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The

RED RANGER

By

H. A. CODY

*Author of "The Frontiersman," "Glen of the High North,"
"The King's Arrow," "The Touch of Abner,"
"The River Fury," etc.*



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*To
My Wife*

*And Children
This Book Is
Affectionately Dedicated.*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MAN WHO DIDN'T HANG	1
II. THE FLAMING HEAVENS	11
III. THE ISLAND MAIDEN	22
IV. RIVER-RANGERS	31
V. FORT JEMSEG	41
VI. SLEUTH-HOUNDS OF THE NIGHT	53
VII. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	63
VIII. FEAR	71
IX. VISITORS	79
X. THE KEE-WOOLS	89
XI. FOR MADAME'S SAKE	98
XII. MADAME LOUISE	107
XIII. DESERTED	116
XIV. THE NAME IN THE SAND	124
XV. MOUNT HOUSE	134
XVI. THE HUNT IS ON	143
XVII. TREACHERY	153
XVIII. DRIFTING	163
XIX. WILD PASSION	172
XX. BEWILDERMENT	179
XXI. THE DRIFTING CANOE	188
XXII. THE RANGERS IN COUNCIL	197
XXIII. THE DRUM BEAT	207
XXIV. ON THE RIVER BANK	215
XXV. A NIGHT OF CONFLICT	226
XXVI. AFTER THE FIGHT	236
XXVII. FACE TO FACE	247
XXVIII. THE INTERVIEW	255
XXIX. THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT	266
XXX. RETRIBUTION	276
XXXI. RENUNCIATION	285

THE RED RANGER

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T HANG

The tide was against him, so he was forced to go ashore. He did not wish to remain here but to keep steadily on his way up through the reversible falls. The current, however, was running like a mill-sluice, and the water was churned into mad breakers as it leaped over the lip of the rock which extended from the island to the western shore. Pierre LeNoir was annoyed. He should have made more haste and arrived sooner. Lucille would be expecting him and she would be anxious at his delay. A softer expression came into his eyes, and his stern face relaxed a little as he thought of her.

As Pierre drew his canoe up on the shore, he looked at the frowning walls of the old fort on the bank above. He could not keep his eyes off those battered logs, with the rotting bastions lifting their sinister heads against their setting of tall dark pines. So fearfully did they seem to leer at him, that he longed to get them out of his sight. They fascinated him, and drew him irresistibly forward.

Slowly he climbed the hill up which Charnisay had led his sea dogs on that fateful Easter morning years before. He stood at the door where the brave Lady LaTour, with sword in hand, had encouraged her gallant men. He entered the fort and beheld on all sides masses of rubbish, ruin and decay. From room to room he moved, evading at first one on the right towards which he cast several furtive glances. But at length he was drawn hither for just one look. This large room had served as the dining-hall and general place of meeting. Now it was empty, damp and desolate. It was here he had often sat at the table with his comrades, taken part in the flow of talk, and joined in the songs. But there was no song in his heart now. He raised his eyes to the ceiling until they rested upon one great beam. To his heated brain there came once more that terrible scene of old. He saw the dangling rope with the curling noose at the end. He lived over again the terror and despair that had filled his soul, when to save his own life he had turned against his comrades in arms. He beheld their proud defiant looks, and the scorn in their eyes as he placed the noose around each neck. He could not blot out that spectacle. Neither could he forget the expression of reproach and misery in the eyes of the noble woman standing near with a rope around her own neck.

Pierre had more than enough of this room. The air seemed stifling, and the dark memories made his brain reel. He called himself a fool for coming here, and he determined never to visit the place again.

As he made his way towards the big open door, he caught sight of the rickety stairway leading to the loft above. A desire seized him to see the large room where he and his companions had slept. He wondered what it looked like now. Ascending the broken and rotten steps, he soon found himself on the upper floor. At once a scene of desolation met his eyes. In places the roof had fallen in, and on all sides there was a litter of dirt and rubbish. The sight repelled him and he was glad to pass through the opening on the left which led to the bastion on the south side of the fort. The cooling air from the water was refreshing after the closeness inside. He breathed more freely, and that haunting fear in his heart gradually subsided. He looked out over the Bay and recalled the day he had stood here watching Charnisay's ships of war standing up towards the harbor. He remembered the intense excitement in the fort, and saw, too, Lady LaTour standing by his side, anxiously watching. That was long ago, but the scene was as vivid now as then.

And as he looked, he presently gave a great start, for on the opposite side of the island at the entrance to the harbor he beheld three tapering top-masts. At first he believed that he had been mistaken, that what he saw was a delusion of his brain owing to his mental vision of Charnisay's ships. But as he looked more keenly he knew that he had not been deceived. There certainly was a vessel anchored on the southern side of the island, and she must be a large one to carry masts tall enough to lift their heads above the tops of the trees. It must be an enemy, and at once a fear smote his heart. He was in danger, and his only safety lay in a speedy retreat. He decided to cross the harbor and carry his canoe above the falls by way of the Indian carrying-place. This would be a difficult undertaking for one man, but he would do it rather than fall into the hands of an unknown enemy.

Quickly descending, he hurried out into the open. He had taken but a few steps along the tangled path, when three men leaped upon him from the thick brushes close by. With a startled gasp, he recoiled and reached for his pistol at his side. But ere his hand could touch the weapon he was overpowered, hurled to the ground, while the pistol and his sheath knife were taken from him. Then one of his assailants gave him a vigorous kick, accompanied by several words in a foreign tongue which he could not understand. But he did know the meaning of that kick, so scrambling to his feet, he faced his captors. They were rough fierce-looking men, bearded and heavily armed. They were sailors, judging by their

appearance, and belonged, no doubt, to the ship at the island. Suddenly he realised that they were Dutchmen. He had heard of them and their daring deeds along the coast. But why had they come here? And what did they intend to do with him?

All this passed rapidly through his mind as he stood cowering there. The thought of being made a prisoner at this old fort was not comforting. He glanced up at the wall and it seemed to his disordered brain as if the spirits of his dead comrades were jeering down upon him. He believed he could hear their mocking laughter. But it was only the voices of his captors who were greatly amused at his terror-stricken face. They were speaking to him, although he did not know what they were saying. But when the leader pointed down the path and headed him in that direction, he understood.

As he stumbled forward, he tried to conceive some way of escape. But none came. His canoe was where he had left it, and nearby was a ship's boat. His companions ordered him into the boat, and when they had pushed off, the canoe was taken in tow. Then down the harbor they moved. Two of the men rowed, while the third, with pistol in hand, guarded the prisoner.

The breeze drifting in from the sea cooled Pierre's heated brow. His fear, caused by his visit to the fort and his sudden capture, changed to anger. What right had these men to lay hands upon him? he asked himself. But, then, he well knew that in a wilderness land might is the only right recognized, and the question of justice is seldom considered. That watchful man seated before him with pistol in hand was a symbol of the only law that prevailed in Acadia.

In a short time it was possible for Pierre to see the ship. She looked very big and menacing as she rode at anchor with her sails furled. Many men were crowding her rails watching the small boat coming down the harbor. Fear again came upon Pierre as he peered anxiously forward. Was he to be carried away to sea? Were more men needed on the ship? And what would become of Lucille? She would be left alone with only old Noel and his wife to protect her. His cup of despair was now full to overflowing as he thought of all this.

When the ship was at length reached, he climbed on board and at once became the centre of curiosity as if he were some wild creature from the forest. Men crowded around to look at him, talking and laughing in the most animated manner. He recognized the captain by his appearance. He was a big, tall, swarthy man, with a hawk-like nose and sharp piercing eyes. Pierre watched him as he talked to the three men who had made the capture. But what they were saying he did not know. Ere long he was surprised by hearing his own French tongue. He glanced around and saw a man looking keenly at him and smiling.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am only Pierre LeNoir, a poor trader."

"What were you doing here?"

"I was on the lookout for a supply ship, but she didn't come."

"And she never will. We met her, and have the supplies on board."

"Who are you?" Pierre was plucking up courage, for this man seemed friendly.

"We are Dutch raiders, and this frigate is the *Flying Horse*, with Jurriaen Aernouts in command, and his associate John Rhoades."

"Aernouts!" Pierre merely gasped the word. He had heard of the noted Dutch pirate and his terrible deeds.

"Ah, you have heard of him," and the man smiled at LeNoir's consternation. "Yes, he is well known, and all on this river will soon know him better, especially de Soulanges at Fort Jemseg, and other traders."

"But you are a Frenchman," Pierre replied. "You speak the language."

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference what a man is in this land. I'm a Frenchman to-day, an Englishman to-morrow, and a Dutchman the next day. I have joined this ship for I want to see the place where my father died."

"Your father died here?"

"Yes, in that old fort over yonder. A traitor put him to death, and that traitor was once his best friend. But to save his own life he hung his comrades, and my father with the rest. I hope to meet him some day if he is still alive."

Pierre felt his knees suddenly weaken beneath him. Terror clutched at his heart, and his face became ghastly. This the other noticed, and smiled again.

"Oh, you needn't fear, my friend. I am not blaming you for what happened years ago."

These words relieved Pierre. This man did not know him.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Basil LeRoi. My father was Jean LeRoi, who served with LaTour, and he was over in that fort when it was captured by Charnisay."

"And who was the traitor?" Pierre asked as calmly as possible.

"Gervais Reynard, so my mother told me. I was very young when she received word of my father's death. But I remember her great grief and how I said that I would find the traitor some day and kill him."

"And you have been searching for him?"

"I have. It is my great purpose in life, but so far he has escaped me. No one knows anything about him. You have not heard of him, I suppose?"

"No, he is not known here. Most of the people along this river have come in recent years."

"Very likely. But I thought the story of Reynard's terrible deed might be known to the Indians."

"Oh, they do talk about the capture of the fort, and how white people fought with one another, but they never mention Reynard. Maybe they never heard of what he did."

"Perhaps not," LeRoi sadly replied as he gazed thoughtfully shoreward. "He may have hung himself out of remorse like Judas did when he betrayed his Master."

The two were alone now, for the other men having satisfied their curiosity had scattered to various parts of the ship. Even the captain was no where in sight. He had gone into the cabin, knowing that LeRoi could deal with the prisoner and tell him what was expected of him. He was not interested in a cringing Frenchman, as he had more important things to think about.

"How long have you been in this country?" LeRoi asked.

"Only a few years," Pierre lied. "I came from Quebec."

"You know this river, then?"

"Fairly well."

"And you know Fort Jemseg?"

"I have been there."

"Then, we want you to guide us to that place. We have been waiting here two days to get some one who knows the river. Several Indians came down, but they got away before we could capture them."

"How did you know about me?"

"Three of our men were watching behind that little island below the falls, and when they saw you go ashore they followed you. You will not be harmed if you pilot us up the river."

"But why do you wish to go to Fort Jemseg?"

"To capture it, of course. Are there any other trading-posts between here and there?"

"No. Sieur de Soulanges is lord of the river to the Jemseg."

"Well, he won't be ruler much longer."

"Why do you wish to destroy the posts along the river?"

"I don't want to destroy them. But these Dutchmen do, that they might get control of this country. They don't understand French, so I have come along as interpreter. They do all the fighting while I look on. They're not a bad lot, though, when you come to know them, except when they get their eyes on a pretty girl. I guess we're all like that, for good-looking girls are scarce in this land."

Pierre made no reply, for he was thinking of Lucille. What would be her fate should these raiders come upon her? If he could only warn her. But, alas! that was impossible.

"When can we get through the falls?" LeRoi asked.

"Not until the tide turns, which will be late in the afternoon."

"That's good, for it will give me time to have a look at that old fort where my father died. And, now, let me give you a word of warning, my friend. You will have to pilot this ship but don't do any crooked work. These Dutchmen will treat you kindly if you do as they say. But they are very devils when crossed. They'll shoot you at the least sign of trickery. As you are one of my race, I want to help you all I can. So, remember what I have told you. And don't try to escape, for you will be watched every minute you are on board this ship. You are too valuable just now for the Dutchmen to run any risk of losing you."



CHAPTER II

THE FLAMING HEAVENS

No one interfered with LeNoir as he wandered aimlessly about the ship. The sailors were friendly and watched him with considerable curiosity. And, in fact, he was a strange specimen of humanity. His black hair, streaked with gray, falling to his shoulders, and his long unkempt beard gave him a savage appearance. His rough buckskin jacket and trousers were ragged, and his moccasins were almost worn out, especially at the toes. He moved with a noiseless gliding motion as one accustomed to the forest trails, and ever on the alert for some unseen enemy. As a sailor is known by his walk, so is a man who has spent years in the woods betrayed by his movements. Never before had these sailors beheld such a queer creature in human form, and they discussed him with much animation. And they were odd-looking beings themselves, with their strange costumes, rings in their ears, and long black moustaches, with pistols and cutlasses at their sides. But they did not consider their own appearance at all strange so accustomed were they to it. But this new arrival was out of the ordinary, and that was enough to make them wonder and speculate.

Pierre, however, was not interested in these Dutchmen. He had eyes only for the frigate, and nothing escaped him. On every side he beheld tell-tale marks of fights in which the frigate had been engaged. There were scars on masts and spars where the wood had been splintered by cannon balls, and the deck-rails showed unmistakable signs where axes and cutlasses had bitten deep. He saw, too, the big guns, blunderbusses, powder-horns, boarding gear and other accoutrements of warfare. And well aft he saw his own canoe near several ship's boats. He pretended not to notice it, for he was well aware that he was being watched, and that any attempt to escape just then would be fatal. But how he did long to throw that canoe overboard and leap after it. With the craft righted and paddle in hand, he felt that he could outstrip any boat that might follow.

He was given a good dinner, the best he had eaten for some time. Then supplied with pipe and tobacco his spirits revived. But for the thought of Lucille's danger and LeRoi's son so near he would have been quite happy among these friendly Dutchmen. More than once he had longed for such a life as these men lived, moving from place to place, ever beholding new scenes. Often around his fire at night when the stark loneliness of the wilderness was almost maddening he had dreamed of a life at sea, and regretted that he had not become a sailor instead of a fur-trader. But it was too late now, for he was past sixty, and too old to learn the ways of the sea.

It was well on in the afternoon before he beheld LeRoi again. Of the captain he had seen nothing since morning. He had remained in his cabin, asleep, no doubt, in preparation for the strenuous work ahead. Pierre was standing at the bow, looking up towards the falls when he saw a boat suddenly appear around the eastern side of the island. Several men were on board, and among them he noticed LeRoi. He needed no words to tell him that the Frenchman had paid a visit to the place where his father had died. He stared at the boat as it drew near. What were LeRoi's thoughts as he stood within the old fort? he wondered. Suppose those rotten logs could speak, what a tale they could unfold.

He was aroused by a voice at his side.

"Watching for the tide to turn?"

It was LeRoi. Pierre shook his head.

"The tide will not turn for some time yet."

"It will be dark, then, before we get far on our way."

"Oh, no. But it will ere we reach Fort Jemseg. But that will not matter."

"You know the river as well by night as by day, eh?"

"Yes. Night or day is all the same to me."

LeRoi made no immediate reply, but stood staring straight before him. There was a serious expression in his eyes, and his usually cheerful manner had vanished.

"My, what a desolate place this is!" he at length exclaimed as a slight shiver shook his body. "That old fort sent the chills

up and down my spine. Those rotten logs and the smell of decay on all sides were most depressing. I cannot shake off the feeling. And to think that my father died there at the hands of his traitor friend! Oh, if I could only find him!"

Pierre shrank away a little, but LeRoi did not notice his movement. Neither did he look at his companion. His thoughts were elsewhere.

"A strange feeling came over me as I stood in that fort," he continued. "My father's spirit seemed to be present there, and once I really believed I saw his form."

"It was only imagination," Pierre murmured, his body trembling.

"Most likely it was, my friend. But it was very real, nevertheless. And so was the depression that settled upon me. It seemed as if something terrible is about to happen to me as it did to my father."

"Ah that was due to the closeness and dampness of the fort. It's an uncanny place."

"It is and I never want to go there again. I feel better now, though, but it is hard to shake off that strange mood I had while there. I wonder if it means anything."

"Nothing, nothing I assure you. I had a queer feeling myself when I visited that fort. You will get over your depression in a short time."

The sun had set as the *Flying Horse* plowed her way up the river. She had come through the falls on the flood tide, up between those high rugged rocks at which the sailors had stared in wonder. Then she moved out into the expansive water above and up through the Long Vue driven by a favoring west wind. The first island, Isle au Garce, was straight ahead, and LeNoir, standing well at the bow, was peering forward with strained anxious eyes. The darkness was deepening, and he planned to keep as far as possible to the western shore that his post on the island might not be discovered. He had delayed sailing as long as he could. But the commander had become impatient, and had ordered the sails set as soon as the tide served, so Pierre could do nothing. Another half hour would have made a great difference to him. His only hope now was that no one would be seen on the island, for then the Dutchmen would consider it uninhabited and pass by without stopping.

Jurriaen Aernouts, with John Rhoades at his side, was standing a short distance away, and near him was LeRoi. There was an eager look in the commander's eyes, for new conquests were ahead of him. He was flushed with victory, and the *Flying Horse* bore rich trophies from Penobscot and other places he had successfully raided. He was a man of indomitable courage and determination. He had to be so, for no coward or weakling could handle a crew of rough sea pirates, one hundred and ten in all, in uncharted waters, and with enemies on every side ready to beat him down. The sea was the only life he knew and he revelled in it. His one great ambition was to win for Holland the whole of Acadia, to drive out the French and make it a Dutch colony. He would be another Van Tromp and sweep the seas of his enemies. And so far he had met with considerable success aided by the "accomplished adventurer and pirate" John Rhoades, whom he had procured at Boston, and who knew the weak condition of the French posts in Acadia.

His was an imperious spirit and while he tolerated such men as Rhoades and LeRoi for the use he could make of them, he considered them like his sailors as mere tools for the carrying out of his designs. And for the captive Pierre he never gave him a second thought. Such a creature was beneath contempt, a miserable Frenchman, an outcast in this great wilderness. He would not deign to approach such an unkempt being. One glance at his appearance had been sufficient to fill his soul with disgust. Rhoades and LeRoi could attend to him, while he gave his mind to more important things.

The sight of this arrogant commander enraged Pierre. He had not seen much of him until the vessel had left the island for her run up river. Aernouts had remained in his cabin most of the time, leaving the management of the crew to Rhoades. Now, however, as he stood not far away Pierre was able to study him closely. He saw a man sturdy and strong, every inch a leader. He was unmistakably Dutch from his neatly-trimmed pointed beard and mustachio, to the wide-leaved, loosely-shaped cock-hat of dark felt, with a cord around the top. His neck was encircled with a ruff. Over a tawny leather doublet was a loose surcoat of gray frieze, with breeches to match. Long boots came almost to the hips, and at his side hung a sword. This completed his costume. Pierre's eyes narrowed as he watched him, and his anger increased. So this was the man who was to drive out the French! He thought of Lucille and his own humble unprotected post. He glanced around the vessel and despair filled his heart. Fate, irresistible and terrible, seemed to abide here, ready to sweep down and destroy all he deemed most precious.

A sudden excitement among the sailors attracted his attention. They were looking and pointing away to the north where a wonderful spectacle was presented to view. The whole sky was illumined as if by great unseen fires. Blood-red streamers flashed forth in quivering waves. They met, spread out and retreated, only to sweep up again more terrible than ever. So brilliant was the light that its reflection caused the river to glow like a stream of blood. Forked tongues shot out, and the startled watchers imagined they could hear hissing sounds. It was an awe-inspiring scene and Pierre's heart was filled with fear. It was a sign of disaster. The Indians had told him that whenever that spectacle appeared it meant danger of a most frightful nature. Instinctively he crossed himself as if to ward off some impending doom. And so did LeRoi. But to the sailors it had no such meaning and when the fiery splendor began to subside they discussed it in the most animated manner.

Pierre, however, paid no attention to them, for his eyes were centred upon a wisp of smoke circling above the tops of the trees on the western side of the island. The commander saw it too, and he turned to LeRoi.

"Ask the guide the meaning of that smoke," he ordered. "There are people on that island, and we must investigate."

Pierre knew that the critical moment had now arrived. He surmised what Aernouts was saying, and a dull despair settled upon him. And to add to his misery, several forms could be seen moving along the shore. The fate of his post was sealed, and he was helpless. He heard LeRoi speaking to him, but so confused was his brain that he hardly knew what he said in reply. He was only aware that the vessel swerved suddenly to the left and headed for the western channel. This would bring them in sight of his post, and then what would become of Lucille?

At the entrance to the narrow channel on the western side of the island the *Flying Horse* was brought up to the wind and the anchor run out. Notwithstanding Pierre's statement that it was merely a small and unprotected trading post, Aernouts determined to take no risk. The guide might be deceiving him so he ordered the guns to be made ready, and everything prepared for a bombardment. He peered keenly forward through the deepening twilight, and saw a portion of a palisade. It looked to him as if guns were mounted upon that rude structure, ready to pour forth their messages of death. It was necessary to be most cautious. He turned to LeRoi.

"Tell that miserable guide that if he has deceived us in the strength of that post, he will go up to the yard-arm this very night."

When this had been communicated to Pierre he shrank back, lifted his hands and swore that he had spoken the truth.

"The post is undefended, Monsieur," he declared. "I have not lied. There are no guns, and only two or three people live there. Tell the commander so."

But still Aernouts was not satisfied. He was suspicious of everything, even of his own men, so he felt that he could not place much reliance upon the word of a contemptible guide. And LeRoi might be in league with him. He didn't have much use for Frenchmen, anyway. He believed they could not be trusted.

"Very well. We shall soon see," was all he said, as he turned and walked away.

It was growing dark now, and as Pierre waited in apprehension for what might happen under cover of night, the roar of a cannon startled him. The bombardment had begun. Then another and another shot was fired and he could hear the crash of timbers where the bullets fell. But no reply came from the island. Pierre thought of Lucille. His only hope was that she had made good her escape with Noel and Marie. They had a canoe, so it would not be difficult for them to get away.

After the bombardment, boats were lowered and men crowded on board. All were anxious to be first in the attack and win whatever booty was to be had. Pierre watched them as they rowed away from the frigate. He was well aware what havoc such men would make of his humble abode, and how they would carry off all his belongings except one treasure, and he was sure they would not find that. He would have something left, anyway, and if only Lucille should not fall into the hands of the pirates he would not mind so much. He would rebuild again as soon as he had his liberty and the Dutchmen had left the river.

The thought of escape had been ever in his mind since his capture. Perhaps this was his opportunity. In their excitement over attacking the post, the raiders had forgotten all about their guide. He looked cautiously around, but no one was watching him. He could see the dim forms of several men on the side of the ship nearest the island, but otherwise the frigate was deserted. The mainland was near, and he was a strong swimmer.

He waited a while, however, for the darkness to deepen. Then moving swiftly along the deck, he climbed up over the high rail and lowered himself over the starboard side. Almost noiselessly he slipped into the water and with strong steady strokes made for the shore. No one had heard him, and from the clamor that reached his ears he could tell that the raiders had forgotten all about him. He swam easily, and when at length his feet touched bottom, he waded ashore, shook himself like a spaniel and looked over at the island. All was confusion there, while the yells, shouts and smashing of boards and timbers told of the destruction that was taking place. Lifting his clenched fist he shook it fiercely at the ship and then at the raiders on the island. Not a sound did he make. His rage was beyond words.

For a while he stood there, watching and listening. He knew that the enemy could not catch him, but he was too near the *Flying Horse* to feel comfortable. He would go to the hill straight across from the island, and once there he knew that the Dutchmen could never find him. He almost wished that they would pursue him, for the forest was his home, and there among the intricate ways of the great trees he could easily confound the raiders and settle his score, perhaps, with some of them.

It did not take him long to follow the shore around the cove above, and reach the high hill overlooking the island. At once a bright light across the water startled him. He knew its meaning. The raiders were burning his post! He saw the flames shooting up like fiery tongues into the night, and the forms of men watching their work of destruction, shouting, yelling and singing in wildest glee.

CHAPTER III

THE ISLAND MAIDEN

"It must mean war!"

The girl was looking at the northern sky, her eyes filled with wonder and awe. The light of departing day touched with a soft and gentle radiance her fair animated face, and glinted upon the neatly-arranged coils of her jet-black hair. Her strong lithe body was tense with interest as she watched the magnificent and unusual scene.

"Yes, it must mean war!" she repeated as she intuitively crossed herself.

She watched the strange display until it gradually faded, and at last disappeared reluctantly, so it seemed, in obedience to some unseen command. She then sighed as she withdrew her eyes from the sky, and looked down upon the water at her feet.

"I wonder if Noel and Marie have seen it," she mused. "The Indians say there were terrible signs in the sky years ago when old Biencourt came to this island and made trouble with the traders here. Perhaps it will be the same now. I do hope something will happen for I am tired of this lonely place."

She remained lost in thought, dipping her bare feet in the water which touched the large stone upon which she was sitting. She was about seventeen years of age, of medium height, and well-formed. Her face was exceedingly attractive, and her slightly-dark features were in harmony with her hair and sparkling eyes. The traders who visited the place always vied with one another for her favor, and the memory of her sunny smile and animated face lingered long in their minds as they wandered through the great trackless forest depths. They talked about her around their camp fires, and all were eager to see again the beautiful maiden of the "Isle au Garce", the name they had given the island for her sake.

Lucille LeNoir was well aware of her attractiveness to the traders, and it pleased her. But they came only at rare intervals, and there were so many long weeks when she had only her father, Noel and Marie as companions. Indians sometimes halted on their way up and down the river. But they did not appeal to her, for their stolid impassive faces never showed any signs of admiration. She needed men of her own race to appreciate her beauty and strive for her attention. Of them she dreamed, especially of one who had come several times to the post. To her he seemed a very superior person, and in imagination she surrounded him with a bright halo of romance in which she herself played a very important part.

Lucille had plenty of time for such dreams, and they were a great comfort to her in her lonely life. So as she sat on the stone she allowed herself to be carried away on the wings of fancy. No longer was she an unknown and poorly-clad girl at a small trading post in the wilderness. She was a finely-dressed lady living at Quebec, leading a gay life, surrounded by men of courtly bearing, and the recipient of attention on all sides. And Jean LeJeune was her husband occupying a high position, and next in rank to the great Count Frontenac himself. It was a wonderful vision, as the glow in her eyes and the flush upon her cheeks plainly revealed.

A raucous sound nearby disturbed her meditation. A smile of amusement overspread her face and her eyes twinkled as she looked to the right and saw a big black crow walking jauntily towards her along the shore. She held out her hand.

"What do you want Minuit? Are you lonesome, too?"

The bird came close and looked up at the girl as if expecting something.

"Hungry are you? Oh, you rascal, you only come to me when you want food. Well, take this."

She dropped upon the ground several pieces of dried meat which she had hidden in a pocket of her dress. The bird quickly devoured the morsels and looked up for more.

"Not satisfied, Minuit? You never know when you have enough. But you will have to wait until we go back to the house."

She gave a chirp, and the bird hopped up on her lap. Lucille stroked him fondly.

"Pretty fellow," she murmured. "You do love me, I know. But what will you do when I go to Quebec? Will you miss me?"

I would like to take you with me but what would the grand people there think if I had a tame crow always following me around? I am sure they would make fun of me. You will have to stay here, I guess."

Lucille was in the right frame of mind for more pleasant dreams. She looked out upon the river with a far-away expression in her eyes. As she did so, she gave a start and sprang to her feet, her body tense with excitement. The crow thus rudely disturbed, fluttered away with a coarse caw, surprised and angry at such rude treatment. But Lucille was not thinking of him, for her attention was centred upon a large vessel coming up the Long Vue. The sails were full set and they gleamed like polished silver. It was a larger ship than any that usually came up the river, and the sight of it caused the girl to tremble with fear. She had sighed for something to happen, and when it seemed as if her wish was about to be granted she was afraid.

For a few minutes she stood staring at the oncoming vessel. It fascinated her, not only because of its beautiful appearance, but what it might mean. Then she stooped, and thrust her feet into a pair of rough shoes lying nearby. Quickly tying them with their rawhide laces, she left the stone and sped swiftly along the shore.

Noel was seated on a rude bench at the open gate of the palisade which surrounded the log house. He was smoking and watching a small brush fire a short distance away. He had been clearing up around the place that afternoon to make it more presentable when the traders arrived, and also as a pleasant surprise to his master when he returned. He was wondering what had detained Pierre as he should have arrived several days ago. Perhaps something had happened to him. He may have been caught in the falls or swamped in the Bay, for Pierre was very reckless. And if he did not return, Lucille would own the post. And she would need him and Marie more than ever for she knew nothing about trading. He could then manage things as he liked with no rough master to threaten him with dismissal. Yes, it would be much more pleasant if his master did not come back, and he could have more rum to drink.

Lucille's abrupt appearance and her excited manner startled him.

"A ship! a ship!" she cried. "A big one!"

Noel was on his feet in an instant, and the pipe fell from his mouth.

"Where?"

"Down the Long Vue, sailing fast. Come quick. Where is Marie?"

"Never mind her. She's over at the house."

Noel followed Lucille, his heart filled with a nameless fear. It must be an English ship sent to capture and destroy the French trading posts along the river, so he believed. He was well aware that the traders of Massachusetts desired this, as they were forced to pay a license for fishing and trading privileges in Acadia. This ship, then, must be the outcome of the bitterness which rankled in their hearts at what they considered an injustice. Yes, it must be an English ship, he decided.

This opinion was fully confirmed when he at length reached the lower end of the island and beheld the vessel. Lucille had been right. It was a big ship, and English, so it first appeared to him. But as it drew nearer and he saw the red, white, and blue streaks on her flag he knew that she was a Dutch man of war. This gave him no comfort, for news had drifted to the river that summer of the daring deeds along the coast of Jurriaen Aernouts and John Rhoades. Yes, it must be their ship, the *Flying Horse*, which was now approaching to destroy the posts along the river.

The vessel was out in mid-channel now, and for a while Noel hoped that the Dutchmen were ignorant of the little settlement on the island and would sail by. But soon he was doomed to disappointment, for ere long the ship swung to the left and headed towards the narrow channel on the western side of the island. Then Noel knew there was a pilot on board who was well acquainted with the river. He turned to Lucille.

"Come, let us go back and get ready to receive our visitors. Oh, for men and a few big guns!"

The girl made no reply as she followed Noel back to the house. They made their way among the great beech, birch, oak and walnut trees which grew in abundance on the island. Darkness was now deepening, and the quiet sombre gloom of the forest caused Lucille to tremble with fear. These noble trees which had always seemed so friendly might soon be concealing cruel men skulking through their dark depths. She drew closer to her companion and caught him by the arm.

"Don't be afraid," he assured her. "The Dutchmen will not harm us."

This was a brave effort on Noel's part to comfort her. But his own heart was very heavy at the thought of what might happen to a defenceless girl among a band of rough reckless pirates. He wondered how he might shield her from harm. He was not so much worried over his wife for she was old and would be no attraction to impassioned men. With this young, beautiful maiden, however, it would be different.

Having reached the gate of the palisade, they stopped and stood silently watching the vessel which had dropped anchor at the entrance to the narrow channel. Lights gleamed, and voices could be faintly heard. They stood there until the vessel was lost in the darkness and only the lights were visible. Then the thundering roar of a cannon sounded forth, causing Lucille to give a startled cry of dismay and clutch Noel by the arm.

"Oh! Let us go inside."

"Very well. But we are as safe here as there if they turn their guns on us."

No sooner had they reached the house than another roar rent the air, followed instantly by the crashing of a log in the palisade where the ball had struck.

"Let us go away in the canoe while there is time," Lucille pleaded. "We can escape up the creek. They can't get us there."

"I shall not leave this post," Noel declared. "Your father left me in charge, and I intend to remain. Go and get Marie. The canoe is on the shore, and you both will soon be safe."

As Lucille hesitated, Noel laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Go quick!" he gasped. "They are upon us! See, they are coming!"

He pushed her fiercely towards a door at the rear of the palisade and sent her out into the night. She knew that resistance was useless, so speeding across the clearing she reached the shelter of the friendly trees where she crouched fearfully at the foot of a towering oak. Here she waited and listened with fast-beating heart for whatever might happen. For a while all was still, and then ensued shouts, loud laughter, and fierce words all in a strange language. She trembled for Noel. What were those terrible men doing to him?

At length so wild became the clamor of voices, and the sound of breaking furniture that she felt unsafe so near the building. The raiders might rush out and find her. She, accordingly, moved to the left along the edge of the clearing which brought her somewhat farther from the post. And as she waited here, a bright light pierced the darkness. It was a flame! The house was on fire! Soon it was burning fiercely, lighting the ground for rods around. Lucille did not think of herself now, nor how she was exposed as soon as she stood at the border of the forest. She was thinking only of Noel among the crowd of men in front of the palisade. She could tell that he was a prisoner, and she wondered what his captors would do with him. They seemed to be enjoying the fire, for they were singing and shouting in the wildest manner. Lucille was numb with fear and anxiety. What was she to do? Noel would be taken away and she and Marie would be left alone on the island with no human being near.

The house was now a seething fiery inferno, and huge flames were leaping up into the night. The heat was intense, forcing the men to move back nearer to the shore. Lucille felt the hot breath upon her face, and at times a wreath of smoke swirled down upon her almost choking her.

As one of these passed and she opened her eyes, she saw a man creeping towards her on the left but a short distance away. Startled, she stared for an instant, and then with a cry she fled among the trees. But the man was already too close for her to escape. Like a panther he bounded after the fleeing girl, overtook her, caught her in his strong arms, and held her fast.

CHAPTER IV

RIVER-RANGERS

For hours a long lean bark canoe had been speeding down river, driven by the strong arms of two Indians and a white man. The natives, swarthy and powerful, with great chests and shoulders, were stripped to the waist, for the day was hot. Their heads were bare, and their straight jet-black hair fell over their ears and necks. The white man seated astern, wore a thin gray shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up to the elbows. He was a young man, strong of limb and in keeping with his companions. His dark-bronze curly hair glinted beneath the glow of departing day. His sun-tanned face denoted determination, and his eyes were expressive of the daring fearlessness of a born leader. And so he was, for Paul Norvall had been trained in the stern wilderness school where weakness meant defeat, and cowardice brought contempt. Every movement of his lithe and finely-developed body betokened a restless energy, even in the prosaic task of paddling a canoe on a quiet summer evening. His body swaying to every paddle thrust was suggestive of great reserve strength. Given an opportunity, and all the possibilities of his one hundred and seventy-five pounds of flesh, bone and sinewy muscle would be aroused to magnificent action. He somewhat resembled a panther, ready to spring at the right moment.

His hips supported a stout moose-hide belt, attached to which were a sheathed hunting-knife, and a tinder-box. Within hand's reach lay his musket, powder-horn, and hatchet. Beneath these was his deer-skin jacket. On one of the sleeves exposed to view a small blood-red patch in the form of a heart could be plainly seen. All knew its meaning, and it was this more than the color of his hair that made Paul Norvall known and feared as the "Red Ranger" in trackless forest depths and on inland streams. The Indians also had their weapons near at hand. These, together with their ever-alert eyes, showed that they were prepared for greater game than birds and beasts.

There was something fascinating about these three rangers as with rhythmic strokes they drove the canoe steadily onward. Strength and confidence were stamped upon their every movement. The mystery of the vast wilderness was expressed in their alert bearing and watchful eyes, and the contrast between the young man seated astern and his dusky companions was most striking. Seldom they spoke and then only a few words in the deep guttural Indian tongue.

They had passed Point au Chenes, the Isle au Nois, and the Isle de Trent Sols was on their right when the northern heavens burst forth in such a magnificent and awe-inspiring display. Paul was looking over at Isle au Garce some distance ahead when exclamations from both Indians startled him. Then when he beheld the wonderful spectacle, he, too, stared in amazement.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"Gara, gara," (war, war) Kondo, the Indian next to him replied.

