the pistol, and he took it. "I can not hope for justice here," said I, "but men are men, and not dogs, and I ask for human usage till my hour comes and my country is your jailer."

The Marquis smiled, and his gay eyes sparkled. "Some find comfort in daily bread, and some in prophecy," he rejoined. "One should envy your spirit, Captain Moray."

"Permit me, your Excellency," replied I; "all Englishmen must envy the spirit of the Marquis de Montcalm, though none is envious of his cause."

He bowed gravely. "Causes are good or bad as they are ours or our neighbours'. The lion has a good cause when it goes hunting for

its young; the deer has a good cause when it resists the lion's leap upon its fawn."

I did not reply, for I felt a faintness coming; and at that moment the Seigneur Duvarney came to me, and put his arm through mine. A dizziness seized me, my head sank upon his shoulder, and I felt myself floating away into darkness, while from a great distance came a voice:

"It had been kinder to have ended it last year."

"He nearly killed your son, Duvarney." This was the voice of the Marquis in a tone of surprise.

"He saved my life, Marquis," was the sorrowful reply. "I have not paid back those forty pistoles, nor ever can, in spite of all."

"Ah, pardon me, seigneur," was the courteous rejoinder of the General.

That was all I heard, for I had entered the land of complete darkness. When I came to, I found that my foot had been bandaged, there was a torch in the wall, and by my side something in a jug, of which I drank, according to directions in a surgeon's hand on a paper beside it.

I was easier in all my body, yet miserably sick still, and I remained so, now shivering and now burning, a racking pain in my chest. My couch was filled with fresh straw, but in no other wise was my condition altered from the first time I had entered this place. My new jailer was a man of no feeling that I could see, yet of no violence or cruelty; one whose life was like a wheel, doing the eternal round. He did no more nor less than his orders, and I made no complaint nor asked any favour. No one came to me, no message found its way.

Full three months went by in this fashion, and then, one day, who should step into my dungeon, torch in hand, but Gabord! He raised the light above his head, and looked down at me most quizzically.

"Upon my soul--Gabord!" said I. "I did not kill you, then?"

"Upon your soul and upon your body, you killed not Gabord."

"And what now, quarrelsome Gabord?" I questioned cheerfully.

He shook some keys. "Back again to dickey-bird's cage. 'Look you,' quoth Governor, 'who will guard and bait this prisoner like the man he mauled?' 'No one,' quoth a lady who stands by Governor's chair. And she it was who had Governor send me here--even Ma'm'selle Duvarney. And she it was who made the Governor loose off these chains."

He began to free me from the chains. I was in a vile condition. The irons had made sores upon my wrists and legs, my limbs now trembled so beneath me that I could scarcely walk, and my head was very light and dizzy at times. Presently Gabord ordered a new bed of straw brought in; and from that hour we returned to our old relations, as if there had not been between us a fight to the death. Of what was going on abroad he would not tell me, and soon I found myself in as ill a state as before. No Voban came to me, no Doltaire, no one at all. I sank into a deep silence, dropped out of a busy world, a morsel of earth slowly coming to Mother Earth again.

A strange apathy began to settle on me. All those resources of my first year's imprisonment had gone, and I was alone: my mouse was dead; there was no history of my life to write, no incident to break the pitiful monotony. There seemed only one hope: that our army under Amherst would invest Quebec and take it. I had no news of any movement, winter again was here, and it must be five or six months before any action could successfully be taken; for the St. Lawrence was frozen over in winter, and if the city was to be seized it must be from the water, with simultaneous action by land.

I knew the way, the only way, to take the city. At Sillery, west of the town, there was a hollow in the cliffs, up which men, secretly conveyed above the town by water, could climb. At the top was a plateau, smooth and fine as a parade-ground, where battle could be given, or move be made upon the city and citadel, which lay on ground no higher. Then, with the guns playing on the town from the fleet, and from the Levis shore with forces on the Beauport side, attacking the lower town where was the Intendant's palace, the great fortress might be taken, and Canada be ours.

This passage up the cliff side at Sillery I had discovered three years before.