"Ah, gara, gara," the other native, Matta, echoed.

"With the English?" Paul questioned.

"Maybe so."

Intuitively the three ceased paddling, rested their dripping blades upon the gunwale and allowed the canoe to drift. A feeling of awe came upon the naturally superstitious natives, and even Paul was unusually affected. For a moment their restless hearts were touched by a sense of a power stronger than themselves, mysterious and terrible. Natures such as theirs were not easily impressed by the beautiful world around them, nor the soft flower-scented air wafted across the water. Only by a startling manifestation such as they now beheld could their souls be stirred, not by any feeling of love and reverence, but by a superstitious dread of some impending disaster.

This feeling was only temporary, however, for when the flaming colors in the sky began to fade, the men again dipped their paddles silently into the water and continued on their noiseless way.

When opposite Isle au Garce they turned their canoe towards the shore and landed at a little inlet where a small brook flowed down from the hills. This was a good camping site, with plenty of fresh spring water. But Paul had another reason for stopping here. The memory of a girl he had seen for a few fleeting minutes months ago was still in his mind. So much had he dreamed of her as he moved from place to place or sat by his lonely camp fires that she had become a

vital part of his life. To him she gradually assumed a being almost unearthly in surpassing beauty and nobleness. So now when at last near the object of his heart's affection, he was all impatient to look upon her face again. That he would see her he had no doubt. He took it as a matter of course that she would welcome him. That another had won her heart never once entered his mind. If love at times is blind and unreasonable, it was certainly so with Paul Norvall for the maiden of Isle au Garce.

It did not take the Indians long to prepare their simple meal. When it was over, Paul made ready for his visit to the island. He donned his buckskin jacket and slung a powder-horn over his shoulder. Carefully he brushed off some dirt that had fallen upon the blood-red heart on his sleeve. He had never allowed the color to fade, but had renewed it from time to time with the deep carmine dye which old Nadu, his forest mother, knew how to make. It was believed by the Indians and Frenchmen alike that the heart was the outward sign of the wearer's feelings. When he was excited or stirred to anger it glowed with a terrible light, so they said. But when Paul was calm it returned to its ordinary color. So as the Indians watched their leader this evening their eyes fell upon the heart and it looked exceptionally bright, so they imagined. They made no remarks, however, and their impassive faces showed no sign of what was in their minds.

Presently Kondo gave a startled exclamation, and pointed excitedly down river.

"See, see! A big canoe!"

"A big canoe!" Matta echoed.

Paul who was in the act of lifting his musket from the ground, straightened quickly up and followed with his eyes the direction of the pointed finger. For a few seconds the three gazed with undisguised wonder. Never before had they beheld such a large vessel upon the river. Was it a friend or a foe?

With the natural instinct of the wild the Indians stepped swiftly forward, seized the canoe, and dragged it well up among the trees. They were determined to be on the safe side no matter what the coming vessel might be.

Paul paid no attention to what his companions were doing, for his eyes were fixed upon those white sails away in the distance. His heart beat with high hope. Perhaps it was an English ship, a man of war! If so, how wonderful it would be. He had waited long, and for years he had dreamed of the time when the English would return, capture Fort Jemseg and recover Acadia. He glanced at the red badge upon his arm. Was his long patient waiting at last to be rewarded? When his father's death had been fully avenged, then, and only then would he be satisfied.

As the vessel drew nearer, he stepped back among the trees by the side of the watching Indians. His wilderness experience had taught him the lesson of caution. Where life is so precarious, and unknown dangers so imminent he had acquired the cunning and alertness common to the natives and the beasts of the forest. He was one of them in thought and manner of living, so far as it was possible for a white man, and a son of an English officer, to assimilate himself with the ways of the wild.

The vessel was close enough now for him to see its colors. He knew all the English and the French flags, but this one was entirely new to him. The Indians were also puzzled. They had never seen such a flag before, and, according to their nature, the unknown was to be feared and considered as an enemy.

Silently they watched, and when it seemed as if the vessel intended to keep steadily up the main channel, she swerved suddenly to the left, headed for the western shore and disappeared behind the lower end of the island. Then Paul and the Indians understood. The strange ship was a raider, and she had turned aside to capture the little trading post on the island. They had no doubt about it, for why should such a large ship come up the river unless it had evil designs?

Anxiously and watchfully they waited. Then when darkness deepened and the cannon roared its prelude of destruction, they launched their canoe, and with great strong strokes sped across the water. Something of an unusual nature was taking place on the other side of the island which they must not miss. Again the cannon sounded forth, and they could hear the crashing of timbers. They knew the meaning. The paddle bent beneath Paul's tremendous thrusts, for he was thinking of the maiden who was in danger. Had the crashing balls or the falling logs struck her? Would he be in time to rescue her? Reason forsook him as he thought of her peril, and he tossed caution to the wind with the wild recklessness of youth. Love, intense, passionate, burned in his heart. And mingled with this was a deadly hatred towards the unknown raiders who were demolishing the post.

As they drew near the shore on the eastern side of the island they ceased paddling and listened attentively. In a few minutes the sound of loud voices was heard accompanied by heavy blows, cursing and yelling. Feeling certain that the trader and his daughter were in great danger, Paul spoke to his companions. Their blades struck the water as one and in another minute the canoe touched the sandy beach in a sheltered little cove. With muskets in their hands, they glided among the trees. Not a sound did they make and they walked as unerringly as in broad daylight. Paul led, with the Indians close at his heels. They were only three, but whoever reckoned with them would have had to reckon with the hardest and most determined fighters in the whole country as many had learned to their sorrow.

When more than half way across the island, a light suddenly shimmered among the trees which caused them to stop dead in their tracks. In a few minutes the light increased, and they could hear the crackling of the fire as the flames of the burning building soared up into the night. Very carefully now they advanced for the light of the fire penetrated the forest and illumined its silent depths. From tree to tree they moved, shadowy figures alert and watchful. Not until they were in sight of the flame-enwrapped building did they again stop. Silent and motionless, they concealed themselves behind great trees and looked curiously upon the wild scene before them. When they saw the raiders, a strong desire filled their souls to creep around the edge of the forest shoot down as many as they could, and then spring upon the rest with their deadly knives and hatchets. The Indians were thirsting for the blood of those invaders, and their fingers toyed with the triggers of their muskets. But their innate caution restrained them. The strangers were too many. And, besides, they did not know who they were. This unknown quantity more than anything else, checked their wild impulse, and kept them carefully concealed.

And while they crouched there, Lucille stood suddenly before them. Her unexpected appearance was startling. Her flame-illumined form seemed unearthly, causing the Indians to quiver with superstitious fear. Paul, however, had no such feeling. The girl's tragic attitude made his heart beat fast, and his fingers to tighten upon his musket. She seemed terrified, and needed help. But what could he do? He longed to rush forward and assure her of his protection. But would that be advisable? He might frighten her all the more before he could explain who he was. She might spring away from him with a cry and thus attract the attention of the raiders from whom she had evidently escaped.

And as he waited he saw the girl turn swiftly and dash straight towards the place where he was standing. And behind her came a man in close pursuit. With the spring of a panther, Paul now bounded forward with the Indians following. Just as the raider with a laugh of triumph caught the girl in his arms Paul dealt him a terrific blow under the left jaw. With a groan, he fell to the ground like an ox under the butcher's axe. Instantly the Indians were upon him with their hatchets ready to strike. But a sharp command from Paul caused them to draw back. Their eyes gleamed, and their bodies quivered with passion. That they could be restrained by a word when the beast nature within them was aroused was a certain proof of the control their young leader had over them.

Paul knew that there was no time to lose, as the raiders were too near to delay. Ordering the Indians to leave the fallen man alone, he stooped, lifted Lucille in his arms and carried her through the forest as if she were a child. It was a joy such as he had never known to have saved the girl he loved, and to feel her body pressed so close to his heart. The distance to the little cove was all too short, and reluctantly he released his encircling arms as he placed her tenderly in the canoe. A great thrill of joy swept over him as the girl clung to him. Did she love him as he loved her? he asked himself. Then he heard her speaking, and he bent his head to catch her low whisper.

"I knew you would come, Jean. I was waiting for you."

Paul straightened suddenly up, and shrank back as from a blow. Lucille noticed this and a new fear came into her heart as she attempted to rise.

"You are Jean, are you not?"

"No! I am only Paul Norvall—a fool."

With a cry Lucille recoiled from him.

"The Red Ranger!" she gasped.

"Yes, the Red Ranger. But you need not fear. You are safe. Where do you want to go?"

"To Fort Jemseg. Warning must be given of the raiders."

Fort Jemseg! Paul was well aware what kind of a reception he would be likely to receive there. He was wanted, not as a friend, but as the deadliest enemy to the French along the river. Why should he endanger his life for the sake of this girl who had given herself to Jean LeJeune? And why should he give warning of the raiders? But he loved adventure and he loved Lucille, so in another minute his hesitation vanished, and his decision made. Yes, he would go to the fort, no matter what the outcome might be. He spoke to the Indians, and they received his words in silence. He then turned to the crouching girl.

"You wish to go to Fort Jemseg. To the fort you shall go. The Red Ranger may be a fool, but he is not a coward."

CHAPTER V

FORT JEMSEG

Although commander of Fort Jemseg, and ruler of a large tract from the mouth of the great river leagues inland, Sieur de Soulanges was worried and annoyed as he sat at dinner with his officers. He had returned home that afternoon from the Big Lake after two days' absence. Not even his wife's glad welcome, nor the sight of little Louise Elizabeth lying fast asleep in her cradle, clad in her delicate foam-white dress, could altogether dispel his mood of gloom. He had kissed his wife, and kneeling beside the cradle had pressed his lips to the infant's soft cheek. He had lingered here for a minute, his eyes filled with a loving tenderness. Marie Francis stood nearby watching the beautiful scene. She was proud of her husband, and loved him with all the ardor of her affectionate nature. His troubles were her troubles, so his depressed manner lessened somewhat the joy of his home-coming. He had left her with the promise that he would return as soon as dinner was over and explain to her the cause of his depressed spirits.

Pierre de Joibert, Sieur de Soulanges et Marson was a man of outstanding ability. Through faithfulness to duty and hard work he had risen high in the favor of the Grand-fontaine. For his services to his king he had been awarded a Seigniorship of several leagues in length along the eastern side of the Saint John River, with headquarters at Fort Jemseg. He had captured the place from Sir Thomas Temple the English commander, who had refused to give it up at the Treaty of Breda in 1667. Sieur de Soulanges had strengthened the palisade and armed the fort with five iron guns on wooden platforms. He thus felt quite secure against any ordinary attack that might be made.

But he had greater ambitions than merely maintaining a fortress in the wilderness. He wished to make it the centre of a thriving community. The land was fertile, so he desired to see the trees cleared, houses built, with fields of waving grain, meadows and gardens on all sides. The memory of his old home in the province of Champagne in sunny France was fresh in his mind, and he longed to make the region around the Jemseg a second Champagne in Acadia. As Seignior he would be ruler and under his guidance peace and plenty would abound.

With this laudable purpose in view, he had brought men from Quebec, parcelled out lands and helped them to build houses. They were single men, for the most part, and it was his intention that in a short time they should return to Quebec and obtain wives from among the "King's Girls" who were being brought out regularly from France. Such was his bright vision. But alas! after he had obtained the men, they became dissatisfied with the quiet hum-drum life of the place. It would take years to develop the land and such a prospect did not appeal to their restless natures. The free and careless life of the forest lured them away. The fur trade was attractive, and living with the Indians they could be a law unto themselves, unfettered by the rules meted out from the fort for their guidance. Thus the men from whom he had expected so much proved a sad disappointment.

And besides all this, these rangers were interfering with his own legitimate fur trade. He had expected to make considerable profit from his barter with the Indians, but the *coureurs de bois* were intercepting the natives and obtaining a large portion of the rich harvest which was rightfully his. He had, accordingly, decided to check this unlawful trade, and, in fact, he had been strongly urged to do so by Count Frontenac at Quebec. But so far he had been powerless to accomplish anything of an effective nature. The rangers were as elusive as the wind, and the Indians were unusually shy about coming to the fort. On his recent trip to the Big Lake he had found this to be especially so. The rangers were nowhere to be seen, and the few Indians he had met were not only reserved but in several cases were quite hostile. Then when he had returned to the fort and beheld the abandoned houses, and the lands lying neglected, he felt that his cup of disappointment was full to overflowing.

His officers knew what was troubling their leader and sympathized with him. They, too, were depressed, but as they ate the good things old Adrien and his wife Barbe had prepared, their naturally buoyant spirits revived. Such men could not remain downcast for any length of time with an abundance of excellent food before them, so ere long they were talking and laughing over incidents that had happened on their recent trip.

The room where the officers were assembled was the largest in the building, and was used for various purposes. The rough-hewn logs which formed the walls were adorned with trophies of the chase, such as antlers of moose, deer, and caribou. Muskets hung on wooden pegs, beneath which were crossed swords and bayonets. There were also racks of fire-arms, loaded and ready for use.

A large stone fire-place had been built on one side of the room, over which was a magnificent pair of moose antlers, the pride of the commander. In winter the fire-place was the centre of attraction when blazing logs gave out their comforting heat. Now, however, the spacious opening was ablaze with a profusion of wild flowers. De Soulanges looked at them more than once, and his heart quickened, for he was well aware whose hands had placed them there for his sake. Marie loved flowers, and he always enjoyed watching her as she gathered the beautiful blossoms along the river bank and woodland ways.

He was thinking of her, and at the same time listening to Jean LeJeune who had joined them and was telling of his efforts to induce the rangers to return to their farms.

"They are as slippery as eels," he declared. "Several times they agreed to meet me at a certain place, but they never came. Then, when I happened to meet them later they had all sorts of excuses to offer. They said they liked the life of freedom in the forest and objected to the long hard work of clearing the lands which had been given them. Others were not in favor of married life. If they had wives and children they would be forced to stay at home, and there would be an end to their happy wandering existence. Several said there were no wives to be obtained. When I told them about the King's girls they said it was too risky an undertaking to choose a wife as one would a horse or a cow just by viewing her on exhibition."

"I agree with them," Claude Petain declared, as he helped himself to another choice portion of wild duck. "When I marry I shall not pick a wife at random from girls lined up in a row. I want to know something about her."

"Oh, girls are always on review," Noel LeBlanc retorted. "You never know them until after marriage, and then it is too late. You are fast bound until death. Marriage is fatal to a man's freedom."

"Not always," the commander somewhat sternly defended, speaking for the first time. He was thinking of Marie Franis, and this his officers knew, so they wisely changed the subject of conversation.

"I can understand about the rangers, and that there is little prospect of doing anything with them," Gervais Romaine remarked. "But what about the Indians? We have failed in getting the land cleared, and we are also in danger of losing the fur trade. We must win the natives."

"We can never do that while they are under the sway of Paul Norvall," LeJeune replied.

"The Red Ranger?" the commander queried.

"Yes, he's the man, and it's wonderful what an influence he has over the Indians. They do just what he says. He is an Englishman, so that explains his hatred to us."

"Although I have never met him he has been a great trouble to me ever since I came here," de Soulanges declared. "His father was killed when I took this fort, so that explains his hatred to us. I should like to get my hands on him."

"If you touch him, sir, the Indians will be upon you like raging devils," LeJeune reminded.

"Ah, so I have heard time and time again. But I am getting tired of that cry. If the Indians are to rule, we might as well give up first as last. But I do not intend to quit without a struggle. If the Indians want to fight, they can come at any time. They must be taught a lesson, and so must that Red Ranger."

"Be careful, sir," Jean advised. "You can defend this fort for a time, no doubt, but if the Indians go on the warpath against us, they could soon starve us out. No one would dare to venture forth for food with those devils prowling around."

De Soulanges realised that these words were only too true. It was galling and humiliating to a commander to be at the mercy of uncouth natives, led by a young man, and an Englishman, at that. He wondered if he could believe all that Jean said. He was not altogether certain of this smooth-tongued fellow. He spent most of his time with the rangers, pretending that he was trying to induce them to return to their lands. But was he really doing this? Perhaps he was in league with them, and was thus playing a double game.

Sieur de Soulanges knew a great deal about men and their ways, for he had lived all his life among them. He was also a keen student of character. He knew very well about the intrigues that were often seething under the calm outward demeanor of polite society. There were jealousies, too, of the subordinates to their superior officers. Fair and loyal

words were often only masks to the hatred which burned within. It was so elsewhere, and he must expect the same here. But he had chosen his men with great care and so far he had found no occasion to distrust any of them. Jean LeJeune, however, was different. He was not one of his carefully-chosen band, but merely an outsider, one he believed who would be useful in watching the rangers and reporting to him their doings. But the more he saw of Jean, the less he liked him. He had too glib a tongue, and his eyes were shifty, which to the commander were not favorable signs.

And this day he doubted Jean more than ever. Perhaps it was due to his words about the Indians and the rangers. He had advised caution in dealing with the former, and especially with the Red Ranger, which was not according to his liking. He decided to do nothing at present, however, but to keep a stricter watch upon Jean in the future.

Dinner was just ended, and the men were about to rise from the table when Paul Norvall walked into the room. His sudden and unannounced appearance startled the little group, and they stared at him in amazement. Jean alone recognized him, and he rose quickly to his feet.

"The Red Ranger!" he gasped, and his face grew pale with apprehension. He knew that it must be something out of the ordinary that would cause Paul to confront his enemies and thus place himself at their mercy. And so did Sieur de Soulanges. He, too, rose to his feet, advanced a few steps and waited. It was a tense dramatic situation. As these two men met for the first time each swiftly estimated the other. The commander was strongly impressed not only by the visitor's courage, but also by his straight tall form, his steady fearless eyes, and his easy manly bearing. Here was a man after his own heart, and he felt that he could trust him even though he was his deadly enemy.

And Paul's opinion of de Soulanges was no less favorable. He had seen him once before at the capture of the fort when his father had been killed. But he had no clear recollection of the French commander, owing to the confusion and excitement that had then prevailed. But he had always thought of him as a villain, a cruel monster of iniquity. But now he saw before him a man of fine personal appearance, and every inch a soldier. He longed to fight him to see what he could do. Intuitively he laid his right hand upon the handle of his knife at his belt. The commander seeing this movement, gave a slight start and was about to reach for his sword at his side. Then a sudden smile broke over his stern face like sunshine from thick clouds. He stepped swiftly forward and held out his right hand. Surprised beyond measure, Paul stared hard and then a peculiar thrill passed through his body. Here was the man who had caused his father's death. Instead of shaking hands with his enemy, he had a great desire to leap upon him and fight him to the finish. His face, eyes and tense body expressed his feeling. Slowly he drew the knife from its sheath. His eyes never left the commander's face. The wild beast within him was stirred, and he seemed like a watchful tiger ready to spring.

Sieur de Soulanges knew how to control himself. He was very calm and showed no sign of fear. He was a great fighter and nothing would have pleased him better than to cross swords with a worthy opponent. But he did not wish to fight a man armed only with a sheath-knife. Such a thing would have been beneath his dignity. Had he known, though, of Paul's skill with his knife he would not have felt so confident. But he did not know, which, perhaps, was fortunate. He spoke, and his voice was friendly.

"This is an unexpected pleasure. Allow me to welcome you to Fort Jemseg. Have you dined? We have an abundance left," and he motioned to the table.

These agreeable words caused Paul to drop the knife back into its sheath. He straightened suddenly up from his somewhat crouching position and squared his shoulders.

"I come to warn you of danger," he said. "The Dutchmen are coming."

This startling announcement brought all the men to their feet in an instant. An anxious expression came into the commander's eyes as he fixed them keenly upon the messenger's face.

"The Dutchmen are coming! What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. A Dutch man of war, loaded with men, is on its way here. They destroyed Pierre LeNoir's post on Isle au Garce last night."

Sieur de Soulanges stood like a statue for a few seconds. His face darkened, and his eyes blazed with anger. Even Paul was deeply impressed by his wrathful appearance.

"How do you know this, young man? Are you sure?"

"I only know what I have seen," Paul replied, somewhat nettled. "I saw it all. The Dutchmen attacked and destroyed the post. We rescued Pierre's daughter, and then waited some distance up river to learn what the enemy intended to do. There was no wind during the first part of the morning, but when a breeze came up with the tide, the man of war appeared around the island and headed up river. She should be here before long."

"Is she a big ship?"

"Very big, and crowded with men, as I said."

"Ah! It must be the *Flying Horse* with the pirate, Aernouts, in command. I knew he was raiding along the coast, but never expected him to come here."

This news filled his heart with dismay. He knew that his fort was in no position to withstand a siege, and his handful of men would be powerless against the raiders. But he would not give up without a struggle. He spoke briefly to his men to see to the guns, and then turned to Paul.

"Where is your canoe?"

"Down by the landing. My Indians and Pierre's daughter are there."

The commander stood for a minute lost in thought. He then looked keenly into the young man's eyes.

"Will you do me a favor? I feel I can trust you."

"What is it?"

"I want you to take my wife and little baby girl to a place of safety. They must not be here when the raiders come. Something might happen to them should those devils capture this place."

"Where shall I take them?"

"Up the creek on the opposite side of the river. I have had a cabin built for just such an emergency as this. I shall send a canoe or two along with you to carry blankets and provisions. You know the way, of course, up the Jemseg, and then to the main river by the little creek and the portage."

"I know it very well. You can leave everything to me. But what about Pierre's daughter?"

"Take her along, too. She can help my wife."

Paul watched the commander as he walked across the room and passed through a door on the left. What a man! And he was his deadliest enemy! Paul stood very still and erect for a few minutes. Admiration and hatred had so unexpectedly clashed that he was bewildered. The men had all gone, and Jean also. Paul turned and left the building. As he reached the big gate of the palisade, a bell from one of the bastions sounded forth its warning of danger to the few people living near the fort. He looked down river, and far in the distance he beheld the gleaming sails of the *Flying Horse* bearing strongly upward on her mission of destruction.

CHAPTER VI

SLEUTH-HOUNDS OF THE NIGHT

The boom of a ship's cannon shattered the air of the clear August afternoon. It echoed over the few patches of cultivated ground and reverberated among the reaches of the great dark forest. It brought panic to several feeding crows, and startled a gray hawk perched upon a branch of a towering pine tree. It sounded to the left down across water and lowlands, causing flocks of wild ducks to rise on rapid wing from reeds and rushes.

Marie Franis heard it, and with a low moan she clasped her babe to her breast and pressed its soft cheek against her own, wet with tears. She had remained calm and self-possessed until now. Even when she had bade her husband farewell she had borne up bravely for his sake. And during the voyage up the Jemseg, across the portage to the main river, and then over another carrying-place to the water beyond, she had shown no outward sign of emotion. But when that ominous cannon boom reached her ears, she could restrain herself no longer. She knew full well its meaning. It was the prelude of death and destruction, the opening note in the carnage which must inevitably follow. Neither was it long delayed. The fight was now on in earnest Marie was well aware. Lifting her head she listened with strained attention. Her face was pale, and her body trembled. She thought of her husband defending the fort against such overwhelming odds. She longed to be with him, and but for the babe she would never have left his side.

And as she listened, the fort guns suddenly ceased, and she knew that the worst had come. A while longer the ship's guns roared, and then were silent. Their work was done, and the fort in the wilderness was nothing but a mass of broken and twisted logs. Marie did not need words to tell her this. She surmised it only too truly. And what of her husband! Again she bowed her head to the child asleep in her arms.

Lucille, crouched at her feet in the bottom of the canoe, looked up into Marie's face. In her eyes was an expression of fear and sympathy. She remembered what havoc the *Flying Horse* had wrought at Isle au Garce, and her own narrow escape. And but for the Red Ranger she would have been carried off by those cruel raiders. Several times she had glanced at Paul as he sat astern. But he had not seemed to notice her, so intent was he upon his work. How grand and noble he looked to her. And this was the man her father and others so greatly feared. She had heard them talk about him, and from what they said she had considered the Red Ranger a most terrible person, gliding stealthily along forest trails, and over rivers and lakes bent upon destruction and revenge. Jean had told her what a dangerous man he was, and she had never doubted his word.

But Paul did not seem terrible to her now as his body moved at each paddle thrust in rhythm with the swaying Indians before him. His eyes were not fierce, and his face had a pleasing expression. Perhaps her father and Jean had been mistaken. She hoped so, anyway, and she wished that he would look at her.

Although Paul did not seem to take any notice of Lucille, he saw more than she imagined. He did not miss a single movement of her body, nor the shy glances she gave him. But she belonged to Jean, and to him she had given her heart, so why should he think about her any more? This was not easy, however, as she had been so much in his mind for months past. And now that she was near, but a few feet away, he had a great desire to look upon her, to feast his eyes upon her face and form. The image he had enshrined in his heart was now a breathing reality. Yet it was necessary for him to assume the indifferent and stoical manner of the natives. She belonged to another, so he was nothing to her. When he was through with this business he would hurry away and forget her, so he decided, as he pointed the canoe towards the narrow creek on the western shore.

Little had been said since leaving the fort. Marie was too much overcome with despair for words. Lucille, naturally bright and talkative, was awed into silence by her companion's grief. As for Paul and the Indians, speech was unnecessary. Theirs was the spirit of the wild, an instinct which prompted and directed them more unerringly than the spoken word.

It was Louise Elizabeth who broke the spell as she at length opened her eyes, looked up into her mother's face and smiled. This wee maiden had no fear of cruel raiders. The dangers of the wilderness held no terror for her. Wherever her mother was that was her home, her fortress, and her kingdom. She gave a gurgle of delight, and kicked her feet in the exuberance of her joy. The mother smiled through her tears, and Lucille clapped her hands with pleasure.

"What a darling!" she exclaimed. "May I hold her, Madame? She won't be afraid of me."

"You may, but be very careful of her."

"I will, Madame. I love babies, but I never held a white one before—only Indian babies, and they are so dirty."

Paul's heart quickened as he saw Lucille take the little one in her arms. It was a beautiful scene to him, especially the girl's flushed face as she gazed tenderly upon the babe. He had often seen Indian mothers fondle their papooses, but his heart had never been stirred as now. It was the girl who made all the difference.

A slight exclamation from Kondo aroused him. The Indian had ceased paddling and was looking down the narrow channel which led to the main river below. As Paul turned, a dark speck and the gleam of a paddle blade away in the distance met his eyes. At once the caution and suspicion of the wild swept upon him. Forgotten was the beautiful scene before him. Something was there on the water unknown to him, and that spelled danger.

"It must be the raiders, Kondo."

"Ah, ah. Big canoe."

"Big canoe," echoed Matta.

Paul stared a few minutes and an angry light appeared in his eyes.

"They must be after us. Some one is guiding them who knows the river well. We must make for the lake where we can watch them."

"Ah, ah. Good." Kondo agreed.

"Ah, ah. Good," Matta repeated.

Once more the canoe sped forward, through the narrow inlet and into the lake beyond. Instead, however, of making for the log cabin on the island ahead, Paul steered to the right towards an opening which could be dimly seen. The other canoes followed, the occupants greatly puzzled as to the meaning of this strange course. Several times Paul looked back, but when they at length passed through the opening into the upper lake and were securely hidden from view on the northern side, an expression of satisfaction appeared in his eyes. He looked at Madame de Soulanges, and smiled.

"We have escaped them so far, and are safe for a while," he informed her. "But if they follow us here we shall have to cross to the main river farther up. Do not be afraid, for they cannot catch us. You all remain here while the Indians and I keep watch."

"You are very good," Marie replied. "I know you will save us. But why are the raiders following us?"

"I cannot say, Madame. But I would like to know who is their guide, and I hope to find out."

"When?"

"To-night, most likely. I do not believe they will follow us up in the lake by day. They are too cowardly for that. They will wait for darkness and try to surprise us then."

"But why should they wish to capture us?"

"Raiders are never satisfied. Why did they destroy LeNoir's post and then attack Fort Jemseg? What was there to gain? Nothing much. It was revenge, and that will drive men far. But they won't harm you and the baby, Madame. Something may happen to them."

Paul said no more, but in this strong calm man Marie felt a great confidence. And so did Lucille. He was now a hero in her eyes, and she felt a thrill of pleasure whenever she looked at him.

While the others, twelve in all, went ashore, Paul and his two Indians kept watch upon the narrow opening to the lake beyond. Quietness reigned around them. Gradually the afternoon wore on to evening. Then when darkness had enshrouded the land, Paul and the Indians entered their canoe and sped silently southward. They were again the sleuth-

hounds of the wild, cautious and terrible. Like weird spectres they glided along close to the shore through the deep shadows of the over-arching trees. Not a word was spoken, and their paddle blades caressed the water like softest down.

Reaching at length the narrow opening, they ran their canoe ashore, and Paul stepped out. Silently he threaded his way among the trees until he came near the shore on the opposite side of the long narrow point of land. Here he paused and listened. Hearing nothing, he dropped upon his hands and knees and crept forward to the very edge of the thick bushes. The dull leaden river spread out before him, but no sign of life could he see or hear. A soft gentle breeze drifting in from the west ruffled the surface of the water, the leaves, and the rushes around him. Here he waited, wondering if he had been mistaken. Perhaps the boat they had seen that afternoon had not been pursuing them, after all. Some of the raiders might have been on an exploration trip, and had long since gone back to the frigate. This idea annoyed him, for what would Madame and the others think of his blunder? Nevertheless, he could not rid himself of the idea that he had not been mistaken. Something had warned him of danger. It was like a sixth sense, common to the creatures of the forest. It had never failed him in the past, and he believed that it had not deceived him now. Anyway, he would wait a while longer, and if nothing happened he would go down to the fort and find out what was taking place there. Madame would like to know, he was certain.

For some time he remained in a watchful and listening attitude. At length a sound down river arrested his attention. It was very faint at first, but gradually became louder. He knew its meaning. A boat was coming towards him. He had not been mistaken, after all. The raiders were coming under cover of night for some special purpose. At this thought his body became tense and alert like some wild animal ready to spring.

The sound of oars in their row-locks was more distinct now, and ere long he could see the dim form of a boat but a short distance away. As it reached the opening into the lake, the rowing ceased, and low voices could be heard. What they said he could not at first distinguish until the boat had drifted nearer before the wind. Two only were talking, and he at once knew who they were, Jean LeJeune and Pete LeVine. Paul was only able to catch part of their conversation, but it was all he needed. And what he heard filled his heart with a burning rage. They had come to capture him and carry off Lucille. LeJeune wanted the girl. Their words were sharp, and they seemed on the verge of a quarrel. Pete was evidently not pleased with this night venture, and said so.

"Let's get through with this fool business at once. I'm sleepy, and so are the Dutchmen. They were up all last night and are not in a pleasant mood."

"We'll have to wait a while yet," Jean replied. "It's not late enough. We can't take any chance when the Red Ranger is around."

"So you expect to get him?"

"I do, dead or alive. The posts are now destroyed, and with that devil out of the way we'll have the full Indian trade to ourselves. I can manage the other rangers, all right. They are like sheep and will follow a leader any time."

"And you hope to get the girl in the bargain?"

"I certainly do. Old LeNoir thinks I'm going to marry her. But what do I want with a wife always tagging after me. No, I just want her for a while, and then she can go to the devil, for all I care. That's what women are for, anyway."

"But suppose you don't get her, Jean? Something might happen before you can lay your hands upon her. One can never be sure of anything when the Red Ranger is around."

"Oh, I can arrange that, all right. We'll let the Dutchmen go first. It's lucky they don't understand what we're saying. They think it's booty we're after, and that they'll get a big haul. They're fighting demons, so while they're attending to the Red Ranger and his Indian devils I'll make love to the girl. She thinks a lot of me, and she'll be so pleased to have me save her from the raiders, ha, ha. Yes, I'll save her, for myself."

Paul had heard enough. He knew that Jean was a villain, but he had never suspected him of such contemptible treachery. So he was planning to get the Red Ranger and the girl. Well, there might be some hitch in his plot.

Without a sound he made his way back to the canoe. In a low whisper he explained to the Indians his plan. Intuitively their right hands touched the keen hatchets at their waists to be sure that they were there. Paul did likewise. Then when

the canoe had left the shore, it was driven through the narrow opening towards the boat beyond. Like a catapult it bore down upon the raiders. As it swept by three hatchets cleaved the air, and three blows fell upon the bodies of three startled men. Yells of fear, shrieks of pain, and wild curses rent the night. A panic ensued, and the boat was in danger of being capsized. Several groped for their muskets, but their hands had barely touched the weapons when again that terror of the night shot by on the opposite side, and three more slashing blows fell, more deadly than the first. The Dutchmen did not lack courage, and they were hardened by years of danger and daring deeds, and fighting was their life. But this silent and mysterious attack was more than flesh and blood could endure. They imagined the whole river was full of revengeful demons, bent upon their destruction. The unknown wilderness surrounded them, and the tales they had heard about the cruel and bloody-thirsty Indians added fuel to their imagination. Those who were not wounded seized the oars and sent the boat reeling down stream. Jean LeJeune was no longer in command. He was huddled in the bottom of the craft bleeding and half paralyzed with fear and pain.

Close to the shore Paul and the Indians waited and listened until the last sound of the retreating boat had died in the distance. They then turned and paddled swiftly up across the lake. They had done their work well. They had struck swift and sure, and they were satisfied.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The morning sun found LeNoir seated upon the high bank overlooking Isle au Garce. He was wrapped in a thick coarse blanket, drawn closely about his body. His wet clothes were spread out upon the ground waiting for the sun to dry them. It was fortunate that Pierre had his secret cave in the side of the hill where he kept his supplies for the trade with the Indians. But for the blanket he had taken from a pile in the storehouse, he would have been most uncomfortable in his wet garments through the chilly hours of the night. When he had prepared this secret place during the previous spring against any raiders who might be prowling around, he little realised that in a few months it would prove of such value. It was merely a great hole among the rocks which he had dug with considerable effort. The entrance was small and was concealed by a number of large flat stones. A thick clump of cedar and fir trees surrounded it in front, and the hill stood high and abrupt behind. It thus served as an admirable secret place for the storing of extra supplies. It was known to himself alone, so he imagined, and he only visited the place by night, and then always in a roundabout way, generally from the point where he had landed after his swim from the *Flying Horse* the evening before.

Since dawn Pierre's eyes had been fixed upon the frigate, now lying far out in the river. He surmised that the Dutchmen had moved out into midstream for fear of an attack by Indians. To them the great silent, forest-covered land held many unknown dangers, so it was necessary to be careful and not remain too close into shore. Pierre's hands clutched the turf before him as he watched that foreign vessel. His eyes glowed with the light of hatred, and his heart burned with an intense rage. He had seen the burning of his buildings, and listened to the wild shouts of the raiders as they returned to their ship. He had heard them making merry on board, and had watched the burning embers of his ruined post. And what had happened to Lucille? Had the Dutchmen taken her with them? The idea was terrible, and he could do nothing to save her. To go to the island with the raiders so near would be madness. Perhaps some of them were still there, and should he fall again into their hands he knew only too well what his fate would be.

The sun rose above the far-off eastern hills, and the trees along the shore were reflected in the mirror-like river at their feet. The island lay like an emerald jewel in a setting of polished ebony. Birds darted to and fro, filling the air with their harmonious notes. But Pierre was in no mood for the charms of the world around him. There was no peace in his heart, but only a heavy despair and a nameless fear concerning Lucille.

As he watched the becalmed frigate he wondered what the Dutchmen intended to do. Would they continue on their way without a pilot? They might consider the river as wide above Isle au Garce as below and venture forth without anyone to guide them. He hoped that they would do so, for then the frigate would surely run aground before she had gone far. What a rich revenge it would be to see the *Flying Horse* hard on a bar or a mud flat with little chance of getting her clear. The Dutchmen would be stranded, and he easily imagined their serious predicament, especially should the Indians sweep down upon them in the dead of night.

Thus all the morning Pierre waited and watched. When his clothes were thoroughly dried he dressed himself. Then going to his cave he drank a mug of rum from a full jug he kept there, and ate a smoked herring. He had a good supply of fish which he had caught and cured during the spring run. Thus refreshed, he left the cave, carrying in his hand a trade-axe. He felt stronger now, and ready for action as soon as the Dutchmen left. But not until a breeze came up on the flood-tide did the *Flying Horse* spread her gray and weather-beaten canvas and head up river. Pierre watched her as she bore up by the three islands and disappeared from view around Point au Chenes. He then left the high bank and went down to the river. Here he fashioned a raft from several drift logs, and with a long pole propelled the ramshackle affair over to the sandy point which ran out like a long finger from the island.

It did not take him long to reach the place where his post had stood. Nothing remained but charred and blackened sticks, with several iron pots strewed around outside the circle of ruin. The Dutchmen had been most thorough in their work of destruction. And where was Lucille? He looked eagerly around, and called aloud. The only response was a hoarse caw, as Minuit, the crow, flopped down and perched upon one of the burnt sticks. Pierre had forgotten all about this bird, and its sudden appearance startled him, while a feeling of superstitious awe came into his heart. That crow had always seemed to him a thing of ill-omen, and only for Lucille's sake had he spared it when it first came to make its home with them. He hated and feared it. To him it seemed like an embodiment of the evil one which knew of his deed at Fort la Tour years ago. Its presence always made him uneasy. Its caw had a mocking sound to his ears, and whenever it perched

nearby its sharp little eyes appeared to be searching his very soul. Several times he had tried to drive it away, but all in vain. It would fly off with an angry caw, but it always returned as impudent and provoking as before. So now its presence was most disturbing. Had it come to gloat over him in his distress? Its caw sounded to him like a diabolical cry of triumph. And to see it before him, blacker than the stick upon which it was perched, angered him. He was about to pick up a stone to hurl at the bird, when old Marie suddenly appeared from among the trees. Seeing Pierre, she threw up her hands in astonishment, and quickened her steps. Her wrinkled face was white and haggard, and she tottered as she walked.

"What's wrong?" Pierre asked. "Where is Lucille? Where is Noel?"

"Lucille is gone. I know not where. The raiders have taken Noel. Mon Dieu! I am almost crazy."

"And you do not know what has become of Lucille?"

"I do not. I was at home in the house and did not know the raiders were here until the cannon roared. I hunted for Lucille, but could not find her."

"But why didn't Noel take you and Lucille away in the canoe? There was plenty of time."

"I know there was, but he did not come near me. He stayed at the post, and I saw the raiders take him away. He told me once that if an enemy came he would not leave because you had placed him in charge."

"He's a fool," Pierre growled. "Did he think he could do anything against those raiders?"

"But you know how stubborn Noel is, Pierre. He was always that way."

"Yes, yes, I know. But look what has come of his stubbornness. He is a prisoner, and Lucille is, too, for all I know. It is hard to tell what those Dutchmen will do with her."

"Dutchmen!" Marie cried. "Are those raiders Dutch?"

"They are, and devils, at that."

"But I thought they are Frenchmen. Are you sure they are Dutch?"

"I am, for they caught me at the mouth of the river. I piloted them up here, but escaped last night."

"But are they all Dutchmen, Pierre?"

"Why do you ask that, Marie?"

"Because the man over there among the trees is a Frenchman. He came with the raiders."

Greatly startled, Pierre stared at the woman as if he had not heard aright.

"What man? A Frenchman, you say? Who is he?"

Marie shrugged her shoulder and shook her head.

"How should I know who he is? I found him this morning lying on the ground, and moaning with pain. I did what I could for him, and gave him some rum which revived him. Then when he had eaten some food he began to talk and ask questions."

"Where did you get the rum and the food, Marie?"

"From our cabin, of course. The raiders knew nothing about our house, for they did not search the island. Noel was very wise when he built our place over there so it could not be seen from the river. Poor man! I hope no harm will come to him."

Pierre, however, hardly heard these words, for he was thinking of the Frenchman. He must be LeRoi, for there was no other Frenchman on the *Flying Horse*. But what had happened to him? Had the Dutchmen tried to kill him? Did they suspect him of allowing their captured pilot to escape? It was only natural that LeRoi's presence on the island should

cause Pierre considerable uneasiness. It was strange that he had been stricken down and left so near the very man he had been seeking for many years. What was the meaning of that? Pierre wondered. What mysterious fate had brought him here above all places? Had he at last reached the end of his long search? And would that same fate reveal to him the man who had put his father to death?

Old Marie was surprised at the trader's silence and absent-minded manner. She was a woman of action and quick words, as her slow-moving and quiet husband knew only too well. Yet she was good-hearted, so Pierre's apparent indifference to the injured man annoyed her.

"What's come over you, Pierre?" she demanded. "You have a strange look in your eyes. Is it because Lucille is gone? But haven't I lost Noel? And isn't a helpless man lying over there to be attended to? What will the Bon Dieu think if we let him die without doing all we can for him? Do you think you will ever get into heaven if you don't do something? St. Peter will say to you, 'Pierre LeNoir, I will not let you in because you neglected a sick man on Isle au Garce'. That's what he'll say, and all the money you have saved will do you no good then."

These words startled Pierre and made him angry, for there was really murder in his heart. He had LeRoi at his mercy, and should something happen to him, where was the law that could bring his slayer to justice? In this wilderness each man was now a law unto himself, so if LeRoi should die, there would be no one to make any investigation. He was a stranger, anyway, and that would make it all the easier. The rangers knew nothing about LeRoi, and the Dutchmen would not care what happened to him. Perhaps they had tried to kill him, and had left him on the island thinking that he was dead. Such were his thoughts as he stood there. Then to be sternly reminded by this old woman of the bar of justice which he could not escape stung him to the quick.

"Hold your tongue," he ordered. "You talk too much."

"Talk too much!" Marie cried. "Mon Dieu! If I don't talk you will do nothing. You are just like Noel. I have to keep at him all the time to get him to do anything. Men are all alike, I guess."

"Well, I am not Noel, remember, and you can't drive me with your whip of a tongue. If you are wise you will let it rest some when you are with me. Take me to that man."

Awed by the trader's rough words and stern look, Marie said nothing more, but turned and led the way across the clearing to the woods beyond. And ahead of them flew Minuit, the crow, cawing hoarsely like a mocking demon, so it seemed to Pierre.

CHAPTER VIII

FEAR

Seated upon the ground with his back against a big butternut tree, LeRoi presented a picture of utter helplessness. He was staring straight before him in an unseeing manner. He turned his head as Pierre approached, but showed no sign of recognition. He seemed like a man in a dream, and his eyes had the expression of one trying to comprehend something which had eluded him. Pierre noticed this, and at once his anger subsided. This was not the debonair Frenchman he had known on board the *Flying Horse*. Something out of the ordinary must have happened to effect such a change. He spoke to him, but received no reply.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Don't you remember me?"

LeRoi looked at him, and slowly shook his head.

"I don't know you. I never saw you before."

"You don't know me! Why, I am Pierre LeNoir who was captured by the Dutchmen. I piloted them to this place."

A puzzled expression came into LeRoi's eyes. His brow wrinkled as if he were trying to recall something. He then lowered his head and remained silent.

Pierre did not know what to do. LeRoi had either lost his senses or was pretending not to remember. It was Marie who enlightened him.

"He has been hurt on the head," she whispered. "There is a big bruise there which you can see for yourself. Somebody must have struck him a nasty blow."

"I believe you are right, Marie. He has met with foul play. The Dutchmen must have tried to kill him. We shall take him to your house, for he cannot stay here."

LeRoi, however, showed no inclination to move. It was only when Pierre and Marie lifted him almost bodily from the ground did he permit himself to be guided through the forest. It was a slow and difficult undertaking, and LeRoi had to be upheld every step of the way. He was weak and staggered from side to side like a drunken man. Reaching the cabin, they laid him upon a rude cot, and in a few minutes he was fast asleep.

Pierre watched him for a while with a mingled feeling of fear and sympathy. He could not forget that he was his old friend's son. He noticed how much he resembled his father, the finely-chiselled face, the broad forehead and generous mouth. Yes, he was Jean LeRoi's son, without any doubt. But he was also the man Pierre feared more than any other on earth. His mission in life was to avenge his father's death. What if he should awake with a clear mind? And if not, what would he do with him? It was hardly likely that the Dutchmen would stop for him on their way down river. They had left him for dead, so it seemed, and no doubt were glad to be rid of him. But LeRoi's memory might return at any time, and suppose in some way he should learn who Pierre really was. Would it not be better if he never woke—better than to go through life an imbecile, and better, too, for Pierre, for then there would be no possible chance for LeRoi to fulfil his vow of vengeance.

Leaving the cabin, Pierre went back to the blackened ruins of his post. He wanted to think, and Marie's presence disturbed him. He had murder in his heart, and he was afraid lest she should see the guilt upon his face. She was a shrewd old woman, and he could not tell what she might suspect. He would wait until night, and under cover of darkness he would feel braver.

LeRoi slept all the afternoon. Marie kept faithful watch while Pierre busied himself clearing away the burnt logs from the place where his post had stood. He would build another, so he decided, and a better one than the first. It was hardly likely that the Dutchmen would return, so he would be safe for some time. He thought often of Lucille, and his heart was heavy. He felt certain that the enemy had carried her off, and he could do nothing to help her. As he brooded upon this, his anger flamed to a white heat and he longed for revenge. It was easy then to think of LeRoi's death. Was he not one of the raiders, even though a Frenchman? Had he not come with them to assist in the work of destruction?

It was after dark when he again went back to the cabin. LeRoi was awake, staring before him with a vacant look in his eyes. Marie was seated by his side.

"He has been talking ever since he woke," she said. "He thinks he is chasing a man who killed his father. Oh!"

This exclamation was caused by LeRoi's sudden agitation. He had lifted his head and shoulders from the bed and was looking straight at Pierre. His eyes were staring wide with fear.

"There he is!" he cried. "Don't you see him? It is Gervais Reynard. He killed my father, and he wants to kill me. Save me! Don't let him get me!"

He started to leap from the bed, but Pierre pushed him back.

"I won't let him hurt you," he told him. "Reynard won't get you."

"But he will! He's right there," the unhappy man insisted. "Drive him away!"

Pierre was trembling, and his face was ghastly. It was fortunate that Marie attributed his agitation to his concern for the raving man.

"He's very bad, poor fellow," she whispered. "I wonder what we can do for him."

But Pierre did not hear her words. He was staring at LeRoi. What was he to do with this unfortunate man? How could he endure his wild raving? It was the voice of condemnation coming from the lips of this man. It was terrible and awe-inspiring. He shrank back and edged towards the door.

"I must not stay here, Marie, for I only disturb him. He imagines strange things, and the sight of a man disturbs him. He will sleep again, maybe, and if you need me I shall be over at the post."

"Oh, I won't need you, Pierre. You wouldn't be any good for, you are almost scared to death. You're not used to a man when he acts like this. But I am, for when Noel gets drunk he is far worse, and he's hard to manage. No, leave this poor fellow to me, and I'll make out all right."

Pierre was only too glad to get away from the cabin and the raving man. He slept that night upon the shore, wrapped in his blanket. He would wait for a while to see what happened to LeRoi, so he decided. He might die, so his death would not be upon his soul. But if he didn't, he would then have time to plan what to do with him.

He spent the next day anxiously watching up river for the return of the *Flying Horse*. It would not do for him to be on the island should the Dutchmen land. LeRoi was quiet, and he had slept most of the night, so Marie informed him.

"He didn't talk much," she said, "and when he woke this morning he just looked around as if wondering where he was. He ate something, too, so that is encouraging. He somehow reminds me of my own son I lost years ago. Anyway, I am going to look after him for the sake of Peirott."

It was evening before the *Flying Horse* made its appearance far up river. Pierre standing on the shore, caught the first glimpse of her sails as she swept around Point au Chenes beating down before a stiff southwesterly wind. Although he knew it would take her some time to reach Isle au Garce, he was about to hurry to the canoe to escape to the mainland, when Marie stood suddenly before him. She was greatly excited, and spoke rapidly.

"He's gone!" she cried. "He's taken the canoe!"

"What do you mean?" Pierre demanded. "Who's gone?"

"The sick man, of course. He leaped out of bed, left the house and ran to the shore. Before I could catch him he had pushed off the canoe, jumped in and paddled away."

Pierre was dumbfounded. This was startling news. Without a word he dashed through the forest, and as the river on the western side of the island appeared to view, he knew that what Marie had told him was true. He saw LeRoi some distance away paddling strongly across the wide stretch of water between the two islands. Judging by his course, he was heading for the main channel. Pierre could hardly believe his senses. By the way he handled the paddle he did not seem at all like a demented man. Then an idea flashed into his mind. Had LeRoi been pretending to be mad? Did he have some

special reason for acting like an imbecile? It seemed so, and he had kept up the deception until the appearance of the *Flying Horse*, and had made off to meet her. Pierre's heart stirred with anger as he thought of this. He should never have let LeRoi leave the island. And now that he was gone, there was no telling when he would return to avenge his father's death. In some mysterious way he must have learned who Pierre was. This was a terrible thought, and his body shook with fear. Would he bring the Dutchmen ashore to help him catch the man he had been seeking for years? And he had taken the canoe! But there was the raft, so he could escape by that. He turned to Marie who was standing by his side.

"I must leave this island. You come with me. The raiders will soon be here."

"No no, I shall not go, Pierre. Noel may come back, and I must be here when he comes. And that crazy man may come, too, and he will need me."

"Yes, he'll come back, Marie, and the Dutchmen with him to destroy your cabin and carry you away. He wasn't as crazy as he acted."

"What makes you say that, Pierre? You know he is raving mad."

"H'm, he fooled us, all right. Look at him now. He knows what he's doing and where he's going. He'll tell the raiders about us. We had better get away while there is time."

"I am not going with you, Pierre. And I don't believe what you say about that man. He is crazy, and you should have heard what he said when he left the shore."

"What, Marie?"

"His eyes were full of terror, and he said that Reynard, the man who killed his father, was chasing him. That's what he said, and no man in his right mind ever looked and talked the way he did."

Pierre made no reply. He stood watching the speeding canoe until it had disappeared around the lower end of Isle de Trent Sols. Then the gray sails of the *Flying Horse* appeared off Isle au Nois. Soon LeRoi would be on board and the Dutchmen would know about the escaped pilot. But they would never catch him, for on the mainland, hidden in the great forest, he would defy all successful pursuit.

Again he appealed to Marie to go with him. She was obdurate, however, and determined to wait for Noel and the sick man. There was nothing, therefore, that Pierre could do, so leaving the shore he hurried across the island to his rude raft moored upon the sandy bar.

CHAPTER IX

VISITORS

Huddled on the bank near his storehouse Pierre watched the *Flying Horse* as she beat her way downstream. Presently there sounded forth the boom of a cannon. Shot after shot succeeded one another, and at first Pierre imagined that the raiders were firing upon Isle au Garce. In a few minutes, however, he understood the cause. Glancing up river towards Point au Chenes, he could see from his elevated position a large flotilla of canoes which he knew contained Indians. They were evidently pursuing the frigate, and the shots he heard were intended for them. He was somewhat surprised at this, for the natives must surely know that they could not come anywhere near an armed vessel under full sail in the day time.

Ere long the frigate could be clearly seen in the long open space between the middle and the lower islands. She was holding well to the channel as she raced from side to side. That a pilot thoroughly acquainted with the river was directing her course was quite apparent, and at once Pierre remembered Noel. Yes, the Dutchmen must be using the old man as guide. And was Lucille there, too? And what had been her fate? Would she be cast aside with Noel at the mouth of the river when the raiders had no more use for her? And would she come back a wreck in body and mind? This was a horrible thought, and Pierre shook his clenched fist towards the frigate, and hurled curse after curse at the raiders.

The *Flying Horse* held steadily on her way down river, past the island and into the wide stretch of water below. The Indians were now nowhere to be seen, for the islands hid them from view. After waiting for some time and they did not appear, Pierre felt certain that they had given up the pursuit. He surmised, however, that they had hoped the frigate would ground on a bar where the river was narrow and difficult to navigate. But below the island where the river was very wide there would be little or no risk. Had the vessel grounded farther up, it would have been a serious matter to the raiders, for then the Indians would have had them at their mercy when night closed down. But the frigate was now safe so far as the natives were concerned, and Pierre was glad to see her sailing away in the distance. He was master of his own island once more, and it was hardly likely that he would be again disturbed for some time.

He wondered what had become of Fort Jemseg. Had the place been destroyed and the commander taken prisoner? If so, the trade with the Indians there would be at an end. Why not make Isle au Garce the centre of trade? It was an alluring prospect, and Pierre's heart thrilled at the thought. If he could induce the natives to bring their furs to him, he would soon be a very rich man. Forgotten for a while was his anxiety about Lucille and his fear of LeRoi. He would be wealthy and ere long he would command the trade on the river and its tributaries. There would be only the coureurs de bois to contend with, but if he could win the Indians he would not mind the opposition of the French rangers. But how was he to get the natives to come to him? Isle au Garce was far down the river, and the rangers would be on the alert farther up to intercept the valuable furs. He needed somebody to aid him, one who had considerable influence with the Indians, and who could induce them to come to Isle au Garce as they had hitherto gone to Fort Jemseg.

Thinking thus, he crossed over to the island and went at once to Noel's cabin. Marie was still standing upon the shore where he had left her. She was looking intently out over the water towards the middle island where the Indians were gathered in their canoes. For a while they remained there, and Pierre wondered what they intended to do. It was very seldom that such a large band came down river, and Pierre felt uneasy. The raiders had slipped from their grasp, so they would be angry and might seek revenge elsewhere. Whether Dutch or French made little difference to them. They were all intruders into their rightful domain and with Fort Jemseg destroyed, they might consider it an opportune time to drive all other white men out of the country. From long experience Pierre knew the instability of the natives. They were savages, and their short contact with Christianity had little restraining effect upon their wild primitive passions when aroused. They were fighters, eager and ready at any time to go on the warpath against an enemy. Pierre knew all this, and while he coveted the valuable furs, he stood in considerable awe of the wandering dusky hunters. But he had always been fair in his dealings with them he believed, so he hoped that this reputation would stand him in good stead now.

And as he stood upon the shore and anxiously watched the Indians in the distance, he saw one canoe detach itself from the others and head straight for his island. It came with great speed, and soon he could tell that it was being driven by three men. As it came nearer he recognized the Red Ranger and his two native companions. That they were bearers of some important message he was well aware. He also knew that Paul Norvall had a powerful influence with the Indians. They had adopted him as one of themselves when he had fled to the forest after his father's death. And during the years

that followed he had so excelled in strength and daring that his fame spread to every band along the river and far into the interior of the country. To Pierre he had always seemed a mystery, and tales had drifted to him of Norvall's deeds in company with Kondo and Matta, his inseparable Indian comrades. If he could only win the good will of this strange restless Englishman, he believed it would go a long way towards bringing the valuable fur trade to Isle au Garce.

As the canoe touched the island and Paul sprang ashore, Pierre extended his right hand, and a smile overspread his face.

"Welcome to Isle au Garce, Monsieur," he accosted. "And welcome to your companions. It is good to see friends once more. Mon Dieu! we've had a bad time."

"From the Dutchmen?" Paul asked. "Did they do you much harm?"

"Harm! They destroyed my post, and carried off my daughter. Oh, what a terrible loss I have sustained!"

Paul looked keenly at the trader and noticed the troubled expression in his eyes. There must be some goodness in this man, after all, although it could hardly be suspected, judging by his unkempt and wild-eyed appearance. It was strange that he was the father of such a girl as Lucille.

"Your daughter is safe, Monsieur. The raiders did not get her."

Pierre started, leaned eagerly forward and peered into Norvall's eyes. He could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

"Are you telling me the truth? Lucille is safe, you say?"

"She is. I left her last night with Madame de Soulanges."

"With Madame de Soulanges! I do not understand. Did the raiders give her up!"

"No. I rescued her here the night your post was burnt. My Indians and I happened to be passing, and we were just in time to save your daughter from the hands of one of the raiders."

"Ah, did you kill him?"

"I knocked him senseless the minute he laid his hands upon Lucille. We didn't wait to see whether he was dead or alive."

"Where was that?"

"Just over there at the edge of the clearing."

"Mon Dieu! he must have been the Frenchman, Basil LeRoi. The Dutchmen left him behind."

"Where is he now?"

"He escaped just before you arrived. He must be with the raiders now."

"I think not, Monsieur. No one boarded the frigate, but we caught a strange-looking man in a canoe out there by that island. He seemed to be crazy, and he was shouting that someone was chasing him."

"That's LeRoi. So the Indians have him. What will they do with him?"

Norvall shrugged his right shoulder, but made no reply.

"Will they kill him?" Pierre eagerly asked.

"I do not know. It all depends."

"Upon what?"

"What the Indians decide. They have gone back to Point au Chenes to hold a pow-wow. They will settle the fate of the rangers, too."

"What do you mean, Monsieur?"

"That the Indians are aroused, and now that Fort Jemseg is destroyed, they wish to drive out all the whites."

"Ah, but they will not touch me, Monsieur, I hope. I am a good friend to the Indians. I have lived long among them, and have always treated them fair. You have much influence with them, I understand. Let us be partners and make Isle au Garce a big trading post, and we will soon be very rich. Don't you think that is a good idea, my friend?"

Norvall made no reply. At first this suggestion was not at all to his liking. He did not wish to have anything to do with LeNoir. But he did wish to become a great trader and make much money. Now that Fort Jemseg was demolished, the fur trade would go to the ones who had most favor with the Indians, and who could hold out the best inducements. But money would be needed, and he had none. Pierre, most likely, had sufficient to make a good start. It was a strong temptation. And then there was Lucille. As her father's partner he would be near her, and he could thus keep Jean LeJeune away. Yes, it was a very alluring prospect.

To Pierre silence meant consent, and his eyes glowed with animation. He had won the Red Ranger easier than he had expected, so he believed. And having gained him, he was sure of the Indians. Fortune was favoring him, after all. He could defy the whole band of rangers. And as for LeRoi, it would be easy to get rid of him. He turned to Marie who had been listening to every word.

"Hurry to your cabin and prepare supper," he ordered. "There is some meat left, and your bread is good. Rum, too, we must have to celebrate an occasion such as this. You know where it is."

Marie, however, had something to say, and she had been anxiously awaiting an opportunity to speak.

"I will get supper, Pierre, but first I want to ask Monsieur Norvall if he knows anything about my husband."

"I do not, Madame," Paul replied. "I have not seen him."

"The raiders have carried him off, then, and I shall never see him again! Poor Noel!"

"Stop your noise, old woman," Pierre sternly ordered. "Go and do as I say. We are all very hungry."

"Oh, it's very well for you to talk that way, Pierre," Marie retorted, "but what am I to do without Noel?"

"He'll come back to you, never fear. The Dutchmen will be glad to get clear of him when they have no more use for him. Don't worry, but go and get us something to eat."

Paul turned and spoke a few words to Kondo. The latter had been squatting upon the shore with Matta watching intently all that was taking place. He at once arose went to the canoe and brought back something which looked like a roll of birch bark. Paul opened it, and lying inside wrapped up with green leaves were several large slices of moose steak.

"Ah!" Pierre exclaimed. "Mon Dieu! I have not tasted fresh meat for weeks. What a supper we shall have!"

As Marie took the meat from Paul, a smile, the first since the arrival of the raiders, overspread her withered face. It was not the meat which caused this gleam of sunshine, but the courtesy and noble bearing of the young man standing before her. Her life had been a hard one. The dangers and many other discomforts of the wilderness she had borne with an unflinching spirit. For years she had wandered from place to place with her restless and unstable husband. Often she had lashed him with her tongue, and time and time again she had threatened to leave him, especially when he was ugly through drink. But notwithstanding her threats she had remained close to him through everything. It was only when she met Lucille LeNoir at Isle au Garce did any real happiness come into her life. That was two summers ago, and ever since then the bright warm-hearted girl had been to her as her own daughter. She took her to her lonely old heart, and the two were much together.

Marie, however, was not blind to the fascination Lucille's beauty had upon the rangers who occasionally visited the island. She was most watchful, and determined to do all in her power to shield the girl from the attention of rough and unworthy men. She had succeeded very well until the arrival of Jean LeJeune. She took a great dislike to him from the first, and she was worried at the favorable impression he made upon Lucille. She talked and reasoned with her, but all in vain. LeJeune's visits became more frequent, so he and Lucille saw much of each other. Marie was at her wit's end to know how to open the girl's eyes to the risk she was running in favoring such a worthless fellow as she knew Jean to be.

In Paul Norvall Marie found a young man to her liking. He was different from the wily and smooth-tongued LeJeune, and

if only Lucille would take a fancy to him she felt that all would be well. So when she heard Pierre's proposition, she was pleased, for then she knew that Paul and Lucille would see a great deal of each other. But there followed at once a great fear for the young man if he should enter into partnership with LeNoir. When it came to the question of money and his own interests Pierre was merciless, as she and Noel had found out to their sorrow. She had always been afraid of the trader, for something lurked in his eyes which she did not like, and which she could not understand.

As she prepared supper she thought much about the Red Ranger, and wondered how she could bring him and Lucille together, and at the same time keep him from entering into partnership with the girl's father.

CHAPTER X

THE KEE-WOOLS

Night had settled over river and land, a night of gentle softness and peace. The air was calm and laden with rich perfume of forest, marshland, and the creek above where grew wild flowers in abundance. The senses of the men seated upon the shore responded to the mystic influences surrounding them. Paul and Pierre had been talking for some time, while the Indians slept on the ground nearby. Marie sat at the door of her cabin, thinking such thoughts as come to a lonely old woman in a wilderness land. At times she looked towards the men as if wondering what they were talking about. The moon was riding above the far-off eastern hills, and a path of silver light streamed across the river and illuminated the shore near the cabin. It thus clearly revealed the men, but her eyes rested mostly upon Norvall's face which bore a thoughtful expression as he listened to Pierre's words. She longed to warn the young man, but so far there had been no opportunity.

"We can do it," Pierre was saying. "If we can gain the good will of the Indians we can control the fur trade on the river. Think what that will mean, my friend. We shall be very rich, and the king will give us large seignories. You can have the west side of the river, leagues from the sea. I shall take the east side, and that will include all the branch streams as well as the Big Lake region. What a seignory that will be, and I shall be ruler over all."

Paul made no reply, although he was thinking seriously. He could easily see that LeNoir was thinking chiefly of his own interests in planning to obtain possession of the east side of the river, which was far more valuable than the west. Would it not be the same with the fur trade should he enter into partnership with him? He believed it would be so, and a sense of distrust stole into his heart. Pierre was too eager and talked too much to suit him. He had heard Kondo call him "loose-tongue", and had wondered why. Now he understood, and knew that the name was appropriate. Accustomed as he was to the reticence of the Indians, Pierre's verbosity was hard to endure.

But Lucille was his daughter, and that meant a great deal. With her here, would not her beauty and fascinating ways more than off-set his dislike for her father? He believed so, and for the love that he had in his heart for the maiden he would be willing to put up with almost anything from LeNoir. As a partner, he could take everything, providing he himself had Lucille.

He was thinking of these things as Pierre talked. He was explaining about the fine post they would build on the island, and how they would keep it well-stocked with supplies for barter with the Indians.

"I shall stay here, my friend," he continued, "while you visit the camps and keep the rangers away. And you will need rum, plenty of it, for one can always make a good bargain with an Indian when he is more than half-drunk."

This statement startled Paul, although he showed no outward sign of his feeling. In these words Pierre had exposed the baseness of his heart. He would make the Indians drunk, and then take from them their valuable furs for almost nothing. This filled Paul's soul with an intense disgust for the man. His very presence was hateful to him now. The Indians were his friends, they had been good to him, and he would have no hand in robbing them. And, besides, he knew that the natives would resent such base dealings, and sooner or later would turn upon the unscrupulous traders.

Paul was about to explain this to Pierre, when the two Indians suddenly awoke, sat up and listened intently. Their usually impassive faces expressed anxiety and fear as they looked off towards the creek below Point au Chenes.

"Kee-wool-a-ta-mo-kik!" Kondo exclaimed.

"Kee-wool-a-ta-mo-kik!" Matta echoed. His body was trembling as he glanced towards the canoe drawn up on the shore.

Paul knew the meaning of that ominous word, and he sprang to his feet. Although Pierre had lived for years in the wilderness, he had never taken any interest in the Indians beyond trading with them. Their beliefs and superstitions he considered foolish and childish, and he had always treated them with contempt. Now, however, a sense of awe came into his heart as he watched the actions of the two Indians, and Norvall's apparent concern. His curiosity was aroused.

"What is it?" he asked, turning to Paul.

"The Kee-wools are around. Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't. What are the Kee-wools?"

"They are the invisible Indians who make their home up that creek over there. I call them 'Kee-wools' for short. The full name is too long to say."

"But what do they mean?"

"I don't know for sure. But the Indians are very much afraid of them. Look at Kondo and Matta. I never saw them so frightened before. They have often told me about the Kee-wools, and when they are heard up that creek it means trouble and death. It is seldom they hear them, but when they do, the Indians hurry back to their camps as fast as they can. We must go at once, for those natives at the point will be off up river in a short time."

"But I don't hear any sound from the creek," Pierre declared.

"I suppose not. Only the Indians hear. It is an instinct such as the birds and animals have which we cannot understand."

Paul was now standing at the bow of the canoe which the Indians had pushed into the water. He knew their impatience to be away to join the band at the point. And he himself was ready to go, for he was tired of Pierre. He soon found, however, that he was not to get rid of the trader so easily. LeNoir saw in Paul Norvall an opportunity to make a good impression upon the Indians at the point. If they could see him in friendly company with the Red Ranger, they would be inclined to look upon him with favor and consider him, perhaps, as one of themselves. This would, therefore, be of great assistance in inducing them to bring their furs to Isle au Garce. And, besides, he wished to see LeRoi again. He could not get him out of his mind, for he feared him as much as the natives feared the invisible Indians. Wherever LeRoi went he would be shouting out the word "Reynard" thinking that he was being chased by the man who had put his father to death. As he had left the island with that cry of fear upon his lips, the Indians might naturally think that LeNoir was his enemy. It was a very disturbing thought. He should never have allowed LeRoi to leave the island. But as he had escaped, he was most anxious to know if he still continued his wild ravings, and also how he was being treated by the Indians.

To get the canoe which LeRoi had taken was Pierre's only excuse for going over to the point.

"I must have it," he explained, "for I am almost helpless without it. Wait a minute until I go to the cabin."

Paul was tempted to push off and leave LeNoir behind. But just then Marie stood by his side. She laid her right hand upon his arm to detain him.

"Beware of the wolf," she whispered. "He has long cruel fangs. Keep away from this island."

The next instant she was gone, while Paul stared thoughtfully after her retreating form. He understood her meaning, and believed that in this old woman he had a true friend. Why she was enough interested in him to give such a warning he did not know. But he felt grateful, nevertheless, and more so when LeNoir returned a few minutes later with a pistol stuck into his belt.

"Why are you taking that along?" he curtly asked.

Pierre, nettled by the question, gave a sarcastic laugh.

"For the invisible Indians, maybe. But there are many more invisible things worse than the Kee-wools, so it's just as well to be prepared."

Paul said nothing more, but as the canoe sped on its way he thought over Marie's warning and Pierre's mysterious words. He had not expected this. During his months of dreaming about Lucille, the thought of her more than half wild father had never entered his mind. He was accustomed to the uncertain life of the wild, and he had always enjoyed pitting his strength and cunning against nature's merciless laws, even though he knew that those laws were bound to win in the end. Every man, no matter how strong, would surely be defeated some day. But in his first great love he had not reckoned with any difficulty. He had found it, however, in Jean LeJeune and in the girl's father. His soul was stirred with anger, and his paddle bent as he drove it furiously through the water. Kondo and Matta were well aware that something out of the ordinary was disturbing their young master. They responded to his paddle thrusts, and the canoe bounded forward at their mighty strokes.

Having traversed the large space of water on the western side of the two islands, they at length passed out into the main river through a narrow channel at the upper end of Isle au Nois. Ahead to the left was Point au Chenes, and as they rounded the big rock which jutted out into the water they could see a number of canoes leaving the sandy shore farther inland. Swiftly they sped towards them, and Kondo's voice rang forth an imperative order. At once the crafts were halted, and then an animated conversation ensued between Paul and the chief of the band. What they were saying Pierre did not know, for they spoke in the Indian tongue. When they at length ceased, and the natives had continued on their way, Paul headed the canoe for the shore. As it grounded upon the sand, he turned to the trader.

"We shall leave you here. Get out. Your canoe is over there," and he motioned to the left.

LeNoir was disappointed, and also somewhat awed by Norvall's words and curt manner. He did want the Indians to know that he was with the Red Ranger, and he was anxious to learn something about LeRoi.

"Are they afraid of the Kee-wools?" he asked as he stepped ashore. "Is that why they are leaving in such a hurry?"

"They are. And they are afraid, too, of that man Reynard who is chasing LeRoi. They have taken the crazy man with them, and they believe the Kee-wools will catch Reynard and kill him. That is what the chief said."

"Is LeRoi quiet now?" Pierre asked. "What did the chief tell you about him?"

"Yes, he is quite quiet. While he was here he sat upon the shore and made marks with a stick in the sand. The Indians think he is possessed with some magical power, and that he will protect them against their enemies."

"So they will take good care of him?"

"Oh, yes. They look upon him now as a very important person. Those marks upon the sand are great medicine, and the invisible Indians will not dare come near them."

A sudden fear smote Pierre's heart, and he made no reply. He stood and watched Paul and the Indians as they paddled swiftly away without one word of farewell, until they were lost to sight. He was trembling with a feeling of impending doom. The Kee-wools would capture and kill Reynard! That was the thought which kept beating through his brain until he felt that he would go mad. Strange invisible powers were surrounding him against which he was helpless.

Slowly he walked along the shore towards his canoe. The big oaks on his left cast long shadows upon the ground. To Pierre those ancient trees looked very menacing. They seemed like the hiding-places of those terrible Kee-wools, who were ready to sweep down upon him. Superstitious by nature, it was easy for him to be affected by those tales of the invisible Indians. He was anxious to leave the place and get back to his own island.

Presently he stopped suddenly and stared downward. He was standing on the smooth hard sand left moist by the ebbing tide. And just where the moonlight fell athwart the shore in a silver gleam he saw marks upon the sand right at his feet. Dropping upon his knees he examined them closely, and traced out with his fingers the rambling letters of the one word "Reynard." With a startled cry he sprang to his feet and looked wildly around. Seeing no one, he again looked fearfully down upon those straggling letters. So these were the marks LeRoi had made, and the invisible Indians would capture and kill Reynard! LeRoi had left the name, that the Kee-wools might know the right man to follow. LeNoir was more of a captive now than when on board the *Flying Horse*. He was bound by a terrible superstitious fear which held him in its o'er-mastering grip, and rendered him incapable of reasonable thought. An intense panic possessed him, and he ran as for life to the canoe. In another minute he was speeding through the water, paddling as he had never paddled before. Often he glanced to the right as if expecting the dreadful Kee-wools to rush upon him. That one word "Reynard" blazed before him, no matter how hard he closed his eyes. By the time he reached Isle au Garce he was wet with perspiration. As the canoe touched land, he saw someone standing upon the shore. It was Jean LeJeune!