When winter set well in Gabord brought me a blanket, and though last year I had not needed it, now it was most grateful. I had been fed for months on bread and water, as in my first imprisonment, but at last--whether by orders or not, I never knew--he brought me a little meat every day, and some wine also. Yet I did not care for them, and often left them untasted. A hacking cough had never left me since my attempt at escape, and I was miserably thin, and so weak that I could hardly drag myself about my dungeon. So, many weeks of the winter went on, and at last I was not able to rise from my bed of straw, and could do little more than lift a cup of water to my lips and nibble at some bread. I felt that my hours were numbered.

At last, one day, I heard commotion at my dungeon door; it opened, and Gabord entered and closed it after him. He came and stood over me, as with difficulty I lifted myself upon my elbow.

"Come, try your wings," said he.

"It is the end, Gabord?" asked I.

"Not paradise yet!" said he.

"Then I am free?" I asked.

"Free from this dungeon," he answered cheerily.

I raised myself and tried to stand upon my feet, but fell back. He helped me to rise, and I rested an arm on his shoulder.

I tried to walk, but faintness came over me, and I sank back. Then Gabord laid me down, went to the door, and called in two soldiers with a mattress. I was wrapped in my cloak and blankets, laid thereon, and so was borne forth, all covered even to my weak eyes. I was placed in a sleigh, and as the horses sprang away, the clear sleigh-bells rang out, and a gun from the ramparts was fired to give the noon hour, I sank into unconsciousness.

XIX

A DANSEUSE AND THE BASTILE

Recovering, I found myself lying on a couch, in a large, well-lighted room hung about with pictures and adorned with trophies of the hunt. A wide window faced the foot of the bed where I lay, and through it I could see--though the light hurt my eyes greatly--the Levis shore, on the opposite side of the St. Lawrence. I lay and thought, trying to discover where I was. It came to me at last that I was in a room of the Chateau St. Louis. Presently I heard breathing near me, and, looking over, I saw a soldier sitting just inside the door.

Then from another corner of the room came a surgeon with some cordial in a tumbler, and, handing it to me, he bade me drink. He felt my pulse; then stopped and put his ear to my chest, and listened long.

"Is there great danger?" asked I.

"The trouble would pass," said he, "if you were stronger. Your life is worth fighting for, but it will be a struggle. That dungeon was slow poison. You must have a barber," added he; "you are a ghost like this."

I put my hand up, and I found my hair and beard were very long and almost white. Held against the light, my hands seemed transparent. "What means my coming here?" asked I.

He shook his head. "I am but a surgeon," he answered shortly, meanwhile writing with a flourish on a piece of paper. When he had finished, he handed the paper to the soldier, with an order. Then he turned to go, politely bowing to me, but turned again and said, "I would not, were I you, trouble to plan escape these months yet. This is a comfortable prison, but it is easier coming in than going out. Your mind and body need quiet. You have, we know, a taste for adventure"--he smiled--"but is it wise to fight a burning powder magazine?"

"Thank you, monsieur," said I, "I am myself laying the fuse to that magazine. It fights for me by-and-bye."

He shrugged a shoulder. "Drink," said he, with a professional air which almost set me laughing, "good milk and brandy, and think of nothing but that you are a lucky man to have this sort of prison."

He bustled out in an important way, shaking his head and talking to himself. Tapping the chest of a bulky soldier who stood outside, he said brusquely, "Too fat, too fat; you'll come to apoplexy. Go fight the English, lazy ruffian!"

The soldier gave a grunt, made a mocking gesture, and the door closed on me and my attendant. This fellow would not speak at all, and I did not urge him, but lay and watched the day decline and night come down. I was taken to a small alcove which adjoined the room, where I slept soundly.

Early the next morning I waked, and there was Voban sitting just outside the alcove, looking at me. I sat up in bed and spoke to him, and he greeted me in an absent sort of way. He was changed as much as I; he moved as one in a dream; yet there was the ceaseless activity of the eye, the swift, stealthy motion of the hand. He began to attend me, and I questioned him; but he said he had orders from mademoiselle that he was to tell nothing--that she, as soon as she could, would visit me.

I felt at once a new spring of life. I gave him the letter I had written, and bade him deliver it, which he promised to do; for though there was much in it not vital now, it was a record of my thoughts and feelings, and she would be glad of it, I knew. I pressed Voban's hand in leaving, and he looked at me as if he would say something; but immediately he was abstracted, and left me like one forgetful of the world.

About three hours after this, as I lay upon the couch in the large room, clean and well shaven, the door opened, and some one entered, saying to my guard, "You will remain outside. I have the Governor's order."

I knew the voice; an instant, and I saw the face shining with expectancy, the eyes eager, yet timid, a small white hand pressed

to a pulsing breast--my one true friend, the jailer of my heart.

For a moment she was all trembling and excited, her hand softly clutching at my shoulder, tears dripping from her eyes and falling on my cheek, as hers lay pressed to mine; but presently she grew calm, and her face was lifted with a smile, and, brushing back some flying locks of hair, she said in a tone most quaint and touching too, "Poor gentleman! poor English prisoner! poor hidden lover! I ought not, I ought not," she added, "show my feelings thus, nor excite you so." My hand was trembling on hers, for in truth I was very weak. "It was my purpose," she continued, "to come most quietly to you; but there are times when one must cry out, or the heart will burst."

I spoke then as a man may who has been delivered from bondage into the arms of love. She became very quiet, looking at me in her grave, sweet way, her deep eyes shining with a sincerity.

"Honest, honest eyes," said I--"eyes that never deceive, and never were deceived."

"All this in spite of what you do not know," she answered. For an instant a look elfish and childlike came into her eyes, and she drew back from me, stood in the middle of the floor, and caught her skirts in her fingers.

"See," she said, "is there no deceit here?"

Then she began to dance softly, her feet seeming hardly to touch the ground, her body swaying like a tall flower in the wind, her face all light and fire. I was charmed, fascinated. I felt my sleepy blood stirring to the delicate rise and fall of her bosom, the light of her eyes flashing a dozen colours. There was scarce a sound her steps could not be heard across the room.

All at once she broke off from this, and stood still.

"Did my eyes seem all honest then?" she asked, with a strange, wistful expression. Then she came to the couch where I was.

"Robert," said she, "can you, do you trust me, even when you see me at such witchery?"

"I trust you always," answered I. "Such witcheries are no evils that I can see."

She put her finger upon my lips, with a kind of bashfulness. "Hush, till I tell you where and when I danced like that, and then, and then--"

She settled down in a low chair. "I have at least an hour," she continued. "The Governor is busy with my father and General Montcalm, and they will not be free for a long time. For your

soldiers, I have been bribing them to my service these weeks past, and they are safe enough for to-day. Now I will tell you of that dancing.

"One night last autumn there was a grand dinner at the Intendance. Such gentlemen as my father were not asked; only the roisterers and hard drinkers, and gambling friends of the Intendant. You would know the sort of upspring it would be. Well, I was sitting in my window, looking down into the garden; for the moon was shining. Presently I saw a man appear below, glance up towards me, and beckon. It was Voban. I hurried down to him, and he told me that there had been a wild carousing at the palace, and that ten gentlemen had determined, for a wicked sport, to mask themselves, go to the citadel at midnight, fetch you forth, and make you run the gauntlet in the yard of the Intendance, and afterwards set you fighting for your life with another prisoner, a common criminal. To this, Bigot, heated with wine, made no objection. Monsieur Doltaire was not present; he had, it was said, taken a secret journey into the English country. The Governor was in Montreal, where he had gone to discuss matters of war with the Council.

"There was but one thing to do--get word to General Montcalm. He was staying at the moment with the Seigneur Pipon at his manor by the Montmorenci Falls. He must needs be sought there: he would never allow this shameless thing. So I bade Voban go thither at once, getting a horse from any quarter, and to ride as if for his life. He promised, and left me, and I returned to my room to think. Voban had told me that his news came from Bigot's valet, who is his close friend. This I knew, and I knew the valet too, for I had seen something of him when my brother lay wounded at the palace. Under the best circumstances General Montcalm could not arrive within two hours. Meanwhile, these miserable men might go on their dreadful expedition. Something must be done to gain time. I racked my brain for minutes, till the blood pounded at my temples. Presently a plan came to me.