CHAPTER XI

FOR MADAME'S SAKE

The afternoon was bright as Madame de Soulanges stood on the shore in front of the little log house her husband had built upon the small island in the lake. Louise Elizabeth was asleep under the shade of a nearby tree. She was lying on a cosy little bed of fir boughs covered with blankets which Lucille had made for her. The girl was seated on the ground keeping faithful watch over the sleeping child, and driving away any flies that hovered too near the soft rosy little face. Often she glanced at Madame de Soulanges, and a great pity for the troubled woman filled her heart. She knew that her thoughts were with her husband who had been taken prisoner by the Dutchmen, and whom she might never see again. Lucille was pleased that she had been chosen by Madame to watch the infant instead of old Barbe or any other of the few women who were on the island. She longed to express her sympathy, but something in her mistress's manner deterred her. She knew that she had not slept during the night, and in the morning her eyes showed the grief that filled her heart.

It was the second day since the destruction of the fort, and the previous evening they had received word that Sieur de Soulanges was a prisoner on board the *Flying Horse* and would be taken to Boston. The ransom was to be a thousand beaver skins, or their equivalent, so the French officer who had brought the news informed them. This was a big sum, Madame de Soulanges well knew, and her heart was heavy with despair. How could she raise the ransom? She had no money to purchase so many beaver skins, and even if she had they could not be obtained until long after the hunting season had opened. Pelts obtained in August would be worthless, she well knew. But something had to be done to redeem her husband. She believed that the Indians were gathering in a large force, and there was the slight hope that they might attack the frigate and rescue the prisoner. But when the courier informed her that the *Flying Horse* had departed during the afternoon, she knew that no help could be expected from the natives. All night long she had stared into the darkness trying to think of some way to obtain the required ransom. Several times she had thought of Count Frontenac at Quebec. He had been a good friend to them in the past, and she felt quite sure that he would come to her assistance now if he knew of her need. But Quebec was a long way off, and who would be willing to undertake the difficult journey?

She was thinking of this as she stood upon the shore looking over towards the Jemseg. It was a beautiful scene upon which her eyes rested, narrow stretches of water lying like gleaming silver among long verdant marshlands, and everywhere the multi-colored foliage of the vast primeval forest gleamed with a dazzling glory beneath the bright afternoon sun. It all seemed like an earthly paradise with peace reigning over all. But there was no peace in Madame de Soulanges' heart. A great fear dwelt there which all the charms of her surroundings could not banish. Her husband was a prisoner, being carried far away from her and little Louise Elizabeth.

She turned and went to the infant's side and looked down lovingly upon the sweet face. And as she stood watching, the babe moved slightly and smiled in her sleep.

"Isn't she a darling!" Lucille whispered as she knelt by the little rude bed. "She is dreaming of angels, I am sure."

"I hope so," and the mother sighed. "I am glad she is unaware of the dangers and troubles of life. She doesn't know that she has lost her father."

"But he will come back, Madame," Lucille replied. "The ransom will be paid."

"Who will pay it, my dear? Count Frontenac is the only one who might assist us, but he does not know of our trouble. There is no one to send to him."

"Yes, there is, Madame. I know of a man who will go."

"You do? Who is he?"

"Jean LeJeune, of course."

"Ah, I had forgotten him. Yes, he might go. But where is he? We have not seen him since the raiders arrived. I wonder what has become of him."

Lucille looked up quickly into her companion's face, and fear was expressed in her eyes.

"Do you suppose the Dutchmen have taken him, too, Madame?"

Madame de Soulanges noticing the anxious note in the girl's voice and the flush upon her face, surmised the cause.

"It is hardly likely that the raiders have taken him, my dear. They only want a man who will bring a big ransom. That is why they have taken my husband."

Lucille said nothing more just then, but sat upon the ground lost in thought. Where was Jean? Why had he not come to find out how she was getting along? This was a disturbing thought, and a slight feeling of resentment stole into her heart. It was the Red Ranger and not Jean who had saved them from the enemy. Her heart beat a little faster as she thought of him. How noble and handsome he looked that afternoon of their escape. And she knew that he had gone to gather the Indians to attack the raiders. That was very good of him. And why had not Jean done something to assist them?

Her thoughts were interrupted by an exclamation from Madame, who was looking excitedly over the lake. Lucille sprang to her feet and beheld in the distance a canoe coming towards them. As it rapidly approached, they could distinguish four persons.

"It's the Red Ranger and his Indians!" Lucille exclaimed. "But who is with them?"

In a few minutes they recognized the fourth man as the officer who had visited them the night before. As the canoe touched the shore, he stepped out and bowed respectfully to the women. By this time all the people on the island came hurrying forward, anxious to hear the latest news.

"You are very welcome, Monsieur," Madame de Soulanges accosted. "I trust it is good news you bring. Is there any word of my husband?"

"None, Madame, I am sorry to report. The raiders have carried him away."

"So the Indians did nothing, then?"

"It was impossible, Madame. They pursued the frigate as far as Isle au Garce, and then gave up the chase. The Dutchmen found safe sailing when they reached the Long Vue."

"Yes, I suppose so, Monsieur," she sadly replied as she looked thoughtfully out over the lake. "There is nothing more we can do, I suppose?"

"Nothing, Madame, except to raise the ransom for the noble Sieur de Soulanges."

"How can we do that? One thousand beaver skins! That is impossible, especially at this season of the year."

"It will have to be money instead, Madame."

"And where will that come from?"

"From Quebec, Madame. Count Frontenac will come to our assistance."

"I have thought of him, Monsieur. But who will go to Quebec? It is a long and hard journey."

"It is nothing, I assure you, Madame. It will be a privilege."

The woman looked eagerly into the officer's face.

"Do you mean that you will go, Monsieur?"

"If you wish it, Madame."

"I do, I do. But how will you go? You cannot undertake the journey alone."

"Certainly not," and the officer smiled. "I shall have good company." He turned as he spoke to Paul Norvall, who had been standing with his two Indians a short distance away. "What better escort could any man have than the Red Ranger? You know him, of course."

Impulsively Madame de Soulanges advanced and held out her hand.

"How can I thank you, Monsieur Norvall? You and your brave Indians have done so much for us already that I can never repay you."

Paul was confused by the woman's words and manner. He was unaccustomed to the polite ways of life, and so wonderfully beautiful did Madame de Soulanges seem to him that his bronzed face flushed with embarrassment. But he noticed that her eyes were moist with tears, and he surmised something of the great trouble that possessed her heart. He longed to speak but could think of nothing appropriate. Madame noticed this, and smiled.

"Pardon me, Monsieur, for speaking about pay. But neither my husband nor myself shall ever forget your kindness."

Something about this woman appealed strongly to Paul. She was so gentle and unaffected. He suddenly found his self-confidence and his voice.

"For your sake, Madame, I shall go to Quebec. Swift action will be the best answer I can give to your kind words."

"Thank you, Monsieur. And when can you start?"

"At once, if it will suit this officer. When the sun sinks below the hills we shall be far on our way. We shall travel light, and darkness will not stop us."

"But you must have provisions, Monsieur." She turned to the women standing near. "Prepare some food at once," she ordered. "We have not much, I know, but we shall share with these men."

As the women hastened away to do their mistress's bidding, she turned to Lucille.

"You look after the baby, my dear. I wish to have a private talk with the officer."

Left thus alone, for the Indians had stretched themselves upon the ground, Lucille and Paul looked at each other for a few seconds. Then the girl smiled and stepped forward.

"I am so glad you are going to Quebec," she began. "I would like to go, too. It must be a wonderful place."

"Perhaps you will go with Madame," Paul replied. "You cannot stay here now that the fort is destroyed. She may need you."

Lucille slowly shook her head, and gazed out over the water.

"I cannot go, Monsieur. My father needs me, so I must go to Isle au Garce and be there when he returns. And poor old Noel and Marie! I hope they are safe."

Paul started, for he remembered that Lucille had heard nothing about what had happened at the island since the night the post was burned. Briefly he told her all he knew, of her father's return, of Noel's capture, and about the crazy man who had escaped.

To all this Lucille listened with almost breathless interest. Paul could not keep his eyes from her animated face. Never had he beheld such a wonderful girl. She seemed almost divine. Anyway, it was like heaven to be near her. And he found it so easy to talk to her, and he did not feel embarrassed as he did in the presence of Madame de Soulanges.

"And was LeRoi really the man who chased me that terrible night the raiders attacked us!" Lucille asked.

"He was."

"And you saved me from him! Oh, how frightened I was. What would have happened to me if you had not come along just then?"

"Perhaps Jean LeJeune would have rescued you."

"Jean! Why, I have not seen him for days. He must be far away and knows nothing of our trouble."

"He was at Fort Jemseg when I told the commander of the coming of the *Flying Horse*."

"He was! Are you sure?"

"I am, for I saw him sitting at the table among the officers when I entered."

"Did he know that I was in the canoe at the shore?"

"He could not help knowing, for he heard all I said to Sieur de Soulanges."

Lucille's eyes dropped to the ground, and she remained lost in thought. Paul longed to know what was in her mind. He was tempted to tell her of the affair at the entrance to the lake the night Jean had planned to carry her off. He resisted this, however, afraid lest it should seem like boasting on his part. But she should be warned against LeJeune.

Just then little Louise Elizabeth awoke, so Lucille's attention was taken up with her. In a few minutes Madame de Soulanges and the officer returned, so there was no more chance for him to speak to the girl.

As the canoe sped on its way up river that afternoon and far on into the night, Paul carried with him the vision of Lucille as he had seen her in all her radiant beauty standing before him on the shore of the little island in the lake.

CHAPTER XII

MADAME LOUISE

That record trip to Quebec was a most convincing evidence of the remarkable endurance of Paul Norvall and his two Indians. To the French officer seated in the bottom of the canoe they seemed like superhuman beings. By day and night they bent strongly and tirelessly to their paddles, resting only at long intervals for a short time to eat a frugal meal on the shore. Through the blazing heat of day when the great trees along the river kept off any breath of wind that might be astir they showed no sign of fatigue or discomfort. The officer dozed through the night, but whenever he woke he could see his companions swaying rhythmically to their steady paddle thrusts. How they could endure such a strain was more than he could comprehend. He would then doze off again to awaken some time later to find them driving the canoe through the great wilderness. His admiration of these men was unbounded. With fifty such as these he would be willing to meet an enemy thrice their number, whether English or Dutch. He understood now why the fame of the Red Ranger and his two Indians was known far and wide. In the cool of the evening they would land, strip themselves to the skin, and bathe for a few minutes in some deep pool. Then it was that the officer could see to good advantage their strong muscular forms and great sinewy arms. He was never tired of watching Paul as he besported himself with delight in the water. He knew that he was the son of an English officer, and if all the fighting Englishmen were like that strong specimen of manhood before him what hope could France have against England? After the swim there was supper, which consisted generally of a trout or a young salmon taken during the afternoon. Then a brief rest and up and on again. The water seemed to refresh the canoemen like magic, and any weariness that they felt vanished.

Thus up the river they sped, across the portage at Grand Falls, up the long stretches of the narrow river above the Madawaska, over Lake Temiscouta, and then over the carrying-place of eighteen leagues to the mighty St. Lawrence, and up to Quebec.

Having landed the officer, Paul's mission was accomplished. It was evening, so after supper he and the Indians stretched themselves upon the shore. The strain of their great effort was relaxed, and they slept soundly through the night. In the morning the officer returned. He had met Count Frontenac, so he informed them, and an envoy was to be sent that very morning to the St. John River to bring Madame de Soulanges and others to Quebec. Paul was pleased that his services would be no longer required, as he wished to remain for several days to see the strange sights of the Citadel. He had been here once before, but only for a few hours. Now that he had plenty of time he wished to wander at will and view the place of which he had heard so much. It was the stronghold of the French in Canada, so it naturally filled his heart with a feeling of awe. Would the English ever capture it? he wondered, and as he looked down the great river flowing at his feet, he wished he could see a fleet of English men of war sweeping up to attack the place. How he longed to join in the fight, for with Quebec fallen, the whole country, including Acadia, would again come under English rule. What a revenge that would be for the destruction of Fort Jemseg by the French and his father's death.

For several days he remained at Quebec. He was quite able to do this, as Count Frontenac had paid him liberally for bringing the women from the Jemseg. He had not seen the great man, as the money had been sent by the officer. But he and the Indians were thus enabled to live in luxury. Paul had many dainties he had not tasted since he began his wandering life in the wilderness. Kondo and Matta also enjoyed their stay here, and viewed with wonder everything they beheld. They wearied at length, however, of the confusion, and longed for the quietness and freedom of the great open spaces by the St. John River. Paul was also anxious to see Lucille again, and to keep her, if possible, from the evil designs of Jean LeJeune.

As they were about to embark, they saw a woman approaching, carrying a bundle over her right shoulder. She waved for them to wait, and as she came near to where they were standing she asked for a passage to the Jemseg. Paul hesitated, for she was a stranger to him, and he could not understand why any woman would wish to go to the St. John River at the present time. He looked at her quite critically. Her appearance was pre-possessing. She was not large, of medium height, and well past middle age. She spoke quietly, and there was a note of dignity in her voice. Her manner was reserved, and her face bore the marks of trouble and care. The sad expression in her eyes touched Paul's heart.

"How far do you wish to go, Madame?" he asked.

"As far as you go, Monsieur. I understand you are bound for the St. John River. If you can take me that far you will do me a great favor. I shall pay for my passage."

"I want no pay, Madame. But the St. John River is a bad place to go to just now. The Dutchmen have been there, they have destroyed Fort Jemseg and carried off the commander. Count Frontenac has sent men to bring Madame de Soulanges back to Quebec. It is not a safe place for men there, let alone women."

"So I understand. But that makes no difference to me. I wish to go to Fort Beausejour, and from there to Port Royal."

Paul wondered how this woman had heard about him, and why she had not gone with the canoes sent by Count Frontenac for Madame de Soulanges. He longed to ask her, but something about her reserved manner deterred him. He decided to wait and perhaps she would explain later who she was and why she was bound to Port Royal. It was most unusual for a woman to venture unaccompanied on such a long and difficult journey. But it was her own affair, and he could not very well refuse to assist her on her way. And, besides, she might help to make the return trip more interesting. Perhaps she would tell something about herself and the places she had visited. Paul surmised that she was a woman who had seen much of the great countries beyond Canada and Acadia of which he had often dreamed.

As they moved down the St. Lawrence, the woman was silent for some time, either gazing straight before her in an absent-minded manner, or looking off towards the forest-covered land along the river. Paul wondered if she would ever speak, and he felt somewhat annoyed at her silence.

There was something, however, about this woman which attracted his special attention. Although her body was still, her hands were ever restless. He had noticed this when first talking to her at Quebec, but had thought little about it then. Now, however, he wondered, for those hands were seldom still. He could not always see them, as the woman was seated before him. But as she turned slightly to the right or to the left he could observe those moving hands opening and closing as they clasped each other. Even when separated and resting upon the gunwales of the canoe they were working, and the long slim fingers beat an incessant tattoo upon the woodwork. It seemed as if she could not keep them still, and they fascinated Paul in no slight degree. They told him plainer than words of the agitated state of her mind. In those restless hands she found some relief. What was her trouble? he wondered, and what was the purpose of her going to Port Royal?

At length the woman opened the bundle she had with her and brought forth a piece of cloth of very fine material, so it seemed to Paul. With a needle and thread she began to sew. What she was making he could not tell. Her fingers moved very fast, and sometimes she ripped apart what she had sewed together, and began all over again. This continued all through the day, and so weird did her actions seem that Paul began to imagine that she was not a human being at all, but a strange spirit who was accompanying them for some special purpose. He was not naturally superstitious, but this woman was affecting him in a most unusual manner.

That night they camped on their way over the carrying-place to the lake beyond. After supper Paul sat before the fire, with the Indians stretched upon the ground nearby contentedly smoking. The woman was resting upon a blanket spread over a liberal supply of fir boughs which Paul had prepared. Occasionally she glanced at him, and once a semblance of a smile appeared upon her face. Then she began to sing an old French song. Her voice, though not strong, was sweet and contained a vibrant note of pathos. Paul and the Indians listened with rapt attention. This was something out of the ordinary to them, and they were greatly pleased. Their surroundings and the stillness of the night added a special charm to the singer's voice. When she had finished Paul gave a deep sigh.

"That is very nice, Madame—"

"Louise," she explained. "Call me that and never mind my other name. You like my singing?"

"I do. You have such a nice voice. Do you sing often?"

"Not now. I have not sung before to-night since I left France. But everything is so peaceful here, and you have been so kind in allowing me to accompany you and asking so few questions, that I could not help singing that dear old song. My heart is lighter than it has been for a long time."

"Sing some more, Madame," Paul requested as the woman again became silent. "It has been a long time since I heard such singing. The Indians enjoy it, too."

Madame Louise looked at Kondo and Matta.

"Do they ever talk, Monsieur?"

Paul laughed.

"Not often, Madame. That is why I like them. They are wonderful Indians—the best on the river."

"Are there many there?"

"Yes, a large number."

"Are they as good and peaceable as these?"

"They are to me. They are great fighters when aroused. I am very fond of them."

"Do they get along well with the white men?"

"As a rule they do, when the white men behave themselves."

"Are there many along the river?"

"Quite a few, but they are scattered. They are nearly all coureurs de bois, and live by hunting and trading with the Indians."

"You know all of them, I suppose?"

"I do."

"Are there any women and girls there?"

"Not many, and there will be less when Madame de Soulanges and her women leave for Quebec."

"But some will remain, you think?"

"Only one or two, I guess."

"Who are they?"

"Old Marie, wife of Noel, who lives on Isle au Garce, and Lucille, the daughter of Pierre LeNoir, the trader."

"How old is Lucille?"

"About seventeen, I think, although I am not sure."

"Tell me something about her, Monsieur. What does she look like?"

"I cannot very well describe her, Madame. But she is beautiful and bright. She does not resemble her father. He is rough, uncouth, and with his long hair and beard he looks more like a savage than a white man."

"Where did he come from?"

"I do not know. He has been trading on Isle au Garce for years. His post was destroyed and burned by the Dutch raiders."

"Where is his daughter now, Monsieur?"

"She was with Madame de Soulanges when I left for Quebec. She has gone back to her father most likely."

The woman asked no more questions that night, but remained lost in thought for some time. After a while she sang several more songs to the delight of Paul and the Indians.

Night after night Madam Louise questioned Paul about the white people along the river, more especially about LeNoir and his daughter. She seemed more interested in them than in the others, and wished to hear over and over again all that Paul was able to tell her. At times she would walk along the shore where they were camped and remain there until it was dark. When she returned she was always very quiet, and Paul could easily tell that she had been weeping. He had taken a keen interest in this woman and longed to know more about her.

Seated one evening by the fire while Madame Louise was singing, an idea came suddenly into his mind. He would take this woman to Fort Beausejour. There was nothing to hinder him, and he knew that the Indians would be quite willing to go. He decided to think it over and offer his services when they reached the Jemseg. But the next day he forgot his resolve by an event which caused him considerable concern and drove everything else from his mind.

CHAPTER XIII

DESERTED

The day had been oppressively warm, and as the sun sank low the voyagers were thankful for a cooling breeze which drifted in from the sea. They were now well on their way down river, and in a few days they hoped to reach the Jemseg. Madame Louise was weary and cramped from sitting so long in the canoe, and she was glad when at last they landed to camp for the night where a small stream joined the main river. Here they found several Indians who had arrived but a short time before. For weeks they had been on Squatook Lake, so knew nothing of what had happened at Fort Jemseg. Its destruction was startling news to them, for they were bringing down a sick white girl to leave with Madame de Soulanges, feeling sure that she would be able to drive away the evil spirit which they believed possessed her. She had been found by them, so they explained, wandering along the shore far up river where she had been deserted by a white man. She was weak from hunger, and almost crazed with fear and despair. The Indians had taken her with them, and had done what they could for her welfare. But she refused to be comforted, and cried most of the time. Then when she became ill they started down river to take her to the fort.

Paul listened with astonishment and anger to this tale which he interpreted to Madame Louise. When he asked the Indians who the girl was, and the name of the man who had deserted her, they could tell him but little. She was one of the "King's Girls" who had come to Quebec. The man she called Rolfe had married her and promised her a good home at Fort Jemseg. Why he had abandoned her they did not know.

"But there is no man by the name of Rolfe at the Jemseg," Paul exclaimed. "Did you ever hear of him?"

"The white squaw knows not what she is saying," one of them replied. "She has the Evil Spirit which makes her think things which may not be true."

"Someone must have brought her from Quebec, though, and left her to die. She could not have come so far herself."

"The Evil Spirit, maybe. He carries off good-looking squaws sometimes."

"I guess you are right, Mee-kis. It was an evil spirit, most likely, in human form. And if he is anywhere in this country we must find him, and punish him for deserting this girl. In the meantime we must do what we can for her. Shall we go over and see her!" he asked turning to Madame Louise.

There was no doubt about the woman's willingness to go. She had been impatiently waiting during this conversation, and her hands were more restless than ever. They seemed anxious to seize upon something and hold it fast.

Following Mee-kis, they soon reached a rude lodge of poles, covered with fir boughs. Lying within upon a bed of blankets they found the girl, with a middle-aged squaw seated by her side. She seemed asleep, but as Madame Louise bent over her she half opened her eyes and looked up in an indifferent manner. Then seeing that it was a white woman and not an Indian, her eyes grew suddenly wide and the expression changed to interest and wonder.

"Mother!" she whispered. "Is it you?"

At once Madame Louise dropped upon her knees by the girl's side and took her right hand which was lying upon her breast in hers. How firm were those restless hands, and how satisfied they seemed as she held the invalid's sunburnt one.

"I am glad you have come," the girl murmured. "I knew you would find me."

With a deep sigh of contentment she closed her eyes, and was soon fast asleep.

As Madame Louise watched her a great pity for this girl came into her heart. That she had been cruelly treated there was no doubt. Suffering was depicted upon her face which was worn and haggard. But it was quite evident that it was a face of considerable strength and beauty. Her jet-black hair, tangled and unbound, fell about her shoulders and partly across her bosom. Madame Louise had noticed her dark lustrous eyes, and now that they were closed, her long black lashes almost touched her cheeks like ebon servants guarding the sacred chamber of a sleeping mistress. Her soiled clothes were almost in shreds, and her feet were nearly bare. Tears came to the woman's eyes as she gazed upon the pitiful form before her. She then turned to Norvall who was standing nearby.

"We must take care of her, Monsieur. She has had a hard time."

"She certainly has, Madame. Shall I carry her to our camp? You can look after her better there."

"That will be good. Can you carry her, Monsieur?"

Stooping, Paul lifted the girl from the bed, and he was surprised to find how light she was. As he carried her from the lodge, the squaw who had been seated close by rose and followed. Reaching his own camping-place, Paul laid the girl down upon the ground near the fire as Madame Louise ordered. This woman was in command now, and this new responsibility had transformed her. She had found work for her restless hands and heart, and she seemed to know just what to do.

"I need some warm water," she said. "And we must have a lodge built for this girl."

Most thankful was Paul now that he had allowed this woman to accompany them from Quebec. What would he have done without her? Explaining to Kondo and Matta what was needed, they set to work at once erecting a suitable lodge among a thick clump of fir bushes, while he himself attended to the water.

When the lodge was finished, which took but a short time, Paul carried the girl inside, where he left her to the care of Madame Louise and the squaw. He then went over to the Indian camp hoping to find out something more definite about the man who had abandoned the girl. But he could learn nothing, although he and the natives tried hard to think who Rolfe might be.

In the meantime the sick girl had been washed, her dirty clothes cast aside, and she was clad in clean garments which Madame Louise brought forth from her wonderful bundle. With the invalid thus made as comfortable as possible, she busied herself at the fire preparing some stimulating broth from a piece of moose meat. She seemed happy to be thus employed. Often she glanced towards the lodge to be sure that the girl was asleep. The Indian woman had gone back to her camp. Kondo and Matta were there, too, while Paul was sitting upon the shore looking out over the water. She was thus left alone with the sick girl, and the expression in her eyes and the unusual stillness of her hands told of contentment for the present, at least.

As she sat before the fire watching the simmering soup, her eyes turned at times to the quiet man down by the shore. Ever since leaving Quebec she had been closely studying him, and each day her interest in him increased. Just why she could not explain to herself. Perhaps it was the mystery surrounding him which increased her curiosity. She did not know who he was, as she had asked no questions, and he had volunteered no information. She was impressed, too, by his influence over Kondo and Matta, and the respect he received from the Indians encamped nearby. That he was not a Frenchman she well knew. He was so strong and manly, and yet gentle and thoughtful. She longed to know more about his past life and what had brought him into this great wilderness.

And while Madame Louise was thus thinking about Paul, he was wondering about her. Since coming across the helpless girl she had become a changed woman, so full of interest and activity. There was something about her eyes which seemed familiar. Even the poise of her head reminded him of someone he had met. But where? Suddenly he remembered, and so startling was the idea that he rose to his feet and went back to the fire. He wished to see her again to be sure that he had not been mistaken.

Madame Louise, however, had returned to the lodge, carrying in her hand a cup of hot soup. As it was growing dusk, Paul stirred up the embers, and added fresh fuel. He did this that the light might enter the lodge to direct the woman in her movements. He then sat down near the cheerful blaze, lighted his pipe and smoked in thoughtful silence.

As Madame Louise entered the lodge, the girl awoke and stared at her in perplexed wonder. Then as the light of understanding dawned in her eyes, a smile overspread her face.

"I must have been dreaming, and thought you were my mother."

"I am trying to be a mother to you now, my dear," was the quiet reply.

"You are very kind," and the girl gave a sigh of contentment. "I feel safe now. Oh, I have had a terrible experience, and thought I should never live through it. That man left me to die, and—"

She ceased abruptly and tears came to her eyes. By the light of the fire Madame Louise could see the terror depicted upon the girl's face as the memory of the past swept upon her.

"Do not think of that now, my dear. You are very weak. I have prepared some nice soup which will make you stronger."

Eagerly the girl took the cup in her trembling hand, and like a famished person drank it to the last drop.

"That is good, Madame. I was starving, for I could not eat what the Indians brought me. They were kind, but their food was bad."

Madame Louise now surmised that lack of food and despair had reduced this girl to her weakened condition. With proper care she would soon be well again. She was not accustomed to such a rough life, and after what she had suffered it was a wonder that she was really alive.

"You will soon be well, my dear," Madame Louise comforted, noticing the sad expression that had come into the invalid's eyes.

"But what will become of me, Madame? I have no money, so how can I live? There is nothing I can do here? No one will have any use for Isabel Belou after this."

"Why not?"

"Because of what I have done. I shall be disgraced all my life."

"But you have done nothing wrong. It wasn't your fault that you were deserted and left to die by that cruel man."

"Ah, I know that, Madame. But I should not have left Quebec with him until we were married. I did not know as much then as I do now."

"Why did he leave you? Don't be afraid to tell me," Madame Louise assured her, as a flush overspread the girl's face. "Let me be a mother to you."

"Thank you, oh, thank you," Isabel fervently replied, clasping the woman's hands in hers. "I know I can trust you. But that—that brute wanted to make me his wife before we were married."

"So that was the trouble?"

"It was, and when I threatened to kill him with my knife, he cursed and hit me. Yes, I would have killed him, and I am sorry now that I didn't. He is a very bad man. I am sure the Indians will kill him when they meet him."

"But they do not know who he is."

"They do not know him now, but I shall tell them when we see him, and then—"

Madame Louise was surprised at the fierceness of these words, and the gleam of anger in the girl's eyes. Isabel had risen to a sitting position, and her bosom rose and fell from the vehemence of her emotion.

"There, there, you must not excite yourself too much," she advised. "You are weak, remember, and you must reserve your strength."

"You are right, Madame. I must be strong so when I meet that man I shall have my revenge."

She sank back upon the blanket, exhausted, and closed her eyes. Leaving her, Madame Louise went back to the fire which was burning brightly. As Paul looked upon her fire-illuminated face, he knew that he had not been mistaken. The poise of her head, her face, and the expression in her eyes reminded him of Lucille.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NAME IN THE SAND

Isabel slept well through the night and awoke greatly refreshed. When Madame Louise entered the lodge she was pleased to see the changed expression in the girl's eyes, and the smile which greeted her. She looked so beautiful lying there with her black hair falling in rippling waves over her shoulders, that she wondered how any man could be so heartless as to desert her and leave her to die in the great wilderness. He must be more than an ordinary villain she thought.

"You look much better, my dear," she said. "The sleep has done you a great deal of good."

"Indeed it has, Madame," was the quiet reply. "I feel like a new person, and ready to go forward."

"Where to?"

"With you, of course. You will take me with you, I am sure. You will not leave me here. And that fine-looking man standing by the fire looks kind and strong. He is not like that other man."

"So you have been watching him?"

"I have, for I could not help it. I like to look at a man like that. What is his name?"

"Monsieur Paul Norvall, and he is English."

"English! What is he doing here?"

"I do not know. But he has been very good to me, and he has great influence with the Indians."

The girl said nothing more, but kept her eyes fixed upon Paul, while Madame Louise went to bring her breakfast. She had heard much about the English, and not always to their credit. They were terrible people, so she had been informed, great fighters, and cruel. But this man seemed so quiet and noble that she wondered if she had been told the truth.

This favorable impression was increased as preparations were made to embark. The Englishman and his two Indians were so kind and thoughtful that she felt like a queen surrounded by loyal attendants. A place was made ready for her in the canoe near Madame Louise, and they were about to push off from the shore when Kondo uttered an exclamation and pointed down river. Paul straightened up from his stooping position and saw three canoes far down stream. They were mere specks in the distance, but coming rapidly onward.

"Who are they?" Madame Louise asked as she rose to her feet.

"They must be Count Frontenac's men on their way to Quebec with Madame de Soulanges and the other women."

At these words Isabel sprang to her feet and clutched Madame Louise by the arm.

"Let us go ashore," she cried. "I don't want them to see me."

"Why? They will not harm you. Perhaps they will take you with them to Quebec."

"That is what makes me afraid, Madame. I must not go to Quebec. If I go back I shall be punished. I ran away with that man. Sister Therese will hand me over to the Governor, and he will send me back in disgrace to France. No, no, I must not go. Let me hide until they have passed. Don't tell them I am here. I must hide."

Stepping ashore, she hurried up the bank and disappeared among the trees. Kondo looked at Paul.

"Bring squaw back?"

"Not now. She will be all right when the canoes have passed."

Madame Louise at once left the canoe.

"I shall stay with the girl, Monsieur, while you go and meet the canoes. She is frightened, and I may be able to calm her."

"Very well, Madame."

"Remember not to say anything to Madame de Soulanges about Isabel."

Paul smiled.

"You can trust me. I know how to keep a secret."

The three canoes were much nearer now, scudding before a smart breeze blowing up river. Paul watched them intently anxious to learn if Lucille had changed her mind and had come, after all. He recalled her resemblance to Madame Louise and wondered if it had been only imagination on his part.

When the canoes were but a short distance away, Paul and his Indians sped forth to meet them. The water was exceptionally rough and as they faced the wind the waves dashed wisps of spray over their bodies. Madame de Soulanges smiled her greeting and bade Paul to run close to her side.

"Welcome to you, Monsieur Norvall, and your brave companions," she accosted. "I wish to thank you for what you have done for us. You were loyal and speedy couriers."

"I hope all is well, Madame," Paul replied. "Have all the women come with you?"

"All but Lucille. She returned to her father the day before we left."

"Did he come for her?"

"No. He sent two men. I did not wish her to go with them, as I did not like their looks. But she was determined to go, for she said that her father and Jean LeJeune were waiting for her."

Paul's face darkened and his hands gripped hard upon his paddle. A great fear had entered his heart.

"Who were the men who came for her, Madame?" he asked as calmly as possible.

"I do not know. But, no doubt, they were all right, and I was foolish to be anxious. But, then, one never feels safe in this country where every man is a law unto himself. When my husband was in command at the fort he was able to keep turbulent spirits somewhat in subjection. But now that he is a prisoner and the fort destroyed, no life is safe here."

The anxious tone of the woman's voice caused Paul to draw nearer until the two canoes were but a few feet apart.

"What is the trouble now, Madame?" he asked. "Are the Indians becoming restless?"

"They are Monsieur, for word has reached them of an Indian outbreak away to the west along the coast."

"Against the whites, Madame?"

"I believe so. It is only a rumor I have heard, but the Indians here are preparing to help their own people."

"In what way?"

"By making war upon the white men along the river, especially the rangers."

"Are the white men aware of this?"

"I think so."

The canoes were now some distance past the camping-place, and Paul was about to draw away and make for the shore. The news he had just heard was of a most disturbing nature, especially as he felt responsible for the two women travelling with him. He dipped his paddle into the water, but Madame de Soulanges reached out a detaining hand.

"Just a minute, Monsieur. I have a favor to ask. Will you look after my Mount House? You know where it is, up the little creek. You may use it, and you will find provisions in the basement, and the key to the main door is under the stone step. I shall feel more satisfied if someone is occupying the building which my dear husband had built for me. I hope to come

back to it some day when this time of trouble is over."

"I shall look after the house, Madame," Paul assured. "But have you been living there since I left for Quebec?"

"Oh, no. We remained on the island where we were quite comfortable, and safer than in the Mount House."

"Why? Since the Dutchmen left there has been no danger."

"There is always danger now, Monsieur. And—" she lowered her voice—"I advise you not to go by the main river to-day. The water is very rough."

"We don't mind how rough it is, Madame."

"Perhaps not. But cross by the carrying-place to the Portobello and go that way. You know what I mean. It is smoother and—and safer. I must not detain you any longer. Good-by, and thanks for your service to me."

She spoke to the canoemen. They bent at once strongly to their paddles and sped on their way, while Paul headed his craft down stream. He was in a most thoughtful mood, and as the canoe touched the shore, he spoke to his companions.

"Kondo, you heard what Madame said?"

"Ah, ah."

"Ah, ah," Matta repeated.

"There is danger ahead, so it seems."

"Ah, ah, danger."

"Ah, ah, danger," came the echo.

"What do you think it is?"

"White man, maybe."

"White man, maybe."

"Jean?"

"Ah, ah, Jean. He is waiting for us."

"Ah, ah, Jean. He is waiting for us."

"You think we should go by the Portobello?"

"Ah, ah. Safer."

"Ah, ah. Safer."

"Very well, then, we shall go that way."

The women now came forth from their hiding-place. The girl was quivering with excitement.

"You didn't tell them about me, Monsieur."

"Oh, no," Paul laughingly replied. "I forgot all about you. There were more important things to speak about."

Isabel shot him a swift glance and flushed. His words seemed like a rebuke, and yet he was so kind and thoughtful. She could not understand him, and wondered what he thought about women. This was in her mind as they moved down river in the teeth of the wind. But when they at length landed to begin their march overland there were other things to occupy her attention. The travelling was difficult and she was weak, so very glad was she when at last the narrow stream was reached and she was again seated in the bottom of the canoe. This waterway ran parallel to the river. It was tree-embowered and well sheltered from every wind that blew. It was much used by the natives, and Paul had often travelled

this way, and knew every bend and shallow place. He was in no hurry now, so he and the Indians paddled slowly. This was the last lap in their long journey, and he had many things to think about. What was he to do with the girl? That was the question uppermost in his mind. She would have to go on with Madame Louise, as there was no place for her to remain along the river at the present time. But would she be willing to go? She was determined to find the man who had deserted her. And so was Paul. He could hardly imagine anyone so cruel, yet he must be living somewhere in Acadia, and, perhaps, not very far away. But the girl may have been mistaken, or the villain may have lied to her and given an assumed name.

He thought also about the restlessness of the Indians, and of Madame de Soulanges' warning. He had no fear of the natives, but he was uncertain about the rangers. They had no love for him, and he knew how pleased they must be at the destruction of Fort Jemseg and the end of law and order. He had never joined those wandering men, but had always held aloof. Although they were not evil men in the main, they were not of his kind. He was an Englishman and their manner of living was not attractive to him. They enjoyed the company of their fellow men, and had their pleasures in common. He preferred to be with Kondo and Matta. He understood them, and they were attached to him. It was a bond of friendship that had been strengthened through years of trying experiences on river and land. Only upon them did he feel that he could depend in an emergency, for he knew the unreliable nature of the other Indians. They might be his friends to-day and his enemies to-morrow according to circumstances. So far, however, they had made him as one of themselves. But that might not continue should they engage in a struggle with the white men.

At the close of the afternoon they reached Big Lake, and there upon a fine sandy shore they landed. This was a favorite camping site of the Indians, although there were none here now. The water of the lake was rough, so Paul decided to wait until evening when the wind would most likely die down with the sun.

After supper the women started for a short walk along the shore. Madame Louise was in a very serious and thoughtful mood, and this Isabel noticed.

"There is something troubling you, Madame," she began after they had walked for a while in silence.

"What makes you think so, my dear?"

"Because you are so quiet. You have not spoken since we left the camp."

"I have been in deep thought. We are soon to part, and I am wondering what is to become of you. It will not do for you to remain here."

"Why can I not go with you, Madame? I will help you all I can."

"But what about the man who deserted you? I thought you were anxious to find him."

"So I am, but it seems almost hopeless to me now. I had no idea that this country is such a vast wilderness. How could I travel?"

Madame Louise did not hear these closing words, for she had suddenly stopped and was gazing with staring eyes upon the sand at her feet. She clutched Isabel by the arm and pointed excitedly downward.

"Look! Look!" she cried.

"What is it?" the girl asked, wondering at the woman's excitement.

"Why, don't you see it? That name in the sand? Is it real, or am I only dreaming?"

"Oh, it's there, all right, Madame—R-e-y-n-a-r-d" she spelled. "Some white man must have scratched it with a stick. I wish it was Rolfe instead of Reynard."

Madame Louise had dropped upon her knees and was tracing the letters with the forefinger of her right hand. She uttered each letter as she did so, and when she was through she remained very still staring upon the word. The girl was puzzled and somewhat worried at her companion's strange action.

"It's only the name of some man who has been here," she said. "I was once at the sea-side in France and amused myself by scratching my name in the sand with a stick. It was great fun."

Madame Louise rose slowly and wearily to her feet. She looked at Isabel and then pointed to the letters.

"Girl, that's the name of the devil!"

"The devil!" Isabel shrank back and crossed herself. "What do you mean, Madame?"

"The devil has been here and left his name in the sand."

"Let us go away, then, Madame. There's only one devil I want to meet, but that's not his name."

Madame Louise, however, did not hear her. She was still staring at the letters. At length she lifted her head and looked out over the water towards the opposite shore. Her manner had suddenly undergone a remarkable change. A fierce light shone in her eyes, she was breathing hard, her hands were clutching each other, and her long slim fingers had the appearance of an eagle's talons about to grasp its prey.

Ere long she turned and walked rapidly back towards the camp. Isabel kept pace with her, wondering why that name in the sand had produced such a startling effect upon her companion.



CHAPTER XV

MOUNT HOUSE

Silently and cautiously Paul and the Indians headed their canoe up the narrow creek on the west side of Et-lim-lats peninsula. The night was dark, the wind was strong, and rain was beginning to fall. But here they were protected from the gale by the great tall trees which lined both sides of the waterway.

They had been travelling since sundown, and the journey had been difficult. In the teeth of the wind they had crossed Big Lake to the Jemseg. Down this stream they had come to the carrying-place to the main river. From the latter they had made their way overland and then downstream to the narrow creek up which they were guardedly moving. It was well that the men were thoroughly acquainted with their locality, otherwise the journey would have been almost impossible on such a night. But they paddled as surely as on a broad stream by the light of day.

The women were weary and silent. Madame Louise, especially, was tired almost to the point of exhaustion. This was largely due to the mental strain caused by seeing the name on the sand. She offered no explanation of her agitation to Isabel, and the latter asked no questions. Their hearts, too, were heavy with a nameless fear. The roaring of the wind in the tree-tops sounded to them like the voices of demons, and at times they almost imagined they could see wild terrible forms surrounding them ready to clutch at them with merciless fingers. It was a night which could easily impose such feelings upon them. They did not know where they were going, and the intense silence and caution of the men seemed ominous. They were two lone women in the midst of unknown dangers, and they naturally clung to each other for protection. Hitherto they had trusted their guides, but now they did not feel altogether confident. They knew very little about these men, and they could not understand the meaning of this night journey nor whither it would lead. But they were helpless, so clinging to each other they anxiously awaited whatever might be in store for them.

At length Isabel began to sob. She had tried to be brave, but the strain was too much for her.

"Keep up courage, my dear," Madame Louise whispered. "These men will take care of us. We can trust them."

"I know we can," was the low reply. "But I am so frightened. This is a terrible place, and the roaring wind makes me shiver."

"You are cold. Let me wrap my shawl around you. There, that will keep you warm. Nestle up close to me."

Unconscious of the women's agitation, Paul carefully guided the canoe up the narrow channel. He could not see a hand before him, but that made no difference. He knew that the Indians were alert as well as himself, and his confidence in them was unbounded.

Ere long the natives ceased their forward strokes, and began to back water. This was all the sign Paul needed, so swinging the canoe to the right, he steered for the bank. In another minute it grounded, and at once Kondo sprang out and pulled it well up on the shore.

"Follow me," Paul whispered to the women. "Keep very close together."

Then up among the trees he led them, and after what seemed quite a distance, he stopped, stooped, lifted a stone and picked up a key hidden there. Finding the key-hole, he unlocked the door, pushed it open and entered the building. The others followed, and when inside stood silently waiting. In a short time a candle was lighted with tinder and flint, and then the room was partly exposed to view. Various articles were stored there, including fire-wood, provisions, muskets and ammunition.

"Well, this is better than out in the storm," Paul declared. "This is the first time I have been in a house for months. But, hello! what's the meaning of this?"

He was looking at the window near the door, which was completely demolished, and the broken glass was scattered around on the floor.

"Somebody has been ahead of us, it seems," he remarked.

He examined the window carefully, and it was quite evident that it had been used as an entrance to the building. Kondo and Matta gripped their muskets more firmly, as if expecting the intruders to appear. Paul, seeing their action, smiled.

"Oh, they'll not come here just now. Anyway, we shall go upstairs. It will be more comfortable there."

Leading the way with the candle in his hand, he ascended the steps on the left, closely followed by the others. The stairs led to a hallway, opening from which were several rooms, including a large one on the north-east side containing a capacious fire-place.

"Ah, here is dry wood," Paul announced. "We shall soon have a fire which will brighten this room up."

Lighting another candle he gave it to Matta, requesting him to bring more wood from below. In a few minutes Kondo had a cheerful fire blazing up the big chimney before which the women stood and warmed their shivering bodies. The night was cool, and their clothes were wet, so the heat felt good. The comfort and the genial cheer of the fire revived their drooping spirits, and they leaned back in the comfortable chairs the room contained, and for a while forgot their fears.

"This is nice," Isabel declared, as she watched the flames dancing before her. "I never saw such a big fire-place before. Whose house is this, Madame?"

"I do not know, my dear. It is very comfortable, anyway, and I should like to stay here a long time."

"Why can't we, Madame? How nice it would be."

"But how could we live? Where would we get food?"

The girl did not answer. This was a new problem to her. Then the realization of her situation dawned upon her. So far she had not thought about provisions, but now that she had reached what seemed the end of her journey the fear of the future filled her heart with apprehension. She turned to her companion.

"Perhaps Monsieur Norvall and his Indians will supply us with food, Madame. They are good hunters, are they not?"

"But why should they do that, my dear? They have other things to attend to, no doubt, so they will not wish to be burdened with us. We must not impose too much upon them. They have been very kind to us, and I am most grateful to them."

Madame Louise's heart, however, belied her words. Secretly she did wish to make this house her home for a time, and already she was planning in her mind how she could induce her guides to supply her and Isabel with provisions. She had become very fond of the helpless girl, and she liked to have her with her. Her desire to move on to Port Royal had lessened. That name on the sand had caused the change. It was ever before her mind, and she knew that she would have no peace until she had found the man who had scrawled it there.

And while the women sat before the fire, Paul and Kondo were talking in a low voice out in the hallway.

"I made fire quick," the Indian was saying. "Big blaze now."

"You did, Kondo. You are very smart."

"But fire there, Paul. White man left hot coals."

Paul started and looked keenly at the native.

"Somebody has been here lately? Is that what you mean?"

"Ah, ah. White man leave fire. Injun smell tobacco smoke, too."

"You did!"

"Ah, ah. Plenty smell here. Good tobacco."

"And you are sure they were white men, Kondo?"

"Ah, ah. See dirty dishes on table. Injun clean dishes. White man, no!"

Paul glanced back into the room and noticed that what Kondo said was true. Several dirty dishes were piled in disorder upon the table against the wall, and an unclean frying-pan was lying upon the floor. A bucket half-filled with water was standing near.

And as Paul's eyes rested upon the bucket, the glint of something on the floor arrested his attention. He stepped quickly forward, stooped and picked up a small gold cross attached to a broken chain. He recognized it at once. It was Lucille's! He had seen it at her throat, and had thought how pretty it looked hanging there. But now it only brought a great fear into his heart. What was it doing here? Lucille must have been in this house. And why? He clutched the cross in his tense right hand as the reason came into his mind. Lucille had been carried off by those two men, and they had brought her here. But where was she now, and what had happened to her? He was certain that he knew the man who was back of her abduction. It was Jean LeJeune. The desire was strong upon him to go forth, even in the storm, that he might track him down and rescue Lucille. But he well knew that it would be foolish to start upon the search on such a wild night. He would think it over and have his plans arranged by morning.

Placing the cross in his pocket, with Kondo's assistance he began to prepare something to eat. Madame Louise wished to help, but he would not let her.

"You enjoy the fire, Madame, and let us wait upon you."

Work of any kind was necessary to him now. He had to be doing something as an outlet to his agitated feelings. The thought of Lucille as a prisoner among rough men was hard for him to endure. He kept his thoughts to himself, however, and when the humble meal was over and there was nothing more for him to do, he seated himself upon the floor and gazed silently into the fire. He said nothing about the discovery he had made. In the morning he would show the cross to the Indians and explain whose it was. As for the women, he did not wish to cause them any unnecessary alarm about the abduction of Lucille. And, besides, if he did say anything he might reveal too much of his heartfelt interest in the girl. It was better, he decided, to say nothing at present.

Matta squatted nearby and began to smoke. But Kondo was restless and watchful. He remained at the back of the room with his musket by his side. Often he glanced towards the uncurtained window on the left which was almost on a level with the bank outside. The rain beat against the small panes, and the wind roared among the trees, a striking contrast to the warmth and quietness within. Kondo did not fear the storm. It meant nothing to him. But the unseen and unknown mattered a great deal, and instinctively he knew that they were never far away in the wilderness, especially where there were women, and one of them strikingly beautiful.

At length a slight motion signified a greater alertness. His keen ears had detected a sound. Only such a trained ear as his could have distinguished it from the wind and the rain. But Kondo knew its meaning. Just for an instant did he hesitate as he glanced towards Norvall. He then glided noiselessly from the room, down the stairway and out into the night.

His departure was unnoticed by those before the fire. The women felt secure now with such sturdy guardians surrounding them. They were comfortable, too, and ere long the girl's head began to nod, and she had difficulty in keeping her eyes open. This Madame Louise noticed, and smiled.

"You are sleepy, dear. Let me prepare you a bed."

"Not yet, Madame," Isabel replied. "I want to see the fire die down. It is something like my hopes which were once so bright, but now—"

She paused abruptly, her eyes filled with tears, and she breathed a deep sigh.

"But you are young, remember, and you must not be down-hearted," her companion encouraged. "We are very comfortable here to-night, so let us be thankful that we are not out in the storm. This is a wonderful house, isn't it? Who built it?" she asked turning to Paul, wishing to divert the girl's mind from her troubles.

"It was begun by Sir Thomas Temple after he had built Fort Jemseg. He liked this place, and I was here several times with my father. The Commander wished to have it well built, as he planned to spend the rest of his life here when he was through with soldiering. But the French came and drove him out. Sieur de Soulanges had the house finished for his wife who often came here to watch the men at work, so I have been told. It is well built, and the stones were brought on rafts from the mainland. In the morning you will see what a fine house it really is. Why, the walls are so thick it would make a

good defence against an attack."

"Then, you are English!" Madame Louise exclaimed. "I suspected it soon after I met you."

"You did! Yes, my father was an English officer."

He ceased abruptly, regretting that he had said even this much about himself. He did not know who this woman was, nor the purpose of her visit to Acadia, so he wished to be on his guard. But Madame Louise was not satisfied. She wanted to know more, and was about to question him further when a yell of pain and terror outside the window brought them to their feet with fast-beating hearts. Again it was repeated, though not so loud, and then all was still.

Terror-stricken, Isabel clung to Madame Louise, and begged her to protect her. Paul and Matta leaped for their muskets, and like sleuth-hounds unleashed sped out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HUNT IS ON

Old Noel was seated upon the doorstep of his cabin, smoking his after-dinner pipe. He was in a most thoughtful mood, and several times he sighed as he looked out over the water. The wind and rain of the night had ceased, the black heavy clouds of early morning had rolled away, and there was calmness on river and land. But there was no peace in Noel's heart. He was very much worried, and the furrows in his brow were unusually deep. His present personal appearance was not altogether attractive. His white hair was ruffled, his face was studded with thick bristles of two days' growth, and he was clad in his oldest and shabbiest clothes. All this was in keeping with his deep depression.

At length he removed the pipe from his mouth, spat upon the ground, and then turned his head partly to the right.

"Marie. Come here. I want you."

"Well, what is it now?" his wife asked, coming to the door with a frying-pan in one hand and a cloth in the other.

"I've been thinking, Marie."

"H'm, that's encouraging. I hope you'll keep it up. Does it hurt you much?"

"Yes, Marie, I've been thinking that your tongue is very long and sharp."

"Have you just found that out, Noel?"

"Oh, no. I have known it since the day we were married. You have made great use of it. I've been the grindstone upon which you have kept it sharp."

"Did you bring me here from my work just to tell me that?" the woman demanded.

"Not at all. I want to tell you that I've got to move."

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear you say that. You have been a long time making up your mind. You have never moved yet without being pushed. What do you intend to do?"

"Go away from here, Marie. I can't make a living in this place. We'll surely starve if we stay."

"No, we won't. Do you think because Pierre's gone we can't make a living? What's the matter with you, anyway? There's fish in the river, game in the woods, and we have enough laid by to get what else we need. Why should we worry? I'm glad Pierre's gone, for I'm afraid of him. He has an evil eye. I never saw a worse one."

"But he has been good to me, Marie."

"Yes, because you were his slave, and he got so much work out of you for almost nothing. And he'll be back, never fear. We're not going to be rid of that man so easily. He and Jean are up to some mischief, so when they get through they'll be here again."

Marie went back to her work, while Noel continued his smoking. His eyes roved again out over the water, and at once he saw a canoe coming down river on the western side of the islands. He was all alert now and called to his wife. Together they watched the approaching craft, and ere long they could see two men on board.

"They must be Pierre and Jean," Noel declared. "They are coming sooner than we expected. What do you suppose they are after?"

"Trouble, most likely. That's all they think about, trouble for others."

As the canoe approached they knew they had been mistaken, for to their joy they recognized Paul Norvall and an Indian.

"It's the Red Ranger!" Marie exclaimed. "But he has only one of his Indians with him. What do you suppose has happened to the other?"

By the time the canoe reached the island, Noel and Marie were at the shore eagerly awaiting the visitors. They shook hands, and there was no doubt about the heartiness and sincerity of their welcome.

"Where is Pierre?" Paul at once asked, looking around as if he expected to see the trader appear.

"That's what we would like to know," Noel replied.

"Why, isn't he here?"

"No. He went away several days ago with Jean LeJeune."

"He did! And where is Lucille?"

"I do not know."

"Hasn't she been home?"

"Not since the night the Dutchmen burned the post."

"Mon Dieu!"

So fierce were these words that Marie clutched Paul by the arm.

"What do you mean? What do you know?" she asked in a voice which was scarcely more than a hoarse whisper.

"That she has been stolen. Madame de Soulanges told me that two unknown men came for her several days ago. And I found this in the Mount House," he added handing her the cross. "Isn't that Lucille's?"

With a piercing cry Marie seized the cross and examined it carefully.

"Yes, it's hers. Oh, what has happened to my Lucille! Evil men have taken her away, and I shall never see her again!"

"Come, come, old woman, don't make such a fuss," Noel chided. "Perhaps Pierre and Jean were the two men, and most likely she is with them now."

"No, Jean was not one of the men, so Madame de Soulanges told me," Paul explained. "Both were strangers to her, and she did not like their looks."

"Suppose we go to the cabin," Noel suggested. "Have you had your dinner, Monsieur?"

"I have eaten nothing since early this morning. We are certainly hungry, eh, Matta?"

"Ah, ah, hungry," the Indian replied.

As Marie prepared the meal, she wailed over Lucille's fate.

"I shall never see my little girl again," she moaned. "The bad men have carried her away. Oh, if I were only a man I'd go after her this very minute, indeed I would."

"That's just what I intend to do, Madame," Paul replied. He was seated at the door with Noel, and had heard the woman's words.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Monsieur, but I hope it won't be too late. You must be careful, though, for you have bitter enemies, remember. You are being tracked and watched."

"I know it only too well. I had proof of it last night."

"In what way?" Marie asked coming to the door.

"We were all in the Mount House sitting before the fire when we heard a wild yell of fear and pain outside the window."

"Mon Dieu! What was it?"

"Keep still, old woman, and let Monsieur finish his story," Noel ordered.

"It was a man spying upon us. There were two women who came with us from Quebec, and it was dark when we reached the house. Kondo was on guard and heard footsteps. He saw a form creep up to the window and peer in. The Indian hurled his hatchet and hit him. With a shriek the man vanished. We searched around the house for some time, but could not find him. It was the darkest night I ever experienced. But we kept watch outside until morning while the women slept, or tried to sleep, for they were very much frightened. As soon as it was light enough we searched the woods, and found the man dead among a bunch of thick bushes into which he had staggered. Kondo's blow had been sure. The dead man was a stranger to us, and there was nothing upon him to tell who he was. We buried him later at the foot of a tree near where we had found him."

Paul paused and turned to Marie.

"I cannot tell you any more until I have had something to eat. It is hard for a hungry man to relate what happened last night. He needs something to strengthen him."

"I am sorry, Monsieur," the woman apologized. "But how could I work while you were telling such a story? It's enough to scare one to death. Noel, go and get Monsieur Norvall something to drink. He should have had it before."

The eyes of the hungry men glowed with satisfaction when a few minutes later they sat down at the rude table, and were served with a liberal supply of cold roast duck and corn bread.

"Noel shot these ducks last night." Marie explained, "so I cooked them this morning. But maybe you would like fish instead. I have a nice fresh salmon we caught this morning in our net."

"Oh, no," Paul replied. "We have been eating fish for weeks, so this duck is a great treat. And this bread is very good, too."

"I am glad you like it, Monsieur. We got the corn from the Indians, and I ground it myself. We have a good supply laid away."

"There is no need for anyone to starve in this country, Madame."

"You are quite right. I could make a good living here myself. Noel thinks he'll have to move away. He can go if he wants to, but I shall stay. And if I only had my little girl back again I would be happy. But I don't want to see Pierre."

Just then Noel entered with the rum, and Marie gave Paul and Matta each a brimming mug-full. Noel helped himself, and when he had drained his second mug and was about to fill it again when his wife raised a warning finger, so he at once desisted.

The meal ended, their pipes lighted, the men sat outside under the shade of a big tree. Marie joined them. She could wash the dishes later when the company had gone. Now she wanted to hear the rest of Paul's story and could hardly wait for him to continue.

"Where is Kondo?" she asked. "I hope nothing has happened to him."

"I left him at Mount House to guard the women. They will be quite safe with him near. Anyway, there is not much danger at present, for the ones who were there left before we could catch them, except the man Kondo killed. But, oh, if we had only arrived there sooner!"

"Why, Monsieur?" Marie inquired, noticing the stern expression that came into Paul's eyes.

"We might have saved Lucille, Madame."

"And you think she was there?"

"I am certain. Didn't I find the cross with the broken chain?"

"Yes, but it might have been stolen from her and taken there by one of those bad men."

"What about this, then?" and Paul held up a piece of cloth which he drew forth from a pocket in his jacket.

Marie took it in her hands, which trembled as she examined it carefully.

"Where did you get this?" she cried. "It has been torn from Lucille's dress."

"Kondo found it this morning caught on a snag as we followed the girl's tracks to the creek below the Mount House. That and the cross are proof enough that Lucille was there."

"Mon Dieu! You are right, Monsieur. My little girl is in the hands of evil men. What are we to do?"

"I don't know for sure, Madame, but I am going to do all I can."

Marie's distress was very keen, and she sank down upon a splint-bottom chair and covered her face with her apron. Lucille was very dear to her, and she loved her as her own daughter. Paul sympathized with her, for he was deeply affected by the girl's fate. He felt certain that Jean LeJeune was back of her abduction, and he longed to lay hands upon the rascal.

"Did you hear anything about Jean when you were with the Dutch at Fort Jemseg?" he asked Noel.

"I did, Monsieur, but not very much because I could not understand what the raiders said. But I heard them mention Jean's name the night after the attack, and they were terribly excited."

"What was the reason?"

"I do not know exactly. Some of the Dutchmen went up the river with Jean and they were attacked by Indians. Several of them were badly injured, and two died after they reached the ship from blows they had received on their heads."

"So Jean didn't return with them?"

"I didn't see him."

"Is that all you know?"

"It is, Monsieur, except that the Dutchmen became frightened and believed the Indians were ready to attack the frigate that very night."

"I wish they had," Paul declared. "If the *Flying Horse* had remained there another night not one of the raiders would have escaped alive."

"That's what they feared, Monsieur, and when they heard that the Indians were gathering in a strong body to attack them that night, they hurried away as fast as they could. It was great fun for me to watch them jabbering in their devilish language when they saw the Indians chasing them. They were so afraid that the frigate would run aground."

"Why didn't she? You were the pilot and could easily have put her on a bar or foul ground. I was hoping she would hit somewhere."

"I could have done it without any trouble, Monsieur, and I wanted to do so. But a big devil held a musket to my head to shoot me the instant she struck, so what was I to do? I thought at first that it would be a noble thing to die in a good cause by ridding the country of those scoundrels. But when I thought of Marie and how she would be left alone in the world I did not have the heart to be so cruel."

"Oh, I could have got along, all right," his wife replied. "I would have been proud of you if you had died a hero instead of dying in a drunken fit, as you will some day."

"Just listen to the woman!" Noel exclaimed. "You would think that she didn't care for me at all, and—"

"When did you leave the frigate?" Paul impatiently interrupted.

"Below the falls, Monsieur. They gave me Pierre's canoe and some money. They then sailed away, and I was glad to see the last of them."

"Did you see anything of Sieur de Soulanges?"

"I did once. Just before I left the frigate he was brought up on deck and allowed to speak to me. 'Tell the Red Ranger' he said, 'to look after my wife and little babe. The Dutchmen are to take me to Boston and hold me for a ransom of one

thousand beaver skins or the amount in money. Tell her I am well treated by the raiders.' That was all he said, and he did look grand standing there. I was sorry to see him a prisoner."

Paul rose to his feet and looked at the sun.

"We must be off now," he declared. "But before we go I want to ask you a question. Who brought word to the Dutchmen when they were at the Jemseg that the Indians were gathering to attack them?"

"I think it was Jean LeJeune, Monsieur. I did not see him myself, but some of the raiders were ashore, and when they came back I heard them mention Jean's name quite often."

"I thought so. It is just what I expected."

Paul then turned to Marie.

"I want to thank you, Madame, for the meal you gave us. You are very kind, and I wish that those two women at Mount House were here. You could do so much for them."

"Bring them here, Monsieur. I long very much for the company of women, and I shall make them as comfortable as I can. Since my little girl left me my heart is very lonely. Find her, Monsieur, and the Bon Dieu will bless you."

"I shall do all in my power, Madame, never fear. From this moment the hunt is on, and nothing but death can stop us."



CHAPTER XVII

TREACHERY

When Lucille LeNoir bade Madame de Soulanges good-bye and stepped into the canoe her heart was light and happy. Jean LeJeune had sent for her, so she had been informed by the two men, and he was waiting for her at Isle au Garce. Never for an instant did she doubt the truth of this statement, neither did she wonder why Jean had not come for her himself. She was going home, and her lover was waiting for her. That was all she could think about as the canoe sped down the lake, through the narrow entrance, and then out into the channel along the western bank of the river. Even when the men turned the canoe up the small creek which led to the Mount House she had no suspicion of treachery. They wished to get some supplies which were stored there, so they told her.

It was a beautiful afternoon, and the water was like a mirror. Birds flitted here and there, and the various perfumes of forest and marshlands filled the air. A dreamy peace brooded on river and land. On such a day spirits ran high, life pulses strong, and it is difficult to believe that there is any evil in the world.

Lucille chatted gaily with the two men. They had little to say, and seemed wrapped up in their own thoughts. Of a naturally trustful nature, she never suspected them of wrong-doing. But had she been any judge of character she would have seen much of the history of their lives stamped upon their faces. Jules LeBaume and Simon Rocher were two of the most dissolute and depraved men who ever paddled a canoe or handled a musket. They were surly, vindictive, and ready tools in the hands of any villain willing to pay the price they demanded. Even the rangers despised and feared them, for they were treacherous to friend and foe alike. Such were the creatures who had Lucille in their power and conducted her up the narrow creek on this bright late August afternoon.

At first the girl was delighted with the big house situated among the trees on the north-east side of the hill. It was a large building containing two stories and an attic. She had often heard of it, and knew that it had been built for Madame de Soulanges. But she had never seen it before, so she looked upon it with wonder as she walked up from the creek. She was anxious to see what it looked like inside, for she expected to find it well furnished and most comfortable, in keeping with Madame's refined tastes. While she waited for the men to open the door, she was surprised and startled when they at once smashed in a window and ordered her to enter.

"We forgot to bring the key," Simon Rocher explained. "But this window will do just as well as the door."

But Lucille drew back. She was becoming suspicious, and she glanced anxiously at the men.

"I don't want to go in there," she said. "I shall wait outside while you get the supplies."

"No you don't," Simon replied with an oath. "In you go, and be quick about it, too."

A great fear now filled Lucille's heart. She knew that she had been deceived. This was succeeded by a fierce anger.

"Why do you speak to me like that?" she demanded. "Do you think I am a dog? Take me away from here at once. I want to go home. Jean is waiting for me there."

The men now laughed outright, but it was a cruel mocking laugh. It caused a shiver to pass through Lucille's body. She then stamped her foot in rage.

"Take me away, you cowards," she cried. "You would not treat me like this if Jean were here. He will make you pay dearly for this."

"Yes, he'll pay us, all right, never fear," Jules replied. "But, get in, and don't keep us waiting here all day."

Lucille, however, still hesitated. That broken window seemed to her like the entrance to a terrible trap. At once Simon caught her by the arm.

"In with you, and be quick. Do you want us to carry you?"

There was nothing else for the girl to do. The tone of the man's voice frightened her. Fearfully she entered and looked around. It was a dreary place, and her heart beat fast with dread. She was then ordered up the stairway. As her feet

touched the steps there flashed into her mind what her father had told her about criminals in France ascending the steps of the guillotine. It was a horrible thought. What did these men intend to do to her? she asked herself as she dragged her trembling body to the floor above. As she entered the room which contained the fire-place, she glanced towards the window on the left. Simon, close at her heels, noticed her look and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"No, you don't get out there," he roared. "You just stay here and do as you are told."

Furiously Lucille wheeled around and confronted the villain. Her hands were clenched and her eyes blazed with anger.

"Tell me the meaning of this," she demanded. "Why have you brought me here?"

"We're only obeying orders."

"Orders! Whose?"

"Jean LeJeune's, of course."

"Did he tell you to bring me here?"

"He did!"

"What for?"

The man shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"It's none of my business why a young man wants to have a pretty girl brought to a place like this. My orders were to bring you here, and here you'll stay until Jean comes and pays us for doing his dirty work. So there, now, I don't want you to ask me any more questions, for it will be of no use. But, remember, you can't get away, so don't try. We'll treat you well and do you no harm."

At these words Lucille reeled back a few steps. Then like a young tigress she sprang forward, causing Simon to retreat a little. Never was the girl more beautiful than now. But it was a terrible beauty in which blazing eyes and flaming passion united with the charm of her strong lithe body. She held the men spell-bound, and their eyes dropped to the floor.

"You have lied to me," she cried. "Jean did not send you to bring me here. You wish to harm me. But I shall die first."

Quick as lightning she drew a small sharp-pointed knife from the bosom of her dress and held it in her right hand.

"Look at this, you devils. The first one who lays hands on me will feel its sharp point."

"Ah, so that's your game, is it, you young she-devil?" Jules growled. "You're not as innocent as you seem."

"Innocent! It is because I am innocent that I carry this."

"Keep it for Jean, then. You'll need it when with him, all right. But we don't intend to harm you. We are not lying, and it makes no difference to us whether you believe us or not. But if we planned to harm you, a little thing like that knife wouldn't stop us. But, there, it is no use to talk any more. I'm hungry, so I'm going to get something to eat."

While Simon busied himself with lighting a fire in the big stone fire-place, Jules opened a small bundle, brought forth some food and placed it upon the table. This consisted of dried meat and coarse bread. For drink, he served out rum from a flask, keeping the larger portion for himself.

Lucille would not eat anything but sat near the fire with her eyes fixed upon the men. She studied their coarse faces and tried to detect some expression of sympathy in their eyes. She was well aware that her situation was most serious and only by some desperate effort could she escape. But if she did flee into the wilderness where could she go? What chance would she have of reaching any human habitation? She thought of the canoe down by the shore. If she could only elude her captors and reach it, even if only a few minutes ahead of them, she would be safe. But how was she to do so, guarded as she was?

All through the night this idea was in her mind. The men had thrown some blankets for her upon the floor while they sprawled out full length on the opposite side of the room near the fire. For a long time Lucille could not sleep. Fear and

anger kept her awake and watchful. At last when she did dose for a few minutes she aroused with a start thinking the men were moving towards her. The fire had died down, and the final glow of the charred embers emitted a feeble light. She strained her eyes in the direction of the men, and listened with fast-beating heart. But her captors were quiet, so again she closed her eyes, and wearied to the point of exhaustion, she slept with her right hand clasping the handle of her knife hidden in her dress. When she again awoke it was daylight. The room was cold, but Simon was preparing wood for a fire. Turning, he saw Lucille watching him.

"Awake, eh!" he queried. "Sleep well?"

Lucille deigned no reply, and the man grinned.

"You didn't find us such devils, after all, did you?"

"I know you are devils already," the girl retorted. "Only devils would act as you have."

"Eh, so you think so?" Simon's upper lip curled. "Well, you passed the night, all right, with the devils near. And you think that knife you are clutching would have protected you, ha, ha! It would have been of no more use than a piece of straw if we had meant to harm you. Yes, we'll obey Jean to the letter."

"You lie about Jean," Lucille cried. "He did not order you to bring me here."

"Keep on thinking that way, then, if you wish. It's nothing to me one way or another. But you might as well step outside a while and get a breath of fresh air. Breakfast will be ready when you come back. But don't go too far, for we want you to be here when Jean comes. He'd feel mighty bad if you're not on hand."

Lucille was only too glad to leave the house, for the hope of escape was in her mind. This she knew was impossible, however, when she reached the shore of the creek and found that the canoe had been removed, for what reason it was easy for her to guess. She looked across the narrow strip of water to the thick forest beyond. On all sides were the great trees. Although grim and forbidding in appearance in the early morning light, they seemed more friendly to her than that house on the hillside. Would it not be better for her to lose herself and die, perhaps, in their silent depths than to endure a worse fate at the hands of merciless men? What her captors had in mind she did not know, but she felt certain that it was some evil design which would not long be delayed. Not for a moment did she believe that Jean had anything to do with her abduction. He was too noble for such a thing. He loved her too dearly to cause her such trouble. He had told her so over and over again, and she would trust him rather than those two bad men.

Slowly and wearily the day dragged by. The morning was bright, and Lucille spent most of the time down by the creek under the shade of a big maple. But during the afternoon a cold wind drove in from the sea, the air became chilly, and she was glad to take refuge in the house. The fire was kept burning before which the men sat and smoked, most of the time in gloomy silence. As the afternoon waned Lucille noticed that they were more alert, and seemed to be listening as if for approaching footsteps. Then came the rain. The wind drove it lashingly against the windows on the south side of the house and roared among the trees. At every furious gust Lucille started and glanced tremblingly around. Her face was white and haggard, her eyes wide and staring, her body tense and quivering. Her nerves were almost at the breaking-point, and at times she felt that she would go mad, so terrible was the strain.

As the darkness deepened the wind increased in violence. Lucille's eyes were fixed upon the men. Had they been observing her closely they might have noticed how their expression had changed. They were now the eyes of one who had abandoned reason and was ready for any deed, no matter how wild and desperate. To such a point Lucille had now arrived. At length she could endure the strain no longer. Rising suddenly to her feet she dashed from the room, down the stairs, falling part of the way, then through the broken window out into the night and the storm.

Cursing furiously, the men sprang after the girl. But they stumbled and fell more than once, and had to grope their way to the window, and when outside they knew not which way to go. But they hurried forward as fast as possible down to the creek where they had hidden the canoe. With difficulty they reached it and were relieved that the girl had not found it. For an hour, perhaps, they groped helplessly and hopelessly around. They were soaked to the skin, and sore from the bruises they had received from roots and stones over which they had tripped. They were in a most devilish frame of mind when at length they gave up the pursuit and began to blame each other for the girl's escape. Their words waxed fierce and hot, and they cursed each other, Jean and the girl as only such men can curse. They were ready to fight and slay each other there on the spot. But in the darkness they were afraid to draw close together, for both carried sharp

knives and they were well skilled in their use. Muttering and threatening they stumbled their way back towards the house. They would find the girl in the morning, they felt sure. She could not escape with the river almost surrounding the place.

They approached the building from the rear, and when but a few rods away a glimmer of light pierced the darkness through an opening among the trees. They stopped dead in their tracks and peered forward in astonishment.

"A light!" Jules whispered. "It is from the fire?"

"No, it was almost out when we left."

"Perhaps the girl has come back. The storm and the darkness must have been too much for her."

"No, she hasn't. She wouldn't think of such a thing. She's too much frightened of us."

"But somebody's there."

"It's Jean, most likely. I shall soon find out, anyway."

Simon now crept cautiously forward with Jules close at his heels. Reaching the window from which the light streamed, they peered in, and the first glance showed them Paul Norvall and the two women sitting before the fire with Matta standing nearby as if on guard. Simon emitted a low chuckle and was about to step back, when with a shriek of pain and terror he threw up his hands, staggered back, and with another wild cry fell to the ground. Fearfully Jules leaped away, and dashed off madly into the woods. What had happened to his companion he did not know. He thought only of his own safety. Falling, stumbling, and frantic with fear he reached the creek, groped his way to the canoe, dragged it to the water, and was soon paddling as swiftly as the darkness would allow from the place of terror and death.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRIFTING

It was the irony of fate that while Lucille was wandering fearfully through the forest, friends were near who would have given her assistance and defended her from all danger. Had she but returned to the house what a change she would have found there. But of this she knew nothing, so wearily and despairingly she staggered forward, not knowing where she was going. Every minute she expected to hear her pursuers, and at times she was sure that she heard their steps. She would then crouch at the foot of a tree, and listen with the strained attention of a wild animal.