"There is in Quebec one Madame Jamond, a great Parisian dancer, who, for reasons which none knows save perhaps Monsieur Doltaire, has been banished from France. Since she came to Canada, some nine months ago, she has lived most quietly and religiously, though many trials have been made to bring her talents into service; and the Intendant has made many efforts have her dance in the palace for his guests. But she would not.

"Madame Lotbiniere had come to know Jamond, and she arranged, after much persuasion, for lessons in dancing to be given to Lucy, myself, and Georgette. To me the dancing was a keen delight, a passion. As I danced I saw and felt a thousand things, I can not tell you how. Now my feet appeared light as air, like thistledown, my body to float. I was as a lost soul flying home, flocks of birds singing me to come with them into a pleasant land.

"Then all that changed, and I was passing through a bitter land,

with harsh shadows and tall cold mountains. From clefts and hollows figures flew out and caught at me with filmy hands. These melancholy things pursued me as I flew, till my wings drooped, and I felt that I must drop into the dull marsh far beneath, round which travelled a lonely mist.

"But this too passed, and I came through a land all fire, so that, as I flew swiftly, my wings were scorched, and I was blinded often, and often missed my way, and must change my course of flight. It was all scarlet, all that land--scarlet sky and scarlet sun, and scarlet flowers, and the rivers running red, and men and women in long red robes, with eyes of flame, and voices that kept crying, 'The world is mad, and all life is a fever!'"

She paused for a moment, seeming to come out of a dream, and then she laughed a little. "Will you not go on?" I asked gently.

"Sometimes, too," she continued, "I fancied I was before a king and his court, dancing for my life or for another's. Oh, how I scanned the faces of my judges, as they sat there watching me; some meanwhile throwing crumbs to fluttering birds that whirled round me, some stroking the ears of hounds that gaped at me, while the king's fool at first made mock at me, and the face of a man behind the king's chair smiled like Satan--or Monsieur Doltaire! Ah, Robert, I know you think me fanciful and foolish, as indeed I am; but you must bear with me.

"I danced constantly, practising hour upon hour with Jamond, who came to be my good friend; and you shall hear from me some day her history--a sad one indeed; a woman sinned against, not sinning. But these special lessons went on secretly, for I was sure, if people knew how warmly I followed this recreation, they would set it down to wilful desire to be singular--or worse. It gave me new interest in lonely days. So the weeks went on.

"Well, that wicked night I sent Voban to General Montcalm, and, as I said, a thought came to me: I would find Jamond, beg her to mask herself, go to the Intendance, and dance before the gentlemen there, keeping them amused till the General came, as I was sure he would at my suggestion, for he is a just man and a generous. All my people, even Georgette, were abroad at a soiree, and would not be home till late. So I sought Mathilde, and she hurried with me, my poor daft protector, to Jamond's, whose house is very near the bishop's palace.

"We were at once admitted to Jamond, who was lying upon a couch. I hurriedly told her what I wished her to do, what was at stake, everything but that I loved you; laying my interest upon humanity and to your having saved my father's life. She looked troubled at once, then took my face in her hands. 'Dear child,' she said, 'I understand. You have sorrow too young--too young.' 'But you will do this for me?' I cried. She shook her head sadly. 'I can not. I am lame these two days,' she answered. 'I have had a sprain.' I sank

on the floor beside her, sick and dazed. She put her hand pitifully on my head, then lifted up my chin. Looking into her eyes, I read a thought there, and I got to my feet with a spring. 'I myself will go,' said I; 'I will dance there till the General comes.' She put out her hand in protest. 'You must not,' she urged. 'Think: you may be discovered, and then the ruin that must come!'

"I shall put my trust in God,' said I. 'I have no fear. I will do this thing.' She caught me to her breast. 'Then God be with you, child,' was her answer; 'you shall do it.' In ten minutes I was dressed in a gown of hers, which last had been worn when she danced before King Louis. It fitted me well, and with a wig the colour of her hair, brought quickly from her boxes, and use of paints which actors use, I was transformed. Indeed, I could scarce recognize myself without the mask, and with it on my mother would not have known me. 'I will go with you,' she said to me, and she hurriedly put on an old woman's wig and a long cloak, quickly lined her face, and we were ready. She walked lame, and must use a stick, and we issued forth towards the Intendance, Mathilde remaining behind.

"When we got to the palace, and were admitted, I asked for the Intendant's valet, and we stood waiting in the cold hall until he was brought. 'We come from Voban, the barber,' I whispered to him, for there were servants near; and he led us at once to his private room. He did not recognize me, but looked at us with sidelong curiosity. 'I am,' said I, throwing back my cloak, 'a dancer, and I have come to dance before the Intendant and his guests.' 'His Excellency does not expect you?' he asked. 'His Excellency has many times asked Madame Jamond to dance before him,' I replied. He was at once all complaisance, but his face was troubled. 'You come from Monsieur Voban?' he inquired. 'From Monsieur Voban,' answered I. 'He has gone to General Montcalm.' His face fell, and a kind of fear passed over it. 'There is no peril to any one save the English gentleman,' I urged. A light dawned on him. 'You dance until the General comes?' he asked, pleased at his own penetration. 'You will take me at once to the dining-hall,' said I, nodding. 'They are in the Chambre de la Joie,' he rejoined. 'Then the Chambre de la Joie,' said I; and he led the way. When we came near the chamber, I said to him, 'You will tell the Intendant that a lady of some gifts in dancing would entertain his guests; but she must come and go without exchange of individual courtesies, at her will.

"He opened the door of the chamber, and we followed him; for there was just inside a large oak screen, and from its shadow we could see the room and all therein. At the first glance I shrank back, for, apart from the noise and the clattering of tongues, such a riot of carousal I have never seen. I was shocked to note gentlemen whom I had met in society, with the show of decorum about them, loosed now from all restraint, and swaggering like woodsmen at a fair. I felt a sudden fear, and drew back sick; but that was for an instant, for even as the valet came to the Intendant's chair a dozen or more men, who were sitting near together in noisy yet half-secret conference, rose to their feet,

each with a mask in his hand, and started towards the door. I felt my blood fly back and forth in my heart with great violence, and I leaned against the oak screen for support. 'Courage,' said the voice of Jamond in my ear, and I ruled myself to quietness.

"Just then the Intendant's voice stopped the men in their movement towards the great entrance door, and drew the attention of the whole company. 'Messieurs,' said he, 'a lady has come to dance for us. She makes conditions which must be respected. She must be let come and go without individual courtesies. Messieurs,' he added, 'I grant her request in your name and my own.'

"There was a murmur of 'Jamond! Jamond!' and every man stood looking towards the great entrance door. The Intendant, however, was gazing towards the door where I was, and I saw he was about to come, as if to welcome me. Welcome from Francois Bigot to a dancing-woman! I slipped off the cloak, looked at Jamond, who murmured once again, 'Courage,' and then I stepped out swiftly, and made for a low, large dais at one side of the room. I was so nervous that I knew not how I went. The faces and forms of the company were blurred before me, and the lights shook and multiplied distractedly. The room shone brilliantly, yet just under the great canopy, over the dais; there were shadows, and they seemed to me, as I stepped under the red velvet, a relief, a sort of hiding-place from innumerable candles and hot unnatural eyes.

"Once there I was changed. I did not think of the applause that greeted me, the murmurs of surprise, approbation, questioning, rising round me. Suddenly, as I paused and faced them all, nervousness passed out of me, and I saw nothing--nothing but a sort of far-off picture. My mind was caught away into that world which I had created for myself when I danced, and these rude gentlemen were but visions. All sense of indignity passed from me. I was only a woman fighting for a life and for her own and her another's happiness.

"As I danced I did not know how time passed--only that I must keep those men where they were till General Montcalm came. After a while, when the first dazed feeling had passed, I could see their faces plainly through my mask, and I knew that I could hold them; for they ceased to lift their glasses, and stood watching me, sometimes so silent that I could hear their breathing only, sometimes making a great applause, which passed into silence again quickly. Once, as I wheeled, I caught the eyes of Jamond watching me closely. The Intendant never stirred from his seat, and scarcely moved, but kept his eyes fixed on me. Nor did he applaud. There was something painful in his immovability.