At length she found herself among bushes and tall grass. Her feet sank into soft ground and then into water. Intuitively she knew that she was on the marshy land which surrounded the hill. Somewhere ahead was the river, and if she could reach that she would feel safer. Madly she plunged forward, the grass and reeds now up to her head. She was soaked to the skin, and the rain beat in fierce gusts upon her defenceless head. She hardly felt the piercing wind, so benumbed now were her senses and overwrought brain. No longer was she a reasoning being, but a half-demented girl fleeing for her life. The grass which struck her face, and the wind which whipped her body were demons besetting her and trying to impede her progress. She imagined that she heard the jeers and cries of her pursuers, and she redoubled her efforts to escape. They should not capture her. She beat frantically with her hands, and tore the grass and reeds from her face. Those long fingers of her enemies should not reach her throat. She would fight them. She had her knife. She drew it from her bosom and slashed furiously to the right and left. Ah, they were falling back. They were wounded. No longer did they wrap themselves about her body and reach for her throat and face. Her feet were on firmer ground. A sense of elation possessed her. Her pursuers were fleeing. She had driven them away. Then a weakness came upon her, and with a pitiful cry she sank upon the ground, helpless and inert.

And there she lay throughout the night, rain-soaked and wind-chilled, the victim of the cruel heartlessness of men. Lucille LeNoir, who on her island home had longed for something to happen, had her wish gratified, but in a manner in which she had never dreamed.

The morning sun broke through masses of drifting clouds. It sent its warm rays down upon the drenched earth. It rested tenderly and caressingly upon Lucille's benumbed form. She felt its warmth, stirred and opened her eyes. At first she was bewildered and stared in wonder at the grass and the trees. Where was she? What was she doing in such a place? Then she remembered, and as the horrors of the past night came into her mind, she struggled to a sitting position. But she was stiff with cold, and her rain-soaked clothes clung clammy to her body. She brushed back the wet tangled hair from her eyes and forehead and looked around. The river flowed before her, calm and unruffled after the turbulence of the night. Beyond stretched the mighty forest. Around her was the wide marshland over which she had plunged in her mad flight. How had she ever crossed it? she wondered. And behind that was the hill where stood the house of terrors. Those cruel men were still there, and soon they would be searching for her. And if they found her, what would be her fate? But they would not take her alive. She preferred death to falling into their hands. She had her knife, so knew what to do. That, however, would be her last resource. She must escape before they found her. But how? There was the river, and she could easily swim that as soon as she recovered her strength. She was at home in the water, and had thought nothing of swimming from Isle au Garce over to the eastern shore and back again. So the narrow stretch of water before her would mean little when her weakness had passed and she did not feel so stiff. When her clothes became dry and the sun had warmed her body she would feel better. But what would she do when she reached the opposite shore? She might find some wild fruit to keep her alive for a while until she made her way home. She knew the direction by the flow of the water. Isle au Garce was down to the left, over twenty miles away. It would be hard travelling, but she could do it if she had the strength. Her only fear now was lest her captors should see her swimming the river, and should pursue her in their canoe. But she would keep low in the water, and thus elude detection.

Higher rose the sun and gradually her body responded to its warm rays. Birds twittered in the trees, and butterflies zigzagged here and there. The perfume of forest and marshland pervaded the air. There was a sweet freshness and joyousness after the night of ravaging storm. Nature was responding quickly to the new day of calm and sunshine. And Lucille, too, responded, so far as she was able. She reclined upon the ground among the grass and looked up into the sky.

"Old Marie says heaven is up there, the Bon Dieu and the gentle Jesus, too, and the Holy Mother. I wonder if they know about me and my troubles. I am sure they will help me if I ask them. The Black Robed man said they would if I prayed to

them. I have not prayed since the Dutch raiders came. Maybe that is why I was allowed to be carried away by those bad men. It must be my punishment. But I will pray now to be forgiven, and I am sure the Holy Mother will ask Jesus to forgive me. I will hold my cross in my hand, for the Black Robe told me to do so, and it would keep the evil one away. I wish I had thought of it last night."

She placed her hand to her throat for the cross, but it was not there. This was startling, and she gave a cry of distress.

"I must have lost it. Oh, what shall I do! But maybe the Holy Mother will understand that it wasn't my fault. I shall pray to her just the same."

She was about to clasp her hands before her, when a gleam upon the water attracted her attention. She looked and at once her prayer was forgotten, for before her was a canoe. It was the glint of the paddle in the hands of a lone voyager she had seen. At first she started and shrank back fearfully among the grass, thinking it was one of the pursuers. The next instant she was relieved to see that he was a stranger to her. His face was covered with a beard, he wore no hat, and his clothes were much torn. He was paddling slowly and erratically, peering now to the right and then to the left as if seeking for something. Here was rescue, for surely this man was not chasing her. She would run the risk, anyway.

Rising with difficulty to her feet, she was about to hail the stranger, when he saw her and ceased paddling. He showed no surprise at seeing the lone girl in such a desolate place. He smiled, dipped the paddle into the water and drove the canoe closer into shore. When near the bank he again ceased paddling and glanced cautiously around. He then looked at the girl.

"Have you seen him?" he asked in a low voice. "Is he here?"

"Who?" Lucille questioned, wondering greatly.

"Reynard, of course. I am looking for him."

"Who is Reynard, Monsieur?"

"I do not know. But I am looking for him. He should be here. Are you sure you haven't seen him?"

"No, I have not," Lucille replied, more surprised than ever.

"Ah, that is too bad. But I may find him farther on."

He sighed, and was about to continue on his way, when Lucille stepped forward.

"Don't leave me here," she pleaded. "Take me with you. I have escaped from two bad men who will harm me if they catch me. Take me to Isle au Garce."

Basil LeRoi placed his right hand to his forehead and his brow wrinkled. He was endeavoring to recall something, like a man trying to remember a lost dream. When he failed, a sad expression came into his eyes as he looked at the girl.

"Is Reynard there?" he whispered. "I thought I heard him speak."

This was more than Lucille could endure. Those men from the stone house might soon appear, so every minute was precious. What did this stranger mean by his silly question and action? Was he making fun of her? If so, she would soon teach him a lesson. She was in a desperate situation. Her clothes were soggy upon her. She was shivering now, notwithstanding the warmth of the sun. She must take matters into her own hands or perish.

"Come closer to the shore," she ordered.

LeRoi did so, and Lucille at once stepped on board. She seated herself in the bottom of the canoe facing the man. It was just as well for her to keep watch upon him, for she could not tell what he might do. He was a mystery to her, and judging by his words and actions he seemed to her like a madman. His eyes had a peculiar expression which frightened her. She had seen a similar look in old Noel's eyes when he had been drinking and was bereft of his senses. But this man was not drunk. He was, therefore, either mad or making fun of her. She shivered as she crouched there with LeRoi still peering from side to side.

"Take me to Isle au Garce, Monsieur," she urged with as much courage as she could command.

"Hush!" the man whispered. "Reynard is over there among the trees."

Lucille looked, but saw no one. She then knew for a certainty that she was with a madman. It was a terrible thought. She had escaped one danger only to encounter another almost as nerve-wracking. She had but one man to contend with now, and if only she did not feel so weak she believed that she could master him if it came to a struggle. Anyway, she could upset the canoe and swim ashore. The river was her friend, and if necessary it would provide a way of escape.

Slowly and spasmodically LeRoi paddled. But for the ebb tide little progress would have been made. Steadily onward they moved over the mirror-like surface of the water which reflected the many trees along the shore in its clear depths. Lucille felt more comfortable now, and quite warm. She did wonder, though, what had caused the sudden change. A few minutes before she had been shivering and her teeth chattering. Now her face was burning and a fire seemed to be passing through every part of her body. She had never known the sun to be so hot, and she longed for the cool shade of the big trees along the bank.

LeRoi seemed to have forgotten all about her. He never looked at her, but kept glancing furtively from side to side. His strange behaviour fascinated the girl. Who was he, and what did he mean by speaking of Reynard? She began to move restlessly now, for the heat was very trying. She felt cramped, too. And how thirsty she was! But she had no cup to dip up the water. She might drink from her hand as she had often done before, but she did not feel like making the effort. She preferred to lie there and watch the man before her.

"Who are you, Monsieur?" she at length asked.

LeRoi looked at her without surprise, and then slowly shook his head.

"Why, don't you know who you are!" Lucille exclaimed.

"Are you hiding Reynard there?" the man inquired, leaning eagerly forward.

"No. Reynard is not here. Why do you ask such a foolish question?"

LeRoi made no reply, but merely dabbled with his paddle in the water. The canoe drifted onward. Lucille did not feel inclined to question the man any further. A drowsiness had come upon her. She slumped gradually down into the canoe, her eyes closed, her head rested against the gunwale, and she slept. But it was not a sweet natural sleep. She was restless, she flung out her arms, and at times cried out in fear. The experience of the past night on the wet ground in her soaked clothes was more than her body could endure, and she was now gripped by a raging fever. Bright buoyant Lucille LeNoir was the plaything of fate. Dangers in the forms of cruel men had surrounded her from which she had marvellously escaped. But another danger now threatened her young life against which she had no longer the power to strive.

And while she crouched there in her fitful sleep, the canoe drifted downstream. LeRoi poised his paddle in the air as much as he dipped it into the water. He no longer peered from right to left, but stared straight forward. His brow was deeply furrowed with wrinkles. He was like a man lost to time and place, groping for the clue to the solution of some baffling problem. Again and again he felt that he had it in his grasp, only to find it fade like some will-o-the-wisp of the marshlands. The cloud of forgetfulness had shut down dark and terrible upon his brain. Only occasionally a faint glimmer appeared for a few seconds, to vanish as rapidly, leaving him more tantalized than ever.

CHAPTER XIX

WILD PASSION

Upon a sandy beach on the western side of the river opposite the lower end of the island Kchee-men-eek, a few Indians were encamped. Only women and children were there, for the men had gone to Big Lake to discuss the question of joining their brethren in their uprising against the whites along the New England coast. Clothes and blankets were spread out upon the ground and bushes to dry after their wetting during the storm. The rude camps were poor defence against such a driving rain, and the occupants had passed a most uncomfortable night. Several children played at the water's edge, while a number of lean dogs roamed around hunting for scraps of food. The women were busy drying and smoking fish and moose meat to be stored away for winter use.

Old Nadu was the busiest of all. She was a superior-looking squaw, and held in high regard by the natives on account of her mental qualities, her quick wit and sharp tongue. She was a large woman, and of more than medium height. But her back and shoulders were now bent through years of ceaseless toil, and her face was deeply furrowed by many cares. She had a big heart and was always willing to share her last morsel of food with others. She was also Paul Norvall's foster-mother, for she had taken him to her heart and cared for him as her own son. She had taught him much of the woodland ways, and it was largely through her patronage that the Indians received the lad and made him as one of themselves. Whatever Paul accomplished later old Nadu took the entire credit to herself, and she was never tired of relating what she had done for the English lad.

She was thinking of him this morning as she bent to her work. He had not been to see her for some time, and she wondered what had become of him. He had never been absent from her so long before, and she knew that he would have many things to tell her when he did arrive.

And as she worked she glanced often at a white man stretched full length upon the ground not far away. She did not want him there, and her faded eyes were unusually stern this morning. He had crawled into her camp and had besought shelter from the storm. And she had fed him that morning hoping that he would then go away. But he had remained, and what was more annoying he would give no account of himself. He would not even explain what he had been doing out in such a rain, and to old Nadu such silence looked suspicious.

And Jules LeBaume was not at all anxious to explain what had happened during the night. He was in a very nasty frame of mind, quite ready to pick a quarrel with anyone, and fight, too, providing his opponent was smaller and weaker than himself. He had sought refuge at this Indian encampment, for he did not know where else to go. The horror of the past night was still strong upon him, and he shivered whenever he thought of the silent and mysterious death which had hurtled out of the darkness and had smitten Simon down. The dying man's shrieks of pain and terror still rang in his ears. But all this instead of filling his soul with awe and repentance only aroused the devil within him, and made him long to vent his feelings upon something or somebody. He had kicked the dogs that morning, and had started to do the same with the children when he was sternly stopped by old Nadu. She had threatened to knock him down, and he knew that she would do so without a moment's hesitation if he touched the little ones. So he had moved sullenly away and sprawled out upon the ground.

As he lay there he thought of the reckoning he would have to make with Jean LeJeune, and the vision of that meeting did not improve his temper. Jean would be furious, not because of Simon's death, but on account of the escape of Lucille LeNoir. Jean wanted the girl, but coward that he was, he had used Jules and Simon to further his evil designs. And, besides, he had planned matters in such a way that the entire blame would fall upon Paul Norvall. He was not only a coward, but a blunderer, and his scheme proved his folly. Passion had blinded him and rendered him incapable of clear thinking, which is most essential in any villainy.

Jules was greatly puzzled over what he had seen in his brief glance through the window of the Mount House. What was the Red Ranger doing there, and who were the two strange women seated before the fire? Where had they come from, and what were they doing in that house? The more he thought about it, the more mystified did he become. Jean must hear about it, and the sooner the better. It would arouse his interest and curiosity, and avert, perhaps, some of the rascal's anger at the loss of the girl. Yes, he would hasten away to Isle au Garce, for Jean had told him that he was going there, but for what purpose Jules did not know.

He was about to rise from the ground, when exclamations from the children and barking of the dogs caused him to sit quickly up. He looked in the direction the little ones were pointing, and at once saw a canoe moving erratically down river. He noticed one man on board, and he was surprised at the way he was paddling. Who could it be? He sprang to his feet and watched as the canoe drew near. The man was a stranger to him, and he presented a wild appearance. He stood very still as the canoe touched the shore and the man stepped out. The children ran back to their mothers, while the dogs ceased their barking and retreated, growling savagely. But Basil LeRoi paid no attention to the angry brutes. He walked straight up to Jules and peered into his face.

"Are you Reynard?" he whispered.

LeBaume shrank back, for the peculiar expression in the stranger's eyes startled and awed him. He glanced towards the canoe, and what he saw there caused him to hurry forward. It was Lucille LeNoir! He knew her at once, and his heart quickened with delight. Most unexpectedly the escaped girl had come right to his feet. He had her now, and he would take good care that she should not get away from him again. That she was crouched in the canoe, asleep, meant nothing to him. He would awaken her, for he longed to see the expression upon her face when she saw who was standing by her side. It would make up for much of the suffering and horror he had endured during the past night.

In his joy at finding Lucille he had forgotten LeRoi. But as he stood gloating down upon the girl, he felt a hand placed upon his arm. Looking quickly around, he saw the strange man peering at him.

"Are you Reynard!" again came the question.

Jules was annoyed, and with an oath he flung the hand from his arm.

"No, I am not Reynard. Leave me alone. It's the girl I want, and not you."

Stooping, he laid his right hand upon Lucille's shoulder and gave her a rough shake.

"Wake up, you little devil," he roared.

Thus aroused, Lucille opened her eyes and stared vacantly around. Then she beheld the leering face bending over her. With a cry of terror she started to rise from her cramped position, but Jules thrust her down again.

"You know me, eh? You thought you could escape, did you? But I've got you now, and you won't get away this time, let me tell you that."

Lucille was weak, and her body was burning with the raging fever. But she would not allow herself to be taken again. She would fight. She would die first. Quickly her hands went to her bosom for the knife. But ere she could grip it, Jules seized her fiercely by the wrists and held her firm. Wildly she struggled and her shrieks rent the air. The Indians crowded around, and the dogs barked and growled more furiously than ever.

At Lucille's cries of terror, LeRoi turned and looked towards the canoe. He had forgotten all about the girl. But when he saw her struggling with her adversary something suddenly awoke within him. His body trembled, his hands clenched together, and his eyes glowed with a new light. That shriek had pierced the dark cloud which had overshadowed his mind and touched some chord of memory. Swiftly he hurled himself upon LeBaume and dragged him away from the canoe. Enraged by such action, Jules drew back his right hand and dealt LeRoi a savage blow on the side of his head. For an instant the latter staggered back, dazed. Then with a cry as of a wounded animal, he leaped upon LeBaume. His was the insensate titanic strength of a madman. He grappled with his adversary, bent him back almost to the breaking-point, hurled him to the ground, and throwing himself upon him he clutched him by the throat with a vise-like grip. Jules struggled vainly to free himself from this demon fighter. His eyes bulged in terror and agony from their sockets, and his hands tore frantically at his opponent's face. In another minute he would have been suffocated had not old Nadu and the other women come to his rescue. They seized LeRoi, tore his deadly grip from Jules's throat and at length succeeded in dragging him off the body of the prostrate man. Wildly he struggled to free himself from the women. Then suddenly his passion died, his arms fell to his sides, and his tense body relaxed. He stared about him like a man awakened from a terrible night-mare. He looked at LeBaume, and then at the women. He was completely bewildered.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked.

Receiving no reply from the gaping women and children, he again looked at the man lying upon the ground and moved

towards him for information. But Jules, thinking he was about to attack him again, scrambled to his feet, sped to the shore, pushed off his canoe and tumbled in. Trembling from head to foot, he seized the paddle and headed the canoe out into midstream. Once he glanced fearfully back thinking that the madman was following. Seeing him where he had left him he breathed more freely. Then his body relaxed, and dropping the paddle he sank down exhausted into the bottom of the canoe. The tide was now setting up, and the canoe caught by the current, drifted up stream on the eastern side of the island. But Jules LeBaume paid no heed to where he was going. A terrible weakness had taken possession of him. His throat was sore from the strangling grip of that wild demon. He did not care what happened to him. He had nowhere to go, and everything was now against him. But he had only himself to blame for his wretchedness. For years he had been a law unto himself. He had led a wild reckless life, and he had always boasted that he could do anything and get clear. But the wheel had now turned against him, and he was receiving some of the misery that he had mercilessly meted out to others.



CHAPTER XX

BEWILDERMENT

The blow that LeRoi had received from Jules LeBaume and his outburst of wild passion broke the dark cloud which had settled upon his mind. His sense of memory returned, bringing with it a great bewilderment as to his surroundings. Everything was strange and perplexing. He looked out upon the river and forest in an effort to locate his bearings. The last he remembered was his arrival at an island with the Dutchmen and pursuing a girl among the trees. But what had become of the raiders and the *Flying Horse*? What were the Indians doing here? He had not noticed them before. And who was the girl they were lifting out of the canoe? She looked weak and flushed. Was she the girl he had chased? But what had happened to her? Perhaps the Indians could tell him. And who was the man out upon the river? He had seen him hurrying to the shore and staggering into the canoe as if wounded. What was the meaning of it all? Everything seemed to be topsy-turvy and unreal.

He watched the women as they assisted Lucille to one of the lodges, and at length followed them. Surely they could explain the mystery. Old Nadu was standing at the entrance about to go inside when LeRoi touched her on the arm. She turned quickly and looked at him, thinking that he was about to attack her. But the wild light had now left his eyes, and Nadu saw there only an expression of wonder and anxiety.

"Where am I?" he asked in French. "And what am I doing here?"

Nadu shook her head. Although she knew a little of the whiteman's tongue, she did not know enough to understand the meaning of these words. She replied in her own language, but LeRoi could not make out what she was saying. He stood sadly before her, wondering what he should do. Seeing his perplexity, Nadu's face brightened, and she motioned to the inside of the lodge. LeRoi understood. The white girl would explain! His eyes shone with animation and he stepped forward as if to enter. The woman, however, barred the way, and shook her head. LeRoi at once grasped her meaning. The girl in there was sick, and the women were attending to her. When they were through, he would be allowed to speak to her.

Leaving the lodge, he walked slowly down to the shore and stood gazing out upon the river. He looked up and down as if expecting to see the sails of the *Flying Horse*. Then his eyes dropped to the calm water at his feet, and what he saw there startled him. It was the form of a man with long hair and matted beard. Quickly lifting his right hand he felt his face and head. Hair of several weeks' growth was there. Why was that? He had always kept his face clean except the moustache on his upper lip. He next looked at his clothes. They were dirty and in tatters, while his boots were so worn that in places his bare feet were exposed. He examined his hands and found them covered with grime. A sickening sensation came upon him. He could not be Basil LeRoi, the clean and well-dressed man who had come with the Dutchmen. He must be some one else, or something very strange had happened to him. Had he been bewitched? He had heard strange stories about this land, of wild creatures with fiery eyes which roamed the forest, and could cast their magic spells over all they met. He had always laughed at such yarns as ridiculous, although he had never been fully able to overcome the awe which such tales had brought to his heart. He could not help being somewhat affected by the superstitious notions which were so prevalent. From a child his mind had been filled with stories of the magic art of sorcerers and the performances of strange creatures which inhabited dark and lonely places. He had always imagined that he was strong-minded enough to resist such ideas. Now, however, he was not so sure. Perhaps the girl he had chased might have been one of those creatures in the form of a human being, and she had cast a spell upon him. It did not seem reasonable that any earthly being could do such a thing. But here he stood, bearded, dirty and his clothes in tatters. And, besides, he did not know where he was, nor what had become of the Dutchmen and the *Flying Horse*. It was certainly a perplexing problem which LeRoi tried to solve as he stood there upon the shore.

At length he thought of the girl in the lodge. He might be allowed to see her now, and perhaps she could explain matters. But he must not visit her with such black hands and unkempt appearance. All at once he felt very dirty and longed for a wash, a complete bath, in fact. He would go down along the shore and find a sandy place in some secluded spot.

Ten minutes later he was in the river. He was a strong swimmer, but never had he enjoyed it as much as now. The water rejuvenated him, and inspired him with new courage and hope. After his swim, he combed his tangled hair and beard with his fingers, using the river as a mirror. He disliked the idea of donning his dirty and ragged clothes. He even smiled as he thought of his former fastidiousness about dress and cleanliness. What a strange and pathetic object he would seem

to the companions he had known before he started forth on that ill-starred venture upon the *Flying Horse*.

When he again stood at the entrance to the lodge he was at once admitted. He saw the girl lying upon some blankets with old Nadu seated on the ground by her side. Lucille's face was still flushed, and she was staring straight before her. As LeRoi quietly, and somewhat timidly, approached, she gave a slight start. But seeing who it was she smiled as if expecting him to speak to her again about Reynard. When, however, he asked her how she felt, she was surprised.

"I feel better now, Monsieur," she told him. "This kind Indian woman gave me something to drink which has made me quite cool and comfortable. But have you forgotten about Reynard, Monsieur?"

It was now LeRoi's turn to be surprised, and he looked keenly at the girl.

"What do you know about Reynard, Mademoiselle? Why do you ask if I have forgotten him?"

"Because that is all you said when you first met me. 'Have you seen Reynard?' you asked over and over again."

"When was that? Where did I meet you?"

"This morning, of course, when I was on the shore of that big marshland. Surely you have not forgotten."

"I don't remember anything about it, Mademoiselle. My mind was a blank until I came here. Everything is so strange, and I have no idea where I am nor who you are. I awoke suddenly as from a dream and found myself in this place with the Indians around me, and you in the canoe."

"But don't you remember saving me from that terrible man, Jules LeBaume?"

LeRoi shook his head, and Lucille noticed the sad expression in his eyes.

"Something must have happened to you, Monsieur, to make you forget. I could not understand why you acted in such a strange way while we were coming down river. You paid no attention to me, but kept peering from side to side as if looking for some one. I thought it was Reynard you were trying to find."

"I guess that was so, Mademoiselle, although I have no recollection of it. The last I remember was going ashore with the raiders upon an island and chasing something that looked like a girl. But whatever it was it must have cast a spell over me which caused me to forget everything."

At these words Lucille raised herself partly from her bed, and so excited did she become that Nadu caught her by the arm and compelled her to lie down again. She then turned angrily towards LeRoi as if she would strike him, evidently thinking he had insulted the girl with some remark.

"Get out," she cried in Indian, which LeRoi did not understand. But Lucille did, and spoke a few words in the native tongue to her faithful guardian. Nadu, thus appeased, seated herself again upon the ground, but kept a strict watch upon the man.

"What is the matter?" LeRoi asked. He was greatly puzzled at the girl's excitement and the old woman's anger. "Have I said anything wrong?"

"No, no," Lucille replied in a low voice, for she felt weak now. "But what you have just told me is so wonderful. I can hardly believe it."

"What, about my loss of memory?"

"Oh, no, I was not thinking of that, but of something else. I was the girl you chased on Isle au Garce the night the raiders came."

"You!" LeRoi took a step nearer. "Were you the girl I saw running from me among the trees?"

"Yes, I was that girl. Oh, I was so frightened, and you had just caught me when—"

"When what?" LeRoi almost breathlessly asked as the girl paused.

"When the Red Ranger arrived, struck you down, and rescued me."

"Ah, so I was struck? On the head?"

"I think so."

"And who is the Red Ranger?"

"He is an Englishman, who travels about with two wonderful Indians. They happened to be passing Isle au Garce that night the raiders arrived, and they were just in time to save me."

"Save you, Mademoiselle! Did you think I would have harmed you?"

"I thought so. What did you chase me for if you did not wish to do so?"

"Because the devil was in me and drove me after you. I might as well tell you the truth. You must know it, anyway, by what I did."

"But you do not look bad, Monsieur. You are not like those two men who stole me away, and kept me in the big stone house."

"What is that you say? Two men stole you away! Tell me about it. But, no, that can wait. You are weary now, and I have talked with you too long already. When you are stronger, you can tell me."

"Very well, Monsieur. But as soon as I am able to travel I want you to take me home. My father must be greatly worried about me."

"I shall take you whenever you wish to go, Mademoiselle. And you need have no fear of me now. You can trust me."

"I feel that I can," and Lucille gave a slight sigh of relief. "Yes, I am certain I can trust you."

LeRoi passed out of the lodge. Several Indians were gathered about a small fire a short distance away, eating. As he watched them he realised how hungry he was. He had no idea when he had last tasted food, but it must have been some time. He did not like the idea of eating what had been prepared by the natives, but the appetizing smell of moose meat overcame his reluctance, and soon he was seated upon the ground gnawing at a piece of well-browned steak which one of the women had given him. So ravenous was he that it mattered little that he held the meat with his fingers. Never had food tasted so good to him, and it was none the less palatable for its lack of salt. He was given a liberal portion of corn-cake, and was surprised to find it so delicious. Then a mug of native-brewed beer was set before him. What it was made of he did not know. Neither did he care. It was just what he needed, and it was more stimulating, so he thought, than the rum the Dutchmen had served to him on board the *Flying Horse*.

LeRoi was wonderfully revived after this meal. If he only had a smoke he would be satisfied. In a pocket he found his old clay pipe, but alas! his tobacco was gone. He held up the pipe, and in another minute he was handed a piece of tobacco as black as a crow's wing. As he cut off a few slices, filled and lighted his pipe with a live coal, he gave a sigh of contentment, and smiled upon the natives who were watching him. Soon the women were smoking, too, and talking in a most animated manner. LeRoi had the feeling that they were discussing him, although he did not understand a word they were saying. But he did not care. The tobacco, though strong, was soothing, and as the smoke encircled his head he began to study his dusky companions. He had always looked upon Indians as wild savages, ready to pounce upon white men and slay them. But these natives were most friendly, and treated him and the girl with much kindness. He was beginning to learn, as many white people have never been able to learn, that the Indians in their primitive state possessed many noble qualities. They received the early explorers with good-will, and it was only when they were treacherously and shamefully treated by the newcomers did they retaliate. LeRoi's eyes were now opened to the quiet dignity and true hospitality of these natives among whom he had been so strangely cast.

The only thing now that caused him any discomfort was his unkempt beard. He could not keep his hands from feeling it, and he longed to have it removed. If only he had a pair of scissors he would clip it. At length he was able to make the women understand his need, and one of them going to her lodge soon returned with a pair of scissors and a small hand-mirror, obtained, no doubt, in trade. Eagerly LeRoi seized them, and withdrawing somewhat apart he soon trimmed his ungainly beard to his liking. He thus presented a far more respectable appearance, and when he returned to the Indians they were delighted at the transformation. LeRoi was pleased, and he felt in a better mood for his conversation with the girl in the lodge. She would behold him in a more favorable aspect, and not the wild being who had brought her down

river. If he had decent clothes he would be better satisfied. However, it was necessary to make the best of what he had, and to show the girl that although clad in rags he was really a gentleman.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DRIFTING CANOE

For some time Jean LeJeune had been playing a double game of falsehood and deceit. He had pretended to be the friend of the commander at Fort Jemseg and the rangers alike. It was a dangerous game, and but for the arrival of the Dutchmen it would have soon ended. The suspicion of Sieur de Soulanges had been aroused, and the traitor would have ere long met the fate he thoroughly deserved. Had the commander acted before the capture of the fort, a great deal of trouble and suffering to others would have been averted.

LeJeune, however, knew nothing of the commander's suspicion. He rejoiced at his downfall and capture. He was now free to carry on his evil designs with no strong power to check and punish him. He had set his lustful eyes upon the girl of Isle au Garce. He might have married Lucille LeNoir, for she was infatuated with the smooth-talking villain, and Pierre would have raised no objection. But he did not wish to be bound to any woman. Women to him meant only one thing, and when he was tired of them they were to be cast aside ruined and helpless. He had done so before, and he desired to do the same with the island maiden.

He was waiting but a favorable opportunity to lure her to her doom when the arrival of the raiders upset his plans. Then the Red Ranger and his Indian companions had suddenly appeared upon the scene. They were the only ones he feared in the whole country. In Paul Norvall he believed that he had a strong and determined rival for the girl. But he vowed that he would get her in spite of the Red Ranger. The failure of his attempt to capture Lucille with the aid of the Dutchmen rankled in his soul. It was another stinging proof of the alertness of Norvall and his Indians. Their sudden attack that night was an unsolved mystery to him, and while his heart was full of rage he knew that great caution had to be exercised. He was like a beast of the jungle deprived of its prey. He knew that the girl was being guarded by his deadliest foes. He must get clear of them before he could expect to get the girl in his possession.

Twice he had secretly visited Lucille by night at the little island in the lake. But she had refused to leave until Madame de Soulanges was ready to go to Quebec. Then when the canoes arrived which Count Frontenac had sent, Jean was afraid to go near the island lest he should meet men whom he wished to avoid. He was wanted at Quebec for several reasons, and if he should run into the hands of any of Count Frontenac's officers he well knew what the result would be.

Fortunately for him Simon Rocher and Jules LeBaume arrived at the river from the coast, owing to the Indian uprising there. They were ready for any desperate deed, and willingly consented to aid LeJeune for a certain sum of money. They were to go for Lucille as his messengers, and when they had her safely away from the island to take her to the Mount House and keep her there. LeJeune would come as soon as he could, pay them what he had promised, and relieve them of their charge. He would then have Lucille to himself. Simon and Jules would leave immediately for parts unknown.

All this seemed quite simple and easy to carry out. But he was not yet contented. He could not forget Paul Norvall and his two Indians. No place would be safe in the country for him from their merciless revenge if he carried out his evil designs towards Lucille. He must get rid of them. But how? Then an idea flashed into his mind. He would use Pierre LeNoir as a tool. And the trader also had something hidden on his island which would be most acceptable to the penniless LeJeune. Lucille had unwittingly betrayed the secret, and Jean had often wondered how he could get possession of the hidden gold.

Visiting Isle au Garce, he filled Pierre's mind with his story of Lucille's abduction by the Red Ranger. Enraged, and never doubting Jean's lies, Pierre was only too willing to follow his deceiver's advice. They would enlist the various bands of rangers on their behalf. The tale Pierre would tell would be sufficient to arouse every white man in the country. They had also heard about the council which was to be held far up the Was-tem-oik in a few days, so that would be an excellent opportunity of speaking to the rangers. In the meantime they decided to lie in waiting along the river above the Jemseg with the hope that the Red Ranger and his Indians would soon be returning from Quebec. Then if near enough to the shore, they could shoot them in their canoes. But if not, they would secretly follow them to where they camped at night, and the rest would be easy.

But they waited in vain for two entire days and nights. They saw the canoes sent by Count Frontenac which carried Madame de Soulanges and others to Quebec. They were close to the shore, and Pierre eagerly scanned the faces of the women to learn if by any possible chance Lucille might be among them. When he failed to see her, every particle of

doubt as to the truthfulness of LeJeune's story vanished. His daughter had been abducted by the Red Ranger! And where had he taken her?

"Mon Dieu!" he whispered, "I can contain myself no longer. I must find that scoundrel who has stolen my daughter. And when I meet him, I shall shoot him like a dog."

Jean made no reply. He did hope that the two would meet, and he had no doubt about what would then happen to Pierre. He would be clear of him, anyway, and the rangers would attend to Norvall later. He urged LeNoir to remain in hiding that day in the hope that their foes would appear. And but for the warning of Madame de Soulanges Paul and his companions might have been the targets for the two men concealed among the bushes. Perhaps it was only a presentiment which Madame had of impending danger. Nevertheless, it was a warning well needed.

It was a terrible night the two watchers spent through the wild storm. They found some shelter beneath their upturned canoe. But long before morning they were soaked to the skin, and shivering with cold. This discomfort, added to their futile waiting, increased their ill-temper, and they were ready to knife each other on the slightest pretext. In fact, Jean had been only waiting for an opportunity to put his companion out of the way. But the latter was too cautious. It was Pierre's nature to be always on guard, and he had often boasted that he could sleep and keep awake at the same time. And Jean found this to be so, for no matter at what hour of the night it might be, he instinctively knew that Pierre was awake and watchful.

About the middle of the morning, after they had dried their clothes in the sun, they started down river. They were two very ill-tempered men, and there was murder in their hearts. It meant nothing to them that the air was fresh and balmy, that the birds flitted and chirped on all sides, and that they were passing through a veritable paradise of great branching trees, wild flowers and shimmering marshlands. All this entrancing beauty was lost upon them. They alone formed the only blot upon one of nature's loveliest scenes.

Slowly and languidly the men paddled. There was nothing to cause them any hurry, as they could easily reach the place of the council meeting by night. They were tired for lack of sleep, and hungry, too, for their supply of food was low. While passing down by the Mount House, Jean longed to go and find out if Simon and Jules had been successful in their undertaking. But Pierre was in the way. He mentally cursed his luck, and drove his paddle furiously into the water. Pierre wondered what had come over his companion, although he said nothing.

Jean was really in a quandary now. Things had not turned out as he had expected. Norvall and his Indians had not shown up, and he did not know when they would arrive. The only thing left was to get the rangers aroused through Pierre's story, leave the latter with them, and then hasten back to the Mount House. There were difficulties in the way, but passion had maddened him to all sense of reason, and he was in the mood for any unlawful venture.

In a most unexpected manner fortune favored him. They were just in sight of the Was-tem-oik when they saw a canoe drifting aimlessly up stream with one person on board. They ceased paddling and reached for their muskets. Whether it was a friend or foe they could not tell, but they could not afford to take any chances in a country of unknown dangers and uncertainty. But as the huddled figure in the canoe did not move, Pierre paddled cautiously forward, while Jean kept his gun ready for any emergency. There might be men concealed in the bottom of the drifting craft ready to open fire.

As they drew nearer, however, they were able to tell that the crouching form was alone, either asleep or dead. Jean hailed him, asking who he was and what was the matter. Then as the man addressed lifted his head, Jean gave a great start and muttered a savage oath. It was Jules LeBaume, and his woe-begone appearance and haggard expression on his face told plainer than words of serious trouble. The musket dropped from Jean's trembling hands. He seized the paddle, and as the blade parted the water like the point of a sword the canoe leaped forward, and in another minute was alongside of the drifting craft.