"I saw it all as in a dream, yet I did see it, and I was resolute to triumph over the wicked designs of base and abandoned men. I feared that my knowledge and power to hold them might stop before help came. Once, in a slight pause, when a great noise of their hands and a rattling of scabbards on the table gave me a short respite,

some one--Captain Lancy, I think--snatched up a glass, and called on all to drink my health.

"Jamond! Jamond!" was the cry, and they drank; the Intendant himself standing up, and touching the glass to his lips, then sitting down again, silent and immovable as before. One gentleman, a nephew of the Chevalier de la Darante, came swaying towards me with a glass of wine, begging me in a flippant courtesy to drink; but I waved him back, and the Intendant said most curtly, 'Monsieur de la Darante will remember my injunction.'

"Again I danced, and I can not tell you with what anxiety and desperation--for there must be an end to it before long, and your peril, Robert, come again, unless these rough fellows changed their minds. Moment after moment went, and though I had danced beyond reasonable limits, I still seemed to get new strength, as I have heard men say, in fighting, they 'come to their second wind.' At last, at the end of the most famous step that Jamond had taught me, I stood still for a moment to renewed applause; and I must have wound these men up to excitement beyond all sense, for they would not be dissuaded, but swarmed towards the dais where I was, and some called for me to remove my mask.

"Then the Intendant came down among them, bidding them stand back, and himself stepped towards me. I felt affrighted, for I liked not the look in his eyes, and so, without a word, I stepped down from the dais--I did not dare to speak, lest they should recognize my voice--and made for the door with as much dignity as I might. But the Intendant came to me with a mannered courtesy, and said in my ear, 'Madame, you have won all our hearts; I would you might accept some hospitality--a glass of wine, a wing of partridge, in a room where none shall disturb you?' I shuddered, and passed on. 'Nay, nay, madame, not even myself with you, unless you would have it otherwise,' he added.

"Still I did not speak, but put out my hand in protest, and moved on towards the screen, we two alone, for the others had fallen back with whisperings and side-speeches. Oh, how I longed to take the mask from my face and spurn them! The hand that I put out in protest the Intendant caught within his own, and would have held it, but that I drew it back with indignation, and kept on towards the screen. Then I realized that a new-corner had seen the matter, and I stopped short, dumfounded--for it was Monsieur Doltaire! He was standing beside the screen, just within the room, and he sent at the Intendant and myself a keen, piercing glance.

"Now he came forward quickly, for the Intendant also half stopped at sight of him, and a malignant look shot from his eyes; hatred showed in the profane word that was chopped off at his teeth. When Monsieur Doltaire reached us, he said, his eyes resting on me with intense scrutiny, 'His Excellency will present me to his distinguished entertainer?' He seemed to read behind my mask. I knew he had discovered me, and my heart stood still. But I raised my eyes

and met his gaze steadily. The worst had come. Well, I would face it now. I could endure defeat with courage. He paused an instant, a strange look passed over his face, his eyes got hard and very brilliant, and he continued (oh, what suspense that was!): 'Ah yes, I see--Jamond, the perfect and wonderful Jamond, who set us all a-kneeling at Versailles. If Madame will permit me?' He made to take my hand. Here the Intendant interposed, putting out his hand also. 'I have promised to protect Madame from individual courtesy while here,' he said. Monsieur Doltaire looked at him keenly. 'Then your Excellency must build stone walls about yourself,' he rejoined, with cold emphasis. 'Sometimes great men are foolish. To-night your Excellency would have let'--here he raised his voice so that all could hear--'your Excellency would have let a dozen cowardly gentlemen drag a dying prisoner from his prison, forcing back his Majesty's officers at the dungeon doors, and, after baiting, have matched him against a common criminal. That was unseemly in a great man and a King's chief officer, the trick of a low law-breaker. Your Excellency promised a lady to protect her from individual courtesy, if she gave pleasure--a pleasure beyond price--to you and your guests, and you would have broken your word without remorse. General Montcalm has sent a company of men to set your Excellency right in one direction, and I am come to set you right in the other.'