As Jules LeBaume watched Jean and Pierre approaching, an expression of mingled fear and defiance flashed from his eyes. He knew how enraged the former would be when he learned of Lucille's escape. It was really hard to tell what he might do. But his rage would be as nothing compared to Pierre's if he knew the truth about his daughter's abduction. He was in no condition now to face enraged men. He only desired rest. Once clear of this accursed river he would never return. He had fled from blood-thirsty Indians along the coast only to fall into the hands of devils just as merciless. And he was alone! Simon Rocher was dead! What should he do? He shuddered as he felt Jean's rough hand upon his shoulder, and turning he saw the black beady eyes peering into his.

"Are you sick or drunk?" Jean demanded. Then without waiting for an answer he stepped on board and picked up the paddle.

"Are you going to leave me?" Pierre asked in surprise.

"Of course not. But I've got to look after this poor devil. You go up into the lake a short distance and find a good place to camp. I'll follow, for this fellow seems helpless."

Pierre sat for a minute or two in silence, as if uncertain what to do. He then gave a quick glance at the two men, dipped his paddle in the water and sped away.

"Now, what's the meaning of this?" Jean demanded with an oath. "What are you doing here? Tell me the truth or I'll kill you. What has happened? Where is the girl?"

So furious were these words that LeBaume shrank back in terror.

"Why don't you answer? Are you deaf? Where is Lucille?"

"At the stone house. Mon Dieu!"

Jules buried his face in his hands in the agony of his despair. Again Jean seized him by the shoulder with such a grip that he winced.

"Look here, I'll give you one more chance," LeJeune roared. "What has happened?"

"The Red Ranger and his Indian devils attacked us, and Simon is dead. Oh, it was terrible!"

At these words Jean staggered back and almost upset the canoe. He glared at Jules as if he had not heard aright.

"When did they attack you?"

"Last night during the storm. I had gone down to the shore to see if our canoe was safe. When I went back to the house I heard a cry inside and a wild noise. Going to the back of the house I saw Simon lying on the floor with one of the Indians standing over him with a hatchet in his hand. The Red Ranger was there, and so was the other Indian. I knew they would kill me, too, if I entered, so I ran to the shore and left the place. I reached the foot of that long island when my strength gave out. The tide must have brought me here."

Not for a moment did Jean doubt LeBaume's words. He was dumbfounded. The Red Ranger and his Indians had upset his plans again. His hope of getting Lucille was now ended. But he would have revenge. He would arouse the rangers. They would surround the Mount House and thus finish the career of his deadly enemies. His heart thrilled at the thought. Although his hope of getting the girl would have to be abandoned for a while, he would get Paul Norvall, and that would be a glorious victory. Pierre must know about this. Seizing the paddle, he headed the canoe for the Was-tem-oik. LeBaume was surprised at the change that had come so suddenly over LeJeune, and he wondered what it meant.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RANGERS IN COUNCIL

It did not take long for the news of the destruction of Fort Jemseg and the capture of the commander to penetrate into the deepest recesses of the great wilderness. It was carried as if on the wings of the wind, and the coureurs de bois heard it by river, hill and lake. These hardy rangers received the information with undisguised delight. It freed them at last from the menace of the law which had been hanging over their heads, and from the fear of punishment from Sieur de Soulanges. They were now free from all restraints. The land was theirs to do as they wished, to trade with the Indians and rob them to their hearts' content. It was, therefore, only natural that various bands should gather to celebrate the event by a feast and much drinking.

But these meetings were held at separate places, where, perhaps, twenty or thirty men were within easy and reasonable travelling distance. These composed but a part of the rangers, those who were more friendly to one another, and had most in common. And each band was a law unto itself, and all the members were eager to outdo the others and win the rich fur trade of the country. So with the fall of Fort Jemseg they saw their hopes about to be realized.

There was something, however, which marred their satisfaction, and that was the thought of the Red Ranger. To them he was a mystery. He was not one of them, and as the son of an English officer, he was the object of their hatred as well as their fear. More than once they had experienced his swift and unexpected attacks with a few Indians when they had been glaringly unfair in their trade with the natives. The results had been so disastrous to the rangers that they had been taught a salutary lesson. But it increased their hatred to the Red Ranger and they longed for some opportunity of revenge. They could not understand his influence with the natives, and they often discussed it with one another around their campfires. Then when they heard of the affair at the entrance to Lake Et-lim-lats they knew for a certainty that Paul Norvall and his two native companions had once more struck swift and hard. The ranger who had accompanied Jean and the Dutchmen that night gave a vivid report of what had happened, and this had been circulated far and wide.

"We were taking the Dutchmen up after the women," he lied. "They had heard about Pierre LeNoir's pretty daughter, so wanted to get her. They made Jean and me show them the way, though we didn't like the job at all. We were just about to enter the lake when something came out of the night and hit us slashing blows on one side of our canoe, and the next minute we were hit on the other side. Mon Dieu! I thought we were all dead men for sure, and two were just as good as dead, for they died later. We were all cut, and I got a bad gash on my shoulder which will take a long time to heal. I hope to meet those devils some day."

"And if you do you'll never live to tell the tale," he was informed, and he knew it was true.

It thus became more and more apparent to the rangers that Paul Norvall must be removed, and the sooner the better for all concerned. But they were fond of ease, and during the warm days it was more comfortable to sleep in the shade of big trees than to be on the move after their enemy. Game was plentiful in river and forest, so there was little inducement for them to leave their quiet places of retreat. They did, however, send several of the most restless of their band to keep a close watch upon Paul Norvall, and to waylay him, if possible, on his return trip from Quebec. He would be sure to come by way of the main river, so they believed, and he and his Indians could be shot down from the shore. There would be no danger to the rangers in their place of concealment among the thick bushes. Their worst enemy would be thus out of the way, and the natives would never know who had done the deed.

At length the day came when news of a most startling nature aroused them from inactivity. This was nothing less than a threatened Indian outbreak. The definite cause they did not know, except the rumor of an uprising far away along the coast. That the Indians were planning to wipe out all the white men in the country was enough to make the boldest tremble. It was, therefore, necessary for them to abandon their life of ease and unite as never before to formulate plans of defence. Word was rapidly circulated, and from far and near the rangers hastened to the place of meeting.

The spot chosen for the gathering of the bands was a small island far up the Was-tem-oik. It was thickly wooded and a favorite camping-place for the Indians and whites alike. It was a good trading centre for the surrounding country, and here Tony Trudeau held sway. He was the oldest of the rangers, and he was considered an authority on woodland lore. In deference to him this Isle au Cote had been chosen as a matter of course for the holding of the council.

It took some time to collect the scattered bands, and several days passed before the last arrived. They were a motley crowd, careless in dress, manners and words. They came from the Pas-co-bac, the Kennebecasis, Sah-gan-ik, the lakes beyond, and other places, each with his supply of food and rum. With their canoes drawn up on the shore they feasted and drank to their hearts' content, and more at times than was good for them. Several became quarrelsome, and it was only with difficulty that Tony was able to keep peace between the bands. They talked a great deal about the Red Ranger and the threatened Indian uprising. Definite plans and concerted action, however, were evidently out of the question among such a lawless assembly of rovers.

For two days they thus wasted their time, drinking, gambling, and singing songs, most of them of a ribald nature. They boasted, too, of what they would do to the Red Ranger and the Indians when they met them. Tony was in despair, for he was the only one among them who remained calm and sober, and who realized the seriousness of the situation which confronted them.

The gathering would undoubtedly have been in vain but for the arrival of Jean LeJeune and Pierre LeNoir. It was the evening of the second day, and night was falling, for the days were now growing shorter. Jean looked with disgust upon the sprawling and lounging rangers, and spat contemptuously upon the ground.

"So this is how you spend your time! Mon Dieu! you look more like a lot of babies than men."

"What's the matter with you, Jean?" little Pete from the Sah-gan-ik, asked. "You seem to be looking for trouble."

"No. Trouble is looking for me, and for you, too. You fools are wasting your time here when hell is let loose over the country. Our lives are in danger. What do you think of that? Doesn't it mean anything to you? Are you willing to be butchered like a flock of sheep without doing anything in self-defence? Shame on you!"

These stinging words of rebuke aroused the careless rangers, and they crowded eagerly around the visitor. They needed some blustering bully to rally them, and Jean felt very well contented with what he had so far accomplished.

"What's the latest news, my friend?" Tony asked. "We have heard only drifting rumors so far."

"News! News, man! Mon Dieu! do you think I can give you news before I have something to eat and drink? And make a fire, too. See how my friend here is shivering with cold. And little wonder, for he's had a terrible time of late, and he has a story to tell such as you never heard before."

In a few minutes a cheerful fire was blazing among the trees by which Pierre warmed his cold hands and chilled body. Then when food and rum had been produced, the visitors' spirits revived.

Darkness had now settled over the land, and a breeze drifting up river swayed the tops of the great trees and sent the flames swirling with countless flying sparks up among the branches of the firs and pines surrounding them. The men gathered in a circle about the fire, all eager to hear the story Pierre had to tell. They looked curiously upon the trader of whom they had heard a great deal, and not always to his credit. He presented a picture of almost hopeless misery as he squatted upon the ground puffing at his short black clay pipe. His long hair and matted bushy beard gave him a ghoulish appearance, bringing a sense of awe to the most careless of the rangers. The setting was in keeping with this feeling—the darkness, the whistling of the wind, and the great trees with their black depths which might contain hostile Indians ready to spring upon them. It was only natural that they should glance occasionally towards their muskets leaning against the trees, while some devoutly crossed themselves. Jean noted all this and was quite pleased. It would be easy to make these men do as he wished. They only needed a firm leader and they could overcome all opponents. And in Pierre he had a strong ally. He despised the trader, but he needed him now to further his designs. Afterwards, he could go to the devil, for all he cared.

Rising to his feet he looked silently upon the expectant men. This silence was very impressive, and Jean knew it.

"You have wondered, men, why my friend, Monsieur LeNoir, is so sad to-night. He has great reason to be so, as he himself will tell you."

Jean sat down upon the ground, and then Pierre began his tale of woe. He commenced with his capture by the Dutchmen at the mouth of the river, his escape to the mainland, the destruction of his post, and the loss of all he possessed. Here he paused and dug his dirty fists into his eyes. His emotion was now quite evident, and Tony handed him a mug of rum to revive his depressed spirits. He gulped it down with much relish and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"It's very kind of you, my friend, to give me this drink, and I shall not forget it unless my troubles drive me mad. Yes, they are very great. But the destruction of my post is nothing compared to the loss of my daughter, my only child."

"What! did the Dutchmen carry her off?" Tony asked.

"Ah, no, the Dutchmen did not take her, but another who called himself my friend. He it was who carried off my Lucille."

Several of the rangers had now risen to their feet. They laid their hands upon their muskets and demanded to know the name of the man who had stolen the girl.

"Tell us who he is and we'll start off this minute, and when we meet him we'll shoot him like a dog," Big Joe Ladue, of Pes-kay-boc, cried. "How I'd like to get my hands on the carcajou."

"You may not have to go very far, my friend, and again you may, for the man who carried off my daughter is the Red Ranger. Ah, I thought that name would startle you," and he glanced around at the staring and gaping men. "Yes, he's the man, and I trusted him as a friend. He came to Isle au Garce the day he led the Indians in their chase after the Dutchmen, and lied to me, the villain. He told me that the night my post was destroyed he happened to be passing with his two Indians, and was just in time to rescue Lucille from a raider he struck to the ground. He said that he took my daughter to Fort Jemseg, and that she accompanied Madame de Soulanges to Et-lim-lats Lake, and that she would come home when Madame left for Quebec. Ah, my friends, had I but known how he was lying to me, and what a snake I was entertaining, I would have—"

Pierre ceased, and with a savage oath struck out fiercely with his clenched right hand. His listeners were intensely aroused.

"Ah, had I but known!" he continued. "But I did not know until it was too late. I accompanied him to Point au Chenes where the Indians were scurrying away like rats because they heard the Kee-wools up the creek. And he went with them, and so did the man he had stricken down, with his mind gone, crazy and yelling like a demon. It was only when I went back to the island and found my friend Jean there that I heard the truth. He told me what had become of Lucille, and how the Red Ranger had lied to me."

As Pierre again paused, Jean leaped to his feet.

"What do you men think of all that?" he asked.

"Very bad, my friend," Tony replied. "But where is the girl now?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders and gave a significant laugh.

"That should be easy to guess. With the Red Ranger, of course, at the Mount House."

"Ah, so that's where he has her? But why didn't you and Pierre go and get her instead of coming here?"

"We want help, my friend. Two, three, half a dozen or more, yes, all we can get will be none too many to overcome Norvall and his two Indian devils. Why, Simon Rocher was killed while looking in the window the night of the big storm."

"Killed!" The rangers gasped, for this was news indeed.

"Yes, killed, and Jules LeBaume who was with him had a very narrow escape. It will take a strong body of men to rescue Monsieur LeNoir's daughter, let me tell you that."

A babel of voices now ensued. Oaths and fierce cries for vengeance upon the Red Ranger and his Indians echoed among the trees. It was some time before Tony could be heard. He then asked when the raid upon the Mount House should be made, the villains captured or slain, and Pierre's daughter rescued. By general consent it was agreed that there should be no delay. They would go down stream the next day, conceal themselves until night, and then under cover of darkness they would make the attack. The whole thing was very simple to their excited minds. Their united strength could easily overcome those three men. And, besides, the raid would be so sudden and swift that there could be no possible chance of any resistance. It would be a regular picnic.

As this plan was decided upon and the talk once more became general, two forms hidden among the blackness of the thick trees, moved slowly back. Then as stealthily as tigers they glided through the forest to the opposite side of the island. Here they drew forth a canoe concealed among the bushes, launched it, and with swift, noiseless strokes sped down river.

Paul Norvall and Kondo had heard something of special interest this night, and they knew that there was no time to be lost.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE DRUM BEAT

All through the night Paul and Kondo moved down stream. They missed Matta's strong arms at the paddle, but even without his assistance they made record time. Their business was urgent, and the canoe fairly skimmed the surface of the water beneath the great strokes of the two determined men. It mattered little to them that they had been paddling for many hours during the day and night. Paul was glad that he had left Matta to guard the women at the Mount House, and had brought Kondo instead. Matta was a reliable Indian and would follow a trail like a sleuth-hound. Kondo was all that and more. He had greater intelligence, and Paul knew that he could rely upon his cunning and sagacity in outwitting an enemy. So as they pressed forward they discussed in low voices their plan of action. They needed the assistance of the Indians, as many as possible, and the most likely place to find them would be up the Big Lake. With even a score of strong native warriors they knew that they would be more than a match for twice the number of rangers.

Paul was greatly worried about Lucille. He felt certain that she had been carried off, and that she had been at the Mount House. He had the cross and a piece of her dress as evidence. Perhaps she had been there the night of the storm and had been hurried away through the darkness. Simon Rocher must have returned and was peering through the window when Kondo struck him down. But where was the girl? His heart was heavy, and he longed to find and help Lucille in her trouble. But he could not do that just now. The rangers must be checked and taught a lesson which they would not soon forget. If they felt that they could become lords of the land and do whatever they pleased they would find out their mistake. Conditions along the river were becoming very serious. Since the destruction of Fort Jemseg and the capture of the commander there was no one in authority. Every man was becoming a law unto himself. And that was the law of the wilderness where the strong ruled and the weak were crushed. He thought of Lucille and what had happened to her. And the same might come upon the two women at the stone house. What a chance would they have if beset by men of unbridled passions if they had no protectors? They were in reality nothing to him. But they were women, and while they were in danger, as they certainly were at the present time, he would defend them with all the strength at his command. He might take them to some other place and conceal them. But just now they were safer at the Mount House, so he believed. It would serve as a fortress in case of an attack.

It was only natural that he should think about those two lone women as he bent strongly to his paddle. They had travelled together, and there was something which drew him to them both. He wondered just what it was. He could not forget the noble bearing of Madame Louise, her reserved manner, and her restless hands. Who was she, anyway? And why should such a woman venture forth into such a wild country? She must have a very great reason for undertaking so hard a journey. And then she had suddenly changed her mind that night on the shore of Big Lake. She and Isabel had been walking together, and when they returned he had noticed that something had come over Madame Louise which affected her most intensely. Did the girl have anything to do with the change in her plans? Was she remaining for a while to keep Isabel company and do what she could for her? Did they expect to find the man who had deserted the girl? The idea of two unprotected women finding the villain in such a vast wilderness was so ridiculous as to be almost amusing. He longed to know who the man was. What a satisfaction it would be to track him down and bring him face to face with the girl he had so shamefully abandoned. In his mind he visioned the scene, and the consternation upon the face of the prisoner. Just what he should then do with him he did not know. He might hand him over to the Indians, perhaps, and let them deal with him. It would be a warning to all other white men.

The dawn of a new day was breaking as they entered Big Lake. It spread out before them like a great mirror, and the only ripples that ruffled its placid surface were those caused by the speeding canoe. They headed for a point of land in the distance, and ere long they were able to discern the smoke of several fires. The Indians were there, they well knew, and their hearts thrilled with satisfaction. They had found help sooner and easier than they had expected.

Paul ceased paddling and looked keenly ahead as they drew near the point.

"There seem to be many Indians there," he remarked in the native tongue.

"Ah, ah, many. They have come to the council."

"Getting ready for war, I suppose."

"Ah, ah. They will go against the white men along the coast."

Paul said nothing more as he again dipped his blade into the water. Only a matter of great importance would bring the Indians together. But why should they go so far when there was work for them to do right along the river? He needed their help as much, if not more, than the natives along the coast. But would they listen to him?

Half an hour later Paul was seated in the lodge of the old chief Quis-pam relating to him the events which had recently occurred. He had been cordially received as one of the Maliseets, a member of the tribe by adoption. The chief was fond of the young Englishman, and proud of his strength and deeds of daring. In Quis-pam's veins flowed the blood of courage, and although not able to perform great feats as of old, his heart always responded to the battle-call. His real age he did not know, but as a boy he had seen the renowned warrior, Membertou, who had led his braves against the Armouchiquois and had won a glorious victory. He was never tired of telling about that mighty leader, the most remarkable chieftain Acadia ever produced. He told of his great strength of mind and body, his knowledge of war and his wonderful influence over his people. Quis-pam had taken him as his hero, and longed to be as great a warrior. But no opportunity had come his way until now. Some of his people considered him too old to lead them into battle, but he reminded them that Membertou had reached the age of one hundred years when he went forth against the Armouchiquois. To such a conclusive argument as this his men had no reply.

The chief listened attentively to what his visitor told him. From his impassive face Paul could not tell what effect his words were producing. If he could influence Quis-pam, all would be well. If not, he had no idea as to what he should do. All depended upon his approval.

"Great chief," he said in conclusion, "I have told you what has happened since the fall of Fort Jemseg. The rangers have listened to lies which have been told about me. I did not steal Pierre's daughter. She was carried away by bad men. Jean LeJeune wishes to kill me. He has aroused the rangers, and they will attack the stone house to-night. The Indians own this land which they received from their fathers. Will they allow the rangers to rule? Soon they will try to drive out the Indians. No, they must be taught a lesson, and now is the time. The Indians along the coast have not asked you to join them. When they want you they will send word. In the meantime you must defend your rights here and save this land for your children. You have been my good friend ever since I came among you, and I now ask you to give me warriors to meet the rangers to-night. Great chief, I have spoken."

Old Quis-pam sat in silence when Paul had ended. He smoked calmly and in deep meditation. Paul watched him anxiously, wondering what was passing through his mind. He knew that Kondo was doing his part among the Indians outside where he was talking to the men gathered around him. Kondo would win the warriors, he felt certain, for he was an eloquent and plausible speaker when he had anything of importance to say. Occasionally he heard the ringing twang of a bow string, and it sounded to him like the sweetest music. It was a sign of the spirit of battle which animated the hearts of the natives.

At length Quis-pam rose to his feet, picked up a smooth stick and gave one stroke upon a small drum by his side. The effect was like magic upon the warriors. They sprang to their feet and looked expectantly towards the lodge. They had been waiting for that sound and knew its meaning. It was the call to the council where the decision would be made.

With considerable dignity in his bearing the chief walked slowly from the lodge to an open space on the right. Here he stood silently waiting until his men had gathered about him in a circle. They squatted upon the ground all eager to hear what their leader had to say. Paul stood by his side and many curious eyes were fixed upon him, for the Indians had heard from Kondo about the defeat of the Dutchmen at the entrance to Lake Et-lim-lats.

Quis-pam's heart swelled with pride as he gazed upon his men. And he had reason to be proud, for he was the chief of some of the strongest and best fighters in the country, physically powerful, cunning, alert, and reliable to death.

For some time the chief addressed his men. He told in glowing language of the greatness of their land, and the famous deeds of the warriors of the past, dwelling especially upon the prowess of the mighty Membertou.

"This land is ours," he said in closing. "Our fathers gave it to us to keep for our children. But strangers have come into our midst who wish to drive us out. They speak a different tongue, and their ways are not our ways. We have heard how the white men along the coast have treated our people there. They robbed them and dealt treacherously with them. The Indians have now risen to defend themselves. And we must do the same here or we shall lose all we possess. To-night these strangers will come and attack the stone house at Et-lim-lats. They wish to kill our white brother here. But his

death will not satisfy them, for should they kill him their hearts will be so swollen with pride that they will seek to destroy us. They must be stopped. We have lived at peace with them, though they have robbed us. We do not wish to destroy them, but they must be taught a lesson. They must be made to know that the Indians own this land and that we shall be rulers. Our white brother is in danger and he asks for our help. What shall our answer be?"

As soon as Quis-pam had ceased, the warriors leaped to their feet and sounded their battle-cry. Then bow-strings twanged, and the drum which had been brought from the lodge was furiously beaten. In this manner the Indians voiced their approval.

"It is well," the chief quietly remarked when the confusion had ceased. "Let us now prepare for the journey."

Paul was delighted. Success had crowned his efforts. But he needed rest, for stern work still lay ahead of him. He sought a quiet spot under the shade of a big tree, and was soon fast asleep.



CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE RIVER BANK

Seated upon the bank of the river Madame Louise and Isabel watched the water flowing lazily by at their feet. It was a bright, beautiful morning, and the air was filled with the hum of innumerable insects. Great trees covered the entire land, but along the river reeds and wild flowers flourished in abundance. A path led through the forest, and along this the women had come. This spot seemed to them the end of their little world. They looked across the river, and nothing but endless leagues of trees met their searching eyes. They were swallowed up in a primeval wilderness, two women unable to do anything on their own behalf.

A sense of helplessness came into Isabel's heart as she looked far and wide with no sign of human life anywhere. Impulsively she caught her companion's hand in hers.

"Oh, Madame, I feel that I can endure this no longer," she exclaimed. "Why are we kept here? What chance is there of my finding that man who deserted me?"

"And you still hope to find him?" Madame Louise quietly asked.

"I do."

"And what then? Do you imagine that such a villain will pay any attention to you? In a country such as this there is no law to protect you. Every man is a law unto himself."

"But Monsieur Norvall will help me, Madame. He and his Indians are so kind and strong that they will do what they can for me."

"I believe so, my dear. But we know so little about Monsieur Norvall. He is troubled over something. You remember that terrible night of the storm, and how he found something on the floor of the house. I do not know what it was, but it made him tremble and caused a strange expression to come into his eyes. He was a changed man after that, and he left us early the next morning. Then when he returned he took Kondo with him. It was easy to tell that he was much worried."

"Have you any idea what it was, Madame?"

"I have not. But he promised that he would return soon, and then we may know. We seem to be surrounded by dangers, and that may be the reason why Matta guards us so carefully. He follows us, no matter where we go, and I know he is not far away now, hiding among the trees."

"I like him, Madame, and feel quite safe when he is near. He never bothers us, and he is always so pleased to do anything he can for us. I do not believe he would leave us to die as Rolfe left me, and he is only an Indian."

"Ah, my dear, such Indians as Matta and Kondo are nature's gentlemen. They have different standards from white people, and, perhaps, they are fortunate. They are great fighters and blood-thirsty when on the warpath. But I have never known them to insult a female captive, no matter how cruel they might be in other ways. I have found them honest and truthful, which is more than one can say of many so-called civilized people. We must remember that the life and deeds of the Indians have been told and written only by white men, and their accounts, as a rule, have always been against the natives. I have never been betrayed by Indians."

She ceased abruptly and looked out over the water. Isabel noticed that her hands were again very restless. This was the first time she had given any hint that she had ever lived among the Indians, so her words were of great interest to the girl.

"Were you ever in this country before, Madame?"

The woman looked at her for a few seconds, and then turned her eyes once again out over the water. She seemed lost in thought.

"Yes, I have been in this country before, but not here," she at length replied. "I lived much of my life in Acadia, and it is very dear to me. I went away, but had to come back. My heart is here, for where one's treasure is there is one's heart also. Yes, I have a precious treasure somewhere in Acadia, and it is that I am seeking."

She paused and rose quickly to her feet. Isabel was startled at the changed expression upon the woman's face. It was stern, and her eyes glowed with anger. Her form was drawn to its full height and her manner frightened the girl. She shrank back as if expecting her to turn upon her. Madame Louise, seeing the girl's fear, laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder. Her face softened, the fierce light in her eyes vanished, and she smiled.

"I am afraid I have said too much, my dear. You have enough troubles of your own, so why should I worry you with mine?"

"I like to hear you talk, Madame. You have suffered and can feel for me. But you are so strong while I am very weak. I wonder what would have happened to me if you had not come along when you did. Le Bon Dieu must have brought you to me."

"Do you think the Lord had anything to do with it?" Madame Louise somewhat sharply asked. "Monsieur Norvall and his Indians saved you."

"I know that. But, you see, I prayed to le Bon Dieu, so He sent them and you."

A slight cynical expression hovered for a fleeting second around the corners of Madame Louise's mouth, and she was about to scoff at her companion's words. But seeing the look of implicit trust in Isabel's eyes, she refrained.

"Has your faith in le Bon Dieu been a comfort to you?" she questioned.

"It has, Madame. When that bad man left me, I prayed and He sent the Indians to help me. Then when I was wandering with them I would have died but for the thought that le Bon Dieu would send some one to save me. And He did. I am certain that He heard me."

"And do you pray to Him now?"

"Oh, yes, Madame. And I have my little cross which good Father Benoit gave me before I left France. I hold it in my hand every night and it makes me strong. Father Benoit said it would, but I did not think much of his words until I was in such trouble. Now I know."

A slight mistiness came into Madame Louise's eyes, and she averted her face lest Isabel should notice her emotion. She then knelt by the girl and enfolded her in her arms.

"May you always have such perfect trust, my dear. I had it once, and I would give almost anything to have it now. I need it as much as you."

"Why don't you trust le Bon Dieu, Madame?" Isabel asked in surprise. "You must trust Him, for you are so good, and—"

She suddenly ceased, and with a cry pointed down river.

"Look! A canoe! It is coming this way!"

Startled, Madame Louise's eyes followed the direction of the girl's pointing finger. She then rose quickly to her feet. A canoe containing one person was coming towards them. It was not far away, and moving slowly. It was easy to tell that the lone voyager was a man. His face was turned towards the shore, and he was peering keenly among the trees.

Isabel clutched her companion by the arm.

"Let us hide, Madame. He may be an enemy."

"Enemy or friend, I am going to speak to him," was the low reply. "It is a relief to see some one, and he looks like a white man."

The canoe was quite close now, and they could tell that the occupant was a bearded man, and his clothes almost in tatters. Curiously they watched him, and when LeRoi saw them standing upon the bank he ceased paddling and stared at them. Then a smile broke over his face, and dipping the paddle into the water he drove the canoe straight towards them until it grounded upon the mud and gravel. He at once rose to his feet and bowed in a most gallant manner.

"Pardon me for intruding," he began, "but I did not expect to find anyone here, especially ladies. Or is this fairy-land I

have entered?"

"You need not apologize, Monsieur," Madame Louise replied. "We are very glad of your intrusion, and we are not fairies, by any means. We are two lone women stranded here in the wilderness which is far from being a fairy-land to us."

"I am in the same unfortunate situation, Madame, so we can sympathize with one another. With your permission I shall come ashore and rest. The heat is very trying, and I have been paddling for some time."

He drew the canoe farther up on the shore, and climbed up the bank to where the women were standing. As he did so, Matta, who had been keenly watching from among the trees, clutched his musket more firmly and glided a little nearer. Not a sound did he make, and no one was aware of his presence.

LeRoi seated himself upon the ground, but the women remained standing. Isabel watched him with interest and curiosity. She looked very beautiful with her long silken hair falling over her shoulders in rippling waves. Her face was flushed, and her dark eyes glowed with animation. LeRoi was deeply impressed by her beauty and quiet maidenly charm. So much in harmony was she with her surroundings that she seemed like a woodland nymph which had suddenly appeared from the forest depths. His heart stirred with admiration.

"I very reluctantly undertook this trip to satisfy a sick girl," he explained. "I have now been well rewarded. This may not be fairy-land, but it certainly is a land of surprises."

"Have you come far, Monsieur?" Madame Louise inquired.

"Not very far, although it seemed a long way to me."

"And you came to satisfy a sick girl, you say?"

"I did. Old LeNoir's daughter is the girl. She has had a very trying experience, and she is now lying in an Indian lodge several miles down river. All through the night she was calling for a trinket she lost, a little cross, so she said, and this morning she asked me to find it for her."

"Where did she lose it, Monsieur?"

"She does not know for sure. But she thinks it was in a big stone house where her captors took her, and from which she escaped the night of the great storm. I have hunted for that house, but cannot find it."

"Why, that must be where we are staying," Madame Louise exclaimed. "The night we arrived there Monsieur Norvall picked up something from the floor, examined it, and put it into his pocket. I could not see what it was, but from that moment he was a changed man, and left us early the next morning. Perhaps it was the cross he found."

"Most likely, Madame. The girl fled from her captors and spent the night by the shore in all that storm. I happened along in my canoe and took her to the Indian camp. That is what she told me, although I remember nothing about it."

Noticing the women's surprise at his closing words, LeRoi smiled.

"It is no wonder you are surprised, Mesdames. But such strange things have happened to me lately that I am quite bewildered. I came to this river with those Dutch raiders, as interpreter. At Isle au Garce I was struck down by that same Norvall you just mentioned. He is known in this country as the 'Red Ranger'. I knew nothing after that until yesterday morning while at that Indian camp where the sick girl is now lying."

"But what were you doing in the meantime?" Madame Louise asked.

"That is what I should like to know, Madame. I have no idea what happened to me after I was stricken down. But I must have been wandering along the river in that canoe. It is all a great mystery to me. And I have come upon another mystery to-day. While paddling up the river, and keeping close to the shore, I saw a name scratched upon the sand. It is the name of the man I have been seeking for years."

"What name?" Madame Louise asked as calmly as possible, although her heart was beating fast.

"It was 'Reynard'. But, Madame, what is the matter? You look frightened."

"Oh, no, no, Monsieur. But I saw that name in the sand on the shore of Big Lake and it affected me very much. It didn't appear natural to see it there. So when you told me that you saw it in another place, it made me afraid."

"Afraid of what, Madame?"

"I can hardly explain. But it makes me feel that an evil spirit has been at work."

"Ah, I have been thinking the same thing, Madame. It may be a warning to me."

"Of what?"

"A warning from Reynard himself. Perhaps he is dead, and his spirit may have put his name in the sand to tell me that my search will be in vain, and if I continue, something terrible may happen to me. I am not naturally superstitious, but since coming to this strange land I don't know what to think."

"Why are you seeking for Reynard, Monsieur?"

"Because he murdered my father."

"Oh!"

Madame Louise was breathing hard, her hands were firmly clasped before her, and her face was white.

"Yes," LeRoi continued, "Gervais Reynard and my father were close friends. But at the capture of Fort LaTour by Charnisay Reynard turned traitor. To save his own life he hung all the garrison, including my father. I was a child then, but it has been the one great aim of my life to find Reynard the traitor."

"And if you find him, Monsieur—?"

"I shall kill him as I would kill a poisonous snake."

"But suppose he should kill you first?"

"That would be hardly likely, Madame. I would not give him any chance."

"What, not allow him to defend himself!"

"Oh, I should do that. But I am an expert swordsman."

"And he may be, too."

"That would make no difference. I know I shall kill him if I meet him."

"He must be quite old now, Monsieur, and you are young. Would a contest with such a man be honorable to you?"

LeRoi leaped to his feet, and so fierce was the expression in his eyes that Isabel shrank back in fear. Matta at his silent watch drew a little nearer.

"I have been seeking him all my life," LeRoi cried in a voice tense with emotion. "When I have found him, I shall pay him as he deserves. He shall not escape."

"But suppose he is dead, Monsieur?"

"Then, that ends it, so far as I am concerned."

"But what about that name in the sand? How can you account for that? I do not believe his spirit put it there."

LeRoi made no reply. The fierceness faded from his eyes, and in its stead came an expression of uneasiness.

"It is strange," Madame Louise continued. "It may be a warning, so I advise you to be careful."

"I have no fear, Madame. I am not superstitious. But I must go now, for that girl will be anxious. I see it is no use searching any more for that cross."

He took a step towards the river, but the woman laid a light hand upon his shoulder.

"Pardon me, Monsieur. But is there anything I can do for that sick girl?"

"I think not, Madame. The Indian women are looking after her, so she has good care. But I shall speak to her, and if she would like to see you, I can come for you. Will you remain here?"

"I cannot tell, Monsieur. I shall know more, perhaps, when Monsieur Norvall returns."

Again LeRoi looked at her and Isabel. He was greatly puzzled at the presence of these two women in such a lonely place. But it was merely another surprise of this strange country, and he was getting quite accustomed to startling things. In another minute he was in the canoe and paddling slowly down river. The women stood and silently watched him until he at length disappeared from view.

CHAPTER XXV

A NIGHT OF CONFLICT

Darkness had settled over the land as the rangers sped out of the Was-tem-oik and entered the main river. There were seven canoes in all, with from five to six men in each, except one which contained only Pierre LeNoir and Jean LeJeune, and which kept some distance behind. Jean was in no hurry. He had no intention of joining in the fight with the Red Ranger and his two Indians. He knew them only too well from sad experience, and he set too high a value upon his life to run the risk of meeting such ugly devils again. He had not the least compunction, however, about letting the other rangers do the fighting, for their lives meant nothing to him. He would have gladly sacrificed them all in order to get rid of Paul Norvall. And, besides, he had something else in mind. His main thought now was how to get rid of Pierre. With him out of the way his course would be clear. If he could only knock him on the head he would throw him overboard. But he had only a paddle, and the trader was a strong man. If a struggle ensued, it was hard to tell what might happen. He, accordingly, decided to wait and carry out the plan he had already conceived in his heated brain. If that failed he certainly would be in a quandary.

When the rangers left their camping-place that afternoon at the head of the Was-tem-oik they imagined that their plans were known only to themselves. In this they were greatly mistaken. Keen eyes had been watching them all day, and they had not been long on their way down stream when the Indians waiting at the Big Lake were aware of their movements. Natives have means of communication which are often quite puzzling to white men, and in the special signal system the Maliseets excelled. From the tops of high hills they could send messages known only to themselves. So while the rangers imagined that they were moving secretly and securely, they were unconsciously headed for the greatest danger they had ever experienced.

LeNoir was in no enviable frame of mind. He was very tired, for he had slept but little for two nights. And this undertaking was not altogether to his liking. He did not trust the rangers, but there was no other way to secure Lucille, so he believed. He was anxious to meet Norvall, the villain, and when he did meet him he would reckon with him for carrying off his daughter. Pierre was in such an ugly mood that he longed for any deed, no matter how wild and hazardous. He wanted revenge, and his passion blinded him to all sense of reason.