"The Intendant was white with rage. He muttered something between his teeth, then said aloud, 'Presently we will talk more of this, monsieur. You measure strength with Francois Bigot: we will see which proves the stronger in the end.' 'In the end the unjust steward kneels for mercy to his master,' was Monsieur Doltaire's quiet answer; and then he made a courteous gesture towards the door, and I went to it with him slowly, wondering what the end would be. Once at the other side of the screen, he peered into Jamond's face for an instant, then he gave a low whistle. 'You have an apt pupil, Jamond, one who might be your rival one day,' said he. Still there was a puzzled look on his face, which did not leave it till he saw Jamond walking. 'Ah yes,' he added, 'I see now. You are lame. This was a desperate yet successful expedient.'

"He did not speak to me, but led the way to where, at the great door, was the Intendant's valet standing with my cloak. Taking it from him, he put it round my shoulders. 'The sleigh by which I came is at the door,' he said, 'and I will take you home.' I knew not what to do, for I feared some desperate act on his part to possess me. I determined that I would not leave Jamond, in any case, and I felt for a weapon which I had hidden in my dress. We had not, however, gone a half dozen paces in the entrance hall when there were quick steps behind, and four soldiers came towards us, with an officer at their head--an officer whom I had seen in the chamber, but did not recognize.

"Monsieur Doltaire,' the officer said; and monsieur stopped. Then he cried in surprise, 'Legrand, you here!' To this the officer replied by handing monsieur a paper. Monsieur's hand dropped to his sword, but in a moment he gave a short, sharp laugh, and opened up

the packet. 'H'm,' he said, 'the Bastille! The Grande Marquise is fretful--eh, Legrand? You will permit me some moments with these ladies?' he added. 'A moment only,' answered the officer. 'In another room?' monsieur again asked. 'A moment where you are, monsieur,' was the reply. Making a polite gesture for me to step aside, Monsieur Doltaire said, in a voice which was perfectly controlled and courteous, though I could hear behind all a deadly emphasis, 'I know everything now. You have foiled me, blindfolded me and all others, these three years past. You have intrigued against the captains of intrigue, you have matched yourself against practised astuteness. On one side, I resent being made a fool and tool of; on the other, I am lost in admiration of your talent. But henceforth there is no such thing as quarter between us. Your lover shall die, and I will come again. This whim of the Grande Marquise will last but till I see her; then I will return to you--forever. Your lover shall die, your love's labour for him shall be lost. I shall reap where I did not sow--his harvest and my own. I am as ice to you, mademoiselle, at this moment; I have murder in my heart. Yet warmth will come again. I admire you so much that I will have you for my own, or die. You are the high priestess of diplomacy; your brain is a statesman's, your heart is a vagrant; it goes covertly from the sweet meadows of France to the marshes of England, a taste unworthy of you. You shall be redeemed from that by Tinoir Doltaire. Now thank me for all I have done for you, and let me say adieu.' He stooped and kissed my hand. 'I can not thank you for what I myself achieved,' I said. 'We are, as in the past, to be at war, you threaten, and I have no gratitude.' 'Well, well, adieu and au revoir, sweetheart,' he answered. 'If I should go to the Bastille, I shall have food for thought; and I am your hunter to the end. In this good orchard I pick sweet fruit one day.' His look fell on me in such a way that shame and anger were at equal height in me. Then he bowed again to me and to Jamond, and, with a sedate gesture, walked away with the soldiers and the officer.

"You can guess what were my feelings. You were safe for the moment--that was the great thing. The terror I had felt when I saw Monsieur Doltaire in the Chambre de la Joie had passed, for I felt he would not betray me. He is your foe, and he would kill you; but I was sure he would not put me in danger while he was absent in France--if he expected to return--by making public my love for you and my adventure at the palace. There is something of the noble fighter in him, after all, though he is so evil a man. A prisoner himself now, he would have no immediate means to hasten your death. But I can never forget his searching, cruel look when he recognized me! Of Jamond I was sure. Her own past had been full of sorrow, and her life was now so secluded and religious that I could not doubt her. Indeed, we have been blessed with good, true friends, Robert, though they are not of those who are powerful, save in their loyalty."