As they sped up river, LeJeune kept to the eastern side of the long neck of land on which the stone house was situated. He knew that the rangers would take the narrow western channel and enter the little creek which ran up in front of the house. There was another way which better suited his purpose, and towards this he steered. At first Pierre did not notice the way they were going, so absorbed was he with his gloomy thoughts. But when he at length ceased paddling, looked around and located their position, he was surprised.

"What are we doing here?" he demanded.

"Why shouldn't we be here? Where else should we be?" Jean replied.

"In the western channel, of course. The rangers have gone that way."

"Let them go, then. We shall cross overland, which will be shorter. It will be safer, too, so that should satisfy us both."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand? We'll let the rangers do the fighting and be on hand among the trees to help them if necessary. I don't feel like going to hell just yet, and I know you don't. But we shall stand a good chance of going to-night if the Red Ranger and his two Indian devils are alert, as they are sure to be."

"I agree with you, my friend. This is a risky undertaking, and to tell you the truth, my nerves are not very steady. If I had something strong to drink I would feel better."

"And so would I, Pierre. But when it is all over, and your daughter is rescued, we shall go to Isle au Garce and sample some of your good rum."

"I'd like to be there now, my friend, instead of prowling around here in the darkness. But that Red Ranger has caused this trouble. I do hope we shall get him to-night."

Pierre could not see the curl of LeJeune's upper lip as he uttered these words. It was an ugly curl, like that of a savage beast baring his fangs.

They were quite near the landing-place now, and it was only with difficulty that the canoe was guided through the darkness. The sky was overcast and the moon had not risen. Over and over again Jean ran the canoe ashore only to find each time that he was mistaken. He cursed his luck as they groped forward, and when they felt that they should never succeed, they made the landing-place. Making the canoe fast, and with their guns in their hands they climbed the bank at the very spot where Madame Louise and Isabel had stood that day.

"Let me go ahead, for I know the way," LeJeune whispered. "But we must make no noise lest we be discovered."

As Pierre followed LeJeune he could not see a hand before him, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he kept the trail. At first he was guided by Jean's soft steps, but as they advanced he lost the sound altogether. Several times he stopped to listen, but hearing nothing he increased his speed. In his haste he left the trail, and ere long he was floundering helplessly around among the trees and thick underbrush. He did not dare to call, for the enemy might be near. At last he stopped, wearied almost to the point of exhaustion. He knew that he was lost, and he became angry. Then his anger increased to a burning rage. He now believed that LeJeune had deserted him, for what reason he did not know. Never did he feel so helpless. He longed to return to the river, but he did not know which way to go.

Sinking upon the ground, he tried to think what he should do. He had now given up all hope of Jean's return. The villain! He would reckon with him just as soon as he met him again. But perhaps the fellow had not meant to desert him. Owing to the darkness Jean might have lost the trail, too, and was wandering aimlessly around. It was very easy to get astray on such a night. Pierre strained his ears in an effort to catch even the faintest sound of his companion. But all he heard was the slight rustle of the tops of the trees. A sense of uneasiness stole gradually into his heart. He could not account for this. He was no coward, but ever since his visit to the abandoned fort at the mouth of the river and his capture by the raiders, a feeling of impending disaster had possessed his soul. Often he had awakened from sleep in terror thinking that his comrades he had put to death were surrounding him. And they seemed very near to him this night as he crouched among the trees. He tried to banish this idea, but in vain. Again he saw them standing before him beneath the noose dangling from the great beam overhead. And he saw, too, the brave Lady LaTour with a rope around her own neck, watching with pitying eyes the slaughter of her brave men. He saw again the sad reproachful look she had given him. It had never faded from his mind, and he beheld it now more clearly than ever. Was he never to be free from that horrible scene? Would it haunt him all his life? He had believed that in time he would forget, but he now knew that it was impossible. Was retribution for his cowardly deed overtaking him at last! Everything had been against him since his visit to the old fort. The raiders had destroyed his post, he had lost Lucille, and LeRoi's son was seeking to kill him. He suddenly remembered that name in the sand. What did it mean? Was it another evidence of the unseen terror that was pursuing him, and which would give him no peace? And the Indians, too, whom he had hoped to win were unfriendly. And the Kee-wools had mysteriously given their dreadful sign right near his island, and that meant disaster. He trembled from head to foot as he thought of these things. He felt that he would go crazy if he remained here any longer. Action was the only thing that would give him any relief. Fighting his way through the dark forest would be better than crouching there the prey of such horrible devils of the mind.

Rising to his feet, he moved slowly forward. He had taken but a few steps when he was startled by the report of a gun right ahead. This was but the prelude to the fusilade which immediately followed. And mingled with the shots were cries of surprise and shrieks of pain. Pierre now knew that the fight was on. But did the shooting come from the rangers? Had they surprised Norvall and his two Indians, and did those cries and shrieks come from them? But there were too many for three men to make. Were there others with the defenders? Had the Red Ranger in some unaccountable manner learned the plans of the rangers, and had called a band of Indians to his assistance? It did seem so, and his fear of Norvall increased. Who could escape from such a man?

At first LeNoir decided to hasten away. But where should he go? He could not find the river, let alone the canoe. He abandoned the idea and crept cautiously forward. His curiosity was aroused, and he was anxious to know what had happened. He felt quite safe, for he could not be detected among the thick trees on such a dark night.

For a while all was still, and he could almost hear the beating of his own heart as he pressed forward. Then suddenly another volley burst forth, and no sooner had this died away than another came from the right. He was quite certain now that what he had surmised was correct. The rangers had been met by Indians lying in wait for them along the bank of the creek. He was most thankful that he had not come that way. And where was LeJeune? he wondered. Had he received any

knowledge that the Indians would arrive in force? Was that the reason why he had taken the overland trail? But if he knew, why had he not mentioned it?

This was very puzzling to Pierre. From the cries he heard and the wild splashings in the water he well knew that some of the rangers had been hit and their canoes wrecked. From his knowledge of them he felt sure that the ones who were able would get away as speedily as possible. But what about those who fell into the hands of the Indians? Their lot would not be enviable, and he shuddered as he thought of their fate. And he himself was in danger. Should the natives find him they would consider him one of the attacking party. While it was dark he would be quite safe. But as soon as he could see he would make his way back to the canoe and escape.

Everything was quiet now. The guns were silent, and the splashings had ceased. If there were men near they made no sound. Nevertheless, he was certain that along the shore there were silent forms, alert and gliding, perhaps, among the trees.

For some time he remained listening and watching. He was tired and he was tempted to lie down upon the ground and sleep. His eyes were growing heavy. But suddenly they opened wide, for through the darkness winged a streak of light. It came from the direction of the stone house, and it told him that the fight was over. The building had been in darkness during the conflict, but now that the danger was past there was no more need of caution.

As Pierre watched, a great desire came upon him to look in at one of the windows and see what was going on inside. He wished to be sure that Lucille was there, and that no harm had come to her. He could not rescue her, he well knew, but to behold her would be some satisfaction.

Cautiously he circled his way up the hill until he was able to look down upon the rear of the house. A light was shining from one window, so towards it he moved. He travelled swiftly now until he came within a few yards of the building. Then his pace slackened, and he listened attentively. Hearing nothing, he crept forward, came as near to the window as was wise and peered in. He saw several persons in the room, although he could not distinguish who they were. The candle light was dim and he could not see distinctly. But he did notice the form of a woman, and she was standing with her back towards him. At first he thought it was his daughter, although she seemed taller than Lucille. Presently she turned around, and as the light shone upon her face, Pierre staggered back as from a blow. It was Louise! What was she doing here! He had never expected to find her in this place. Perhaps he was mistaken. Louise was in France. This must be some woman who resembled her. Again he looked. It was Louise, there was no mistake about that. But who was the girl standing by her side? Was it Lucille? Had the two met? And if so, did they know each other? His brain reeled at the thought. Louise and Lucille together! He could think of nothing else, and all his other worries were forgotten in the presence of this mystery and trouble. He would have to leave the river. But where could he go? And he would have to give up Lucille. With a great effort he repressed a cry of despair. He took one more searching look through the window, moved slowly away from the house and at length sank down under a big tree, bewildered and exhausted. But he still stared, as if fascinated, at that lighted window.

Grey dawn found Pierre making his way rapidly towards the river. He was shivering, for the night had been cold, and he had slept in spite of his determination to keep awake. It was just light enough for him to find his way. There was no sign of life about the stone house, and not an Indian was to be seen. Pierre felt perfectly safe as he sped through the forest. He would leave the country. He had money enough to keep him the rest of his life. He would go to Isle au Garce at once, get his gold and disappear.

Coming at last to the landing-place, he looked for the canoe. But it was not there! Then the truth dawned upon him. LeJeune had taken it and fled! He stood as if turned to stone, staring at the place where they had landed during the night. LeJeune had deserted him in the woods!

And as he stood there, he heard a slight noise on his left. He turned quickly and caught a glimpse of an Indian creeping towards him. He gripped his musket and brought it to his shoulder. But ere his hand could press the trigger, there was a report among the trees and something struck him between the shoulders. He staggered, and with a wild cry of pain and terror he fell prostrate upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THE FIGHT

Terrified and amazed beyond measure, the rangers sped away from the place of their defeat. Not all of them, however, for several had been killed or drowned. The few who managed to reach the shore of the creek were speedily captured by the Indians, except two or three who escaped among the trees. The fleeing rangers could do nothing for their unfortunate comrades. They were thankful to be alive after their harrowing and unexpected experience. They carried with them several injured men as proof of the deadly fire of the enemy. Consternation filled their hearts, and they were completely mystified. They had expected to surprise and encounter three men, but instead they had been met by a band of fully prepared Indians. How had the natives obtained knowledge of their plans? they asked one another in hoarse whispers. No one, however, was able to explain, although all thought of the Red Ranger. In some unaccountable way he must have received word of their intentions, and had summoned the Indians to his assistance.

There was something else which troubled them and caused them to bend to their paddles with feverish energy. The natives had been aroused, and even now, perhaps, they might be in hot pursuit, eager for more slaughter. It was a terrible thought, and so wrought up were they with excitement that at times they imagined they could hear the Indians following them. Even when they had entered the Was-tem-oik they did not feel secure. Anyway, they rested here, huddled their canoes together, and counted their members. Ten were missing, and the rangers trembled as they thought of their fate.

Presently some one asked for LeNoir and LeJeune. But no response came through the darkness. Then the men remembered that they had been far in the rear all the afternoon. It soon became evident to all that they had not been with them when they entered the creek. Had they deserted? That was the question they asked one another. Or had the rangers been betrayed by those two men? For some time they had known that LeNoir coveted the rich fur trade along the river, and with LeJeune's aid he may have arranged this plot to destroy the white men who were his keen competitors. This seemed to be the truth, and the rangers' hearts were filled with an intense anger. They disliked LeNoir and had never fully trusted him, so they now believed him capable of any deed of treachery. He was willing to sacrifice all the rangers, men of his own race, in order to further his own selfish designs. The more they considered this, the more convinced did they become of the truth of this idea. But the villains should not escape, so the excited men resolved, and there in the darkness they swore that they would capture LeNoir and mete out to him the punishment they believed he deserved. In the meantime they would go back to the island and form their plans. In some way they would have to pacify the Indians, and when that was done they would attend to LeNoir.

All through the night Paul Norvall had been very busy and alert. He had found it difficult to keep the Indians under control. He had no trouble with Kondo and Matta, for they obeyed his slightest command. But with the others it was different. The spirit of the wild possessed them, and they were eager for the blood of their enemies. They had crouched silently and patiently among the trees while awaiting the arrival of the rangers. But when they heard the canoes moving cautiously up the creek, and they had fired their first shots they were eager to rush forward and put to death all who were able to swim ashore. This Paul sternly opposed, and it was only through his almost superhuman efforts that all the captured rangers were not slain at once. The Indians were intensely aroused. This easy victory over the whites filled them with a desire for greater conquests, and Paul hardly knew what to do. To handle Indians in times of peace was one thing; to control them when at war was another. He restrained them, however, from pursuing the fleeing rangers, so that was something.

The wounded men were carried into the stone house where Madame Louise and Isabel did what they could for their welfare. It had been a night of terror to the two women. Paul had visited them and informed them of the expected attack, and that they would be safe. But when the shooting began, and they heard the cries of pain and fear they clung to each other in dismay in the dark and lonely house. They did not know what to expect next. Which ever side won it might make no difference to them. To be at the mercy of either the wild savages or the reckless rangers would not be an enviable lot for two helpless women. Their only hope was in Paul Norvall and his two Indians. They felt that they could trust them.

For a long time, so it seemed, they crouched there. After the firing had ceased a silence ensued, harder to endure than the noise. They did not know which side had won, and their hearts trembled with fear. Madame Louise comforted her companion as much as she could.

"Monsieur Norvall will come soon, my dear, and he will tell us what has happened."

"But suppose he has been killed, Madame," the girl replied. "If so, we shall have no one to protect us."

"Have you forgotten what you told me this morning?"

"What was that, Madame?"

"Your trust in le Bon Dieu, of course."

"Ah, I remember what I said, Madame. But that was when the sun was shining and I felt quite safe. But now when it is dark and with so many dangers around us, I am afraid my trust is not very strong."

"I understand, my dear. We are all weak, I guess. But a time like this is a great test of one's faith. I wish I had it. What a comfort it would be."

"But you are strong, Madame, and wonderful. Suppose you were not with me to-night!"

"Little good am I to help anyone. I can do nothing to assist those who are fighting for us."

"I know what we can do, Madame. Monsieur Norvall and his Indians will be hungry when they come here. We can prepare food for them."

"So we can, my dear. You stir up the fire. There are a few hot coals left. I shall go below and get some provisions. We have moose meat which Matta brought, and I can broil that. Then there are the ducks he shot, and which I cooked to-day. There is plenty of meal, and a supply of dried fish, so we should be able to feed quite a number."

"But what about the light, Madame?" Isabel questioned. "Monsieur Norvall ordered us to keep the house in darkness."

"I know he did. But the fight seems over now, and, besides, I want to see. This waiting in the dark and doing nothing is dreadful. I must be busy or I shall go crazy."

When Paul entered the house half an hour later, and with him several Indians, bringing with them three wounded rangers, he was surprised. The room upstairs was redolent with broiling meat, and the presence of the women before the fire made a very homelike scene. The Indians stared in amazement at the unusual sight, while the suffering and despairing rangers' eyes brightened with hope. Here was unexpected comfort, with women to attend to their wounds. They sank upon the floor and stretched out their numbed hands to the cheerful blaze. The heat warmed their bodies and raised their spirits.

"So this is the way you obey orders," Paul smilingly began. "I told you to keep the house in darkness."

"I know you did, Monsieur," Madame Louise replied. "But women do not always obey. Sometimes we do what we think best, such as preparing food for hungry men and keeping a bright fire for them when they return. That is women's work, is it not? Isn't it better than crouching here in the dark and moaning?"

"But you ran a great risk, Madame. You exposed yourselves to the enemy, and they might have shot you through the window."

"Oh, we knew that we had good defenders. And we were right, judging by your prisoners here. Are they badly hurt?"

"Just a few flesh wounds. They will be all right when they get over their fright. They thought the Indians would scalp them alive, and they wanted to jump into the creek to join their companions who went down."

"So some were killed, Monsieur?"

"Yes, shot and drowned."

"How terrible!"

"I suppose so, but it could not be helped. Next time the rangers make a call upon their neighbors they will be more careful. They didn't expect to get such a hearty reception. But one never knows what Indians will do next. They are funny fellows, and do strange things at times."

Paul was in high spirits. With a few natives he had defeated the rangers, and sent them scurrying like rats back to their

forest retreat. That several of them had been shot and drowned did not trouble him in the least. It was the way of the wilderness, and it was the only lesson the rangers could understand. He looked at the captives and a feeling of disgust came into his heart. Here were three of the men he had heard boasting about what they would do. And now they were cowering with fear. He himself had been trained in a stern school, and he had been taught the Indian code of contempt for fear, pain, and even death itself. To hit first and hit hard when necessary had been grounded into his very being. And if defeated, to bear himself in such a manner as to win the respect of his opponents. To cringe, to plead for mercy, or to show the least sign of fear to him was most contemptible. He loved the wild life of uncertainty, hazards, and sudden deaths. It thrilled his soul, and now that he had outwitted and overcome the rangers he was jubilant.

As he and the Indians ate the food that had been prepared, he watched Madame Louise tending to the injured men. He noticed how skilful were her hands, and with what gentleness she washed the men's wounds and bound them up with some light cloth she produced from the bundle she had brought with her. Who was she, anyway? he wondered. And what was she doing in this country? He also watched Isabel as she held a dish with warm water, and did whatever she could to help. He knew that she was beautiful, but her beauty seemed to be enhanced this night with the glow from the fire falling upon her face and hair. His heart quickened as he looked and wondered how any man could desert such a girl in the lonely wilds. He longed to meet her and give her the punishment he deserved.

When Madame Louise had finished her work, she turned towards Paul.

"I hope, Monsieur, that you and your companions have had enough to eat."

"We are satisfied, Madame, and are very grateful to you. The Indians will never forget your kindness."

"But there are more outside, Monsieur. They must be hungry, too. Please bring them in. We have plenty of food left."

She then turned to the Indians and to Paul's unbounded amazement addressed them in their own language. She told them how grateful she was for their protection, and that she and the white girl would never forget what they had done for them.

Her words were few, but the expression upon the faces of the Indians showed their pleasure. They emitted grunts of satisfaction, and then left the house to relieve their comrades on guard down by the creek.

"I didn't know you understand the Indian language," Paul exclaimed. "This is a great surprise."

"I suppose it is, Monsieur. But I am quick at picking up languages."

"You surely did not learn to speak Indian since we left Quebec, Madame!"

"Oh, no. I lived among the Indians years ago."

"Why did you never speak to Kondo and Matta in their own tongue, then?"

"There was no need to do so. They understand French fairly well, and that is easier for me to speak. And, besides, they never gave me any opportunity, for they talked so little, and then only to you."

Paul smiled.

"You are right, Madame. They seldom talk, and that is why I like them. They are good Indians."

In the meantime the natives had all been fed, and had gone back to their watch. Kondo and Matta remained on guard at the front of the house. The three captive rangers were asleep on one side of the room. Madame Louise was seated upon the floor before the fire, with Isabel lying by her side, resting her head upon her lap. She stroked the girl's hair as she gazed thoughtfully into the fire-place. Paul was sitting opposite, his knees drawn up almost to his chin in Indian fashion. He was in deep thought. Who was this woman who understood the native tongue so well? She was a mystery to him, and he longed to know the story of her life. And what should he do with her and the girl? They could not remain here, that was certain. He had looked after them since leaving Quebec, but he would have to leave them and go forth in search of Lucille. She had been seldom out of his mind since he had heard of her capture. And where was Pierre LeNoir? Perhaps he and LeJeune had escaped with the rangers.

As he thought of these things, the fire slowly died down, and tired out after the excitement of the night, Isabel slept. There was silence in the room, and Paul's head began to droop. He was becoming drowsy, but it would not do for him to sleep

this night. He aroused himself and looked at the women. Madame Louise's right hand was lying idle upon the girl's head, and her eyes were still fixed upon the fire. She knew that he was watching her, and as she turned her face towards his, she smiled somewhat sadly.

"How fortunate, Monsieur, that some people can sleep, no matter what happens. Those men have forgotten all their cares, and so has this poor girl. I wonder what will become of her."

"She must go back to Quebec, Madame."

"Nothing will induce her to go."

"But what will she do here? She expects to find that villain who deserted her. And if she does find him, she cannot compel him to provide for her. This is a hard country for anyone, but far harder for an unprotected girl, especially at the present time."

"I know you are right, Monsieur. And I have been thinking much about that poor girl lying sick in an Indian camp somewhere along the river. She was carried off by several bad men, and escaped from this house in that terrible storm the night we arrived here."

At these words Paul sprang to his feet and bent over the woman. He was greatly excited.

"What do you know about her?" he demanded. "Who told you?"

Madame Louise was surprised at his agitation. It was the first time that she had seen this calm self-possessed man so keenly aroused. Briefly she explained her meeting with LeRoi, and what he had told her.

"It is Lucille, Pierre LeNoir's daughter," Paul declared when the woman had ended. "Did that man tell you where she is?"

"He did not know the place. Somewhere down along the river, I think he said. He went that way when he left us."

"And he came to find the cross she had lost?"

"That was what he told us. You have it, Monsieur, have you not?"

Paul thrust a hand into a pocket of his packet.

"Here it is, Madame. I knew Lucille had lost it."

As the woman took the cross in her hand and looked at it, she gave a slight start, and with difficulty suppressed a cry that was trembling on her lips. With shaking hands she held it towards the fire, and by the light she was able to distinguish two letters, "C. R.," engraven thereon. Madame Louise now knew for a certainty that her long quest was almost ended.

CHAPTER XXVII

FACE TO FACE

It was not Paul's nature to ask questions, but he did long to know why Madame Louise was so much interested in that little cross. He noticed the start she gave as she exposed it to the light of the fire, and with what an effort she checked a cry of astonishment. She was sitting very erect, with her body rigid and tense. It was easy to see that she was greatly disturbed. As she held the cross, her fingers opened and closed upon it in a caressing manner, and several times she lifted it up to the light and studied it carefully. Would she speak and tell him what it meant to her?

As he watched and waited, the woman gave a deep sigh and turned her eyes full upon his face. She did not speak, and it seemed to Paul that although she was looking straight at him she did not really see him. She had the expression of one who was looking far away as if in a dream. Presently she averted her eyes, laid her hands upon a blanket by her side, and folded it into the form of a pillow. This done, she gently removed Isabel's head from her lap to the blanket, and then rose to her feet. At once she began to walk up and down the room, clutching the cross in her hands. Paul placed several sticks upon the fire, and sat watching the bright blaze. He no longer looked at the woman, and showed no sign that he was aware of what she was doing.

For some time Madame Louise continued her pacing to and fro. At length she stopped by Paul's side and laid a light hand upon his shoulder.

"Did you say that the sick girl is Pierre LeNoir's daughter?"

"Every one thinks she is, Madame."

"But do you think so, Monsieur?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Is there any doubt in your own mind?"

Paul shrugged his right shoulder, and gave a slight laugh.

"One can never be certain of anything in this country. Pierre says she is his daughter, so we have to accept his statement."

"But you are doubtful, Monsieur."

"How can I help it, Madame? How such a girl as Lucille can be LeNoir's daughter is a mystery to me. In no way do they resemble each other. Lucille is very beautiful and good, while LeNoir is as ugly as any man can be, and a rogue, besides."

The woman stared for a while, lost in thought.

"Is he good to his daughter, Monsieur?" she at length asked.

"He is, and that is the one fine thing about him. He is fond of her, and he is greatly worried about her."

Madame Louise asked no more questions, and Paul wondered why she was so much interested in the girl. He recalled what she had said to him on the way from Quebec. She was a greater mystery to him now than ever.

Slowly the night wore away, and the first faint gleam of dawn fell gently upon the dust-laden window. Paul knew that the Indians would soon be ready to leave for Big Lake, and he wished to see them before they departed. Isabel and the rangers were still asleep, and Madame Louise was nodding before the fire. Once Paul had suggested that she should lie down and rest, but she had refused. She still clasped the little cross, and several times when she thought that Paul was not watching she had pressed it to her lips. It evidently meant much to her, he believed.

Rising to his feet, Paul placed several more sticks upon the fire. He then turned to the woman.

"I am going down to the Indians, Madame, as I wish to see them before they leave."

"But you will soon be back Monsieur?"

"Yes. I shall not be long."

"And you will take us away from this place?"

"Where do you wish to go?"

"I want to see that sick girl. Will you take me to her?"

"I do not know where she is."

"She is somewhere along the river, and we must find her."

Madame Louise had risen to her feet, and was facing him. She had impressed him from the first time he had met her, but she seemed more remarkable now than ever. There was a new expression of hope in her eyes which he had not noticed before.

"You will take me to her, will you not?" she pleaded. "The Bon Dieu will reward you if you do."

"Yes, I shall take you, Madame. It will be reward enough to find Lucille. She needs your care, no doubt."

As Paul stepped out of the house, he found Kondo still on guard at the door.

"Where is Matta?" he asked.

Kondo pointed westward towards the main channel.

"Matta is watching the river," he explained.

"At the landing-place?"

"Ah, ah."

"Is he afraid that the rangers will come back that way and surprise us?"

The Indian grunted and shook his head.

"Some white man here now. Matta watch him."

"Why, I thought they all went away except the ones we captured."

"One white man watch house all night. Matta followed him to the river. He'll get him, maybe."

"Who was the man, Kondo?"

"Matta didn't know. Too dark. Man very quiet."

"But how did he know he was here?"

"Matta is smart Indian. He knows much."

Paul went down to the shore and found the Indians preparing to depart. They were well pleased at their victory over the rangers, and were eager for further conquests. They wished to pursue the enemy up the Was-tem-oik, attack them at night, and destroy them all. This troubled Paul, and he opposed the idea with all the eloquence at his command.

"You must not do it," he told them. "The Indians and the white men should be friends. The rangers did not make war upon you last night. They came against me. But they have been taught a lesson which they will not soon forget. The Indians need the white men, for they will buy their furs."

"The Indians will trade their own furs," Chief Quis-pam replied. "The rangers have been robbing us. We will now get much money when the ships come."

"They will rob you worse than the rangers," Paul declared. "They will not give you much for your skins. And they will

have big guns, too. Those traders will not visit your lodges, sit around your campfires and talk with you about the prices they will give. No, they will take all and give you what they like."

For some time Paul thus reasoned, and at length the Indians realised that he was right. They decided to go back to Big Lake and get ready for their winter's hunting. But they would watch the rangers, and not allow them to rule. The country belonged to the Indians, and the white men must remember that. It had always been theirs, and they would keep it for their children. So long as the rangers behaved themselves they would let them remain. But if they became troublesome, and robbed them any more they would drive them out.

There was another reason why the Indians were so easily pacified. They were really fond of the rangers, and found kindred spirits in those careless rovers of the woods. They liked to have them visit their lodges, bringing their cheap gaudy goods to barter for valuable skins. They were noisy men, those rangers, and good company. They could sing, dance, and tell stories of the wonderful land beyond the Great Water. And they always had plenty of rum, too, for they knew the natives' weakness for the fire-water. So altogether, these Indians were quite satisfied to leave the rangers alone, and to go back to their camping-grounds.

As Paul left the shore, he saw two Indians emerging from the forest on the left, carrying something which looked like the body of a man. He hurried forward, and as he drew near, the natives laid their burden upon the ground. It was a man, and to all appearance he was dead. When close enough, Paul at once recognized him. It was Pierre LeNoir!

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, looking sternly at Matta. "Who killed him?"

"White man not dead," was the quiet reply.

Paul at once bent over the prostrate form.

"You are right, Matta. He is breathing. We must get him to the house."

He then noticed blood trickling through a hole in Pierre's jacket. He looked at Matta.

"Did you do that?"

Matta nodded.

"You should not have done that, Matta. Lucille will be very sorry if her father dies."

Paul knew that it would be useless to say any more just then. In shooting LeNoir, Matta had merely followed the custom of the wild. The rangers were now his enemies, so no mercy was to be granted. He was proud of his deed, and summoning an Indian to his aid he had brought in the wounded man to receive his master's praise. He was, therefore, much puzzled and somewhat annoyed when Paul, instead of praising, had uttered words of rebuke. This was hard for him to understand, and Paul surmised what was passing through the mind of his faithful companion.

"We must shoot no more white men now," he told him. "The rangers have gone, and they will not trouble us any more. But this man was a good friend to the Indians. Carry him into the house, and the white women will take care of him."

Madame Louise was preparing breakfast as the Indians entered and laid Pierre upon the floor. The three rangers were awake, and anxiously waiting to learn what their fate would be. The terrors of the past night were very vivid in their minds, and they did not know at what minute the Indians might rush in, seize them, and carry them off for torture. Madame Louise had told them that they would not be harmed. But they were doubtful, so when the two Indians entered, they fully expected to see others following. In another minute, however, their fears were dispelled when they saw Norvall and the wounded man.

Paul stepped swiftly over to where Madame Louise was standing.

"We have another patient for you, Madame."

"Is he a ranger, Monsieur?"

"No. He is Pierre LeNoir, the trader."

Startled, the woman almost let fall the dish she was holding in her hand. Then her body suddenly straightened from its

bent position, and only with a great effort was she able to control herself as she looked at the young man.

"Is he badly wounded?" she asked in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

"I fear so. He is alive, but unconscious."

Crossing the room, Madam Louise looked down upon Pierre. She then dropped upon her knees by his side and studied his face. Not a sound did she make, and as Paul watched he was surprised. What was the meaning of her silence and peculiar manner? And why was she looking so intently upon Pierre's face? Did she know him? He recalled the questions she had asked on the way from Quebec. Had she been seeking for Pierre?

Madame Louise rose slowly to her feet. She stood very still for a few seconds, lost in thought. She then motioned to the fire-place.

"Carry him there," she ordered. "Lay him on those blankets."

When this had been done, she drew Paul aside.

"Take those rangers away," she whispered. "You and the Indians go, too. Isabel will be all the help I need."

Paul was about to speak, but before he could say a word, the woman laid a firm hand upon his arm.

"Please do as I say, Monsieur, and ask no questions."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE INTERVIEW

The sun of the early September day was gilding the land with a radiant glory. The air was balmy and not a breath of wind stirred the trees. There was peace everywhere, a striking contrast to the strife and confusion of the past night. Paul was reclining upon the ground near the house. The Indians had all left for Big Lake, and now that the excitement was over he could afford to rest.

He was tired and sleepy and the warm sun was most soothing. Kondo and Matta were sound asleep a short distance away. There was nothing now to disturb them. They had defeated the rangers, and they had eaten a good breakfast, so they were contented. Ere long Paul, too, was asleep, and his cares for the present were ended.

When he awoke the sun was high in the heavens. He sat up with a start, for he had been dreaming that the rangers were upon him. But when he saw Isabel coming towards him, he smiled and rose to his feet. She was not far away, and in her hand she carried some wild flowers.

"I am sorry I have disturbed you, Monsieur," she apologized. "I walked as carefully as I could."

"It is time I was awake, anyway," Paul replied. "I have slept too long. How is Pierre?"

"He was about the same when I left some time ago. Madame told me to get some fresh air. I think she wished to get me out of the house. May I sit down here? I am quite tired after my ramble through the woods."

"You must not go too far from the house," Paul warned, as he seated himself by her side. "You might get lost, and some enemy may be prowling around. One is never safe in this country."

"But, Monsieur, why should I care what happens to me? I have nothing to live for. But for you and your Indians I would have died days ago. I almost wish now that I had."

"Don't say that, Isabel. We shall take care of you."

"Thank you, Monsieur, for your kindness. But I must not be a burden to you any longer."

"What are you going to do?"

"I do not know. I am bewildered. If I could only find that man who deserted me, he might do something to help me."

"It is not likely you will find him. If he left you to die, how could you trust him again? Give up the idea of finding him, and go back to your own country. This is no place for you."

The girl made no reply, but looked thoughtfully down towards the creek. She was thinking of her old home far away and all that she had left behind. But how sad it would be to return. Her relatives and friends might not understand what had happened to her. And, besides, she had no money to take her back. She was poor and helpless. Tears came to her eyes as she thought of this. With an effort she controlled her feelings. She must be brave, and bear up as well as she could. She glanced at Paul and felt comforted. He looked so strong and masterful. His very presence was inspiring. If he had only chosen her at Quebec instead of that villain Rolfe, how happy she would be. Her heart quickened at the thought. Suppose she were his wife!

And Paul, too, was in deep thought. This girl appealed strongly to him. She needed some one to help her, and he admired her wonderful spirit of courage. And she was beautiful. What a companion she would be to him in the wilderness. What a home she would make. Hitherto he had thought only of Lucille as the girl of his heart's adoration. But now he knew that the trader's daughter had a strong rival in the girl seated by his side. He was not well acquainted with Lucille, but Isabel he had known for days, and had found out her worth. She was a girl who would make any man happy, so he believed. How good it would be to have her always waiting for him when he returned from some hunting trip. But would she be happy? Would not the lonely wilderness life be unbearable to such a girl? She might be contented for a while, but not for long. His brow wrinkled as he meditated upon this. What right would any man have to doom a wife to such an existence?

Within the house Madame Louise watched by Pierre's side. She had done all that she could for his welfare, and the only

thing left was to wait. Would he open his eyes and recognize her? She asked herself over and over again. And what should she say to him? How could they talk to each other after what had happened?

Madame Louise now knew that her long quest was almost ended. She had found the man she had been seeking, though in a most unexpected way. Had she met him well and strong she would have known what to do and say. But to see him lying before her, unconscious, upset her plans. She knew that the fierce thoughts of condemnation which had surged in her heart and mind would never be shaped into words. This pathetic form of humanity was not the Gervais Reynard she had known years before. He had changed greatly, and for the worse. Dirty, unkempt, with untrimmed beard, and matted hair, he would have been an object of disgust to anyone else. But as Madame Louise watched his heavy breathing a feeling of pity stole into her heart. Although he had treated her cruelly, yet she knew the secret of his life, and what mental agony he had suffered. Some women might have abandoned such a man and revelled in the fate that had overtaken him. But Madame Louise was no ordinary woman. Strong and self-contained she was, but her heart was noble, and her sufferings, instead of weakening, had strengthened her character. In the severe crucible of trial she had been thoroughly refined.

She had plenty of time for thought as she sat there. If Gervais recovered what should she do? Then LeRoi came to her mind. He was seeking for this man to kill him. And LeRoi was near. He had seen the name in the sand and would now be searching more persistently than ever. But he should never know that Gervais was the man he wanted. Of that Madame Louise was determined. She would defend him with all the skill and power she could command. Her great hope now was that the unconscious man would open his eyes and recognize her. There was one question she wished to ask, and upon his answer so much would depend.

Slowly the morning wore away and still Pierre remained in his dull stupor. The sun poured its hot rays through the dirty window brightening for a while the dingy and disordered room. Patiently Madame Louise waited and watched. Her eyes seldom left the face of the man lying before her. Would he ever recover consciousness? she asked herself. Or would he die, carrying his secret with him?

At length when hope had almost vanished, Pierre began to move a little. Then his eyes slowly opened, but they were unseeing eyes so far as the objects in the room were concerned. Presently an expression of terror overspread his face, and he made a slight effort to rise. His lips began to move, and he mumbled words which Madame Louise could not for a while understand. Ere long several became intelligible, and she knew that he was living over again that terrible scene at Fort LaTour. He murmured the names of several of his old comrades in arms, especially that of his friend LeRoi. At times it was the dangling noose he saw, and again the name in the sand. Then his eyes were filled with terror, and he struck out with his hands as if to drive away the sight.

Anxiously the woman waited and listened for the one name she longed to hear. But it did not come. It was only of Lucille he spoke. Had he forgotten that other name which once meant so much to him? He was now groping around with his right hand as if trying to find something.

"Louise! Louise!" he called. "Where are you? I can't find you. Why don't you come to me? I want you."

With a slight cry, the woman caught his hand in hers.

"I am here, Gervais. Don't you know me?"

Slowly the vacant expression faded from Pierre's eyes, and he stared around in a bewildered manner. Seeing the woman bending over him, he gazed at her intently for a few seconds. Then he recognized her, and a faint smile overspread his face.

"Louise! Is it you?"

"It is, Gervais. I am glad you know me."

"But where am I? What has happened?"

"You were hurt, and some Indians brought you here."

"Ah, now I remember."

Pierre closed