Alixé then told me that the officer Legrand had arrived from France but two days before the eventful night of which I have just written, armed with an order from the Grande Marquise for Doltaire's

arrest and transportation. He had landed at Gaspé, and had come on to Québec overland. Arriving at the Intendance, he had awaited Doltaire's coming. Doltaire had stopped to visit General Montcalm at Montmorency Falls, on his way back from an expedition to the English country, and had thus himself brought my protection and hurried to his own undoing. I was thankful for his downfall, though I believed it was but for a moment.

I was curious to know how it chanced I was set free of my dungeon, and I had the story from Alix's lips; but not till after I had urged her, for she was sure her tale had wearied me, and she was eager to do little offices of comfort about me; telling me gaily, while she shaded the light, freshened my pillow, and gave me a cordial to drink, that she would secretly convey me wines and preserves and jellies and such kickshaws, that I should better get my strength.

"For you must know," she said, "that though this gray hair and transparency of flesh become you, making your eyes look like two jets of flame and your face to have shadows most theatrical, a ruddy cheek and a stout hand are more suited to a soldier. When you are young again in body, these gray hairs shall render you distinguished."

Then she sat down beside me, and clasped my hand, now looking out into the clear light of afternoon to the farther shores of Lévis, showing green here and there from a sudden March rain, the boundless forests beyond, and near us the ample St. Lawrence still covered with its vast bridge of ice; anon into my face, while I gazed into those deeps of her blue eyes that I had drowned my heart in. I loved to watch her, for with me she was ever her own absolute self, free from all artifice, lost in her perfect naturalness: a healthy, perfect soundness, a primitive simplicity beneath the artifice of usual life. She had a beautiful hand, long, warm, and firm, and the fingers, when they clasped, seemed to possess and inclose your own--the tenderness of the maidenly, the protectiveness of the maternal. She carried with her a wholesome fragrance and beauty as of an orchard, and while she sat there I thought of the engaging words:

"Thou art to me like a basket of summer fruit, and I seek thee in thy cottage by the vineyard, fenced about with good commendable trees."

Of my release she spoke thus: "Monsieur Doltaire is to be conveyed overland to the coast en route for France, and he sent me by his valet a small arrow studded with emeralds and pearls, and a skull all polished, with a message that the arrow was for myself, and the skull for another--remembrances of the past, and earnest of the future--truly an insolent and wicked man. When he was gone I went to the Governor, and, with great show of interest in many things pertaining to the government (for he has ever been flattered by my attentions--me, poor little bee in the buzzing

hive!), came to the question of the English prisoner. I told him it was I that prevented the disgrace to his good government by sending to General Montcalm to ask for your protection.

"He was deeply impressed, and he opened out his vain heart in divers ways. But I may not tell you of these--only what concerns yourself; the rest belongs to his honour. When he was in his most pliable mood, I grew deeply serious, and told him there was a danger which perhaps he did not see. Here was this English prisoner, who, they said abroad in the town, was dying. There was no doubt that the King would approve the sentence of death, and if it were duly and with some display enforced, it would but add to the Governor's reputation in France. But should the prisoner die in captivity, or should he go an invalid to the scaffold, there would only be pity excited in the world for him. For his own honour, it were better the Governor should hang a robust prisoner, who in full blood should expiate his sins upon the scaffold. The advice went down like wine; and when he knew not what to do, I urged your being brought here, put under guard, and fed and nourished for your end. And so it was.

"The Governor's counsellor in the matter will remain a secret, for by now he will be sure that he himself had the sparkling inspiration. There, dear Robert, is the present climax to many months of suspense and persecution, the like of which I hope I may never see again. Some time I will tell you all: those meetings with Monsieur Doltaire, his designs and approaches, his pleadings and veiled threats, his numberless small seductions of words, manners, and deeds, his singular changes of mood, when I was uncertain what would happen next; the part I had to play to know all that was going on in the Chateau St. Louis, in the Intendance, and with General Montcalm; the difficulties with my own people; the despair of my poor father, who does not know that it is I who have kept him from trouble by my influence with the Governor. For since the Governor and the Intendant are reconciled, he takes sides with General Montcalm, the one sound gentleman in office in this poor country--alas!"

Soon afterwards we parted. As she passed out she told me I might at any hour expect a visit from the Governor.

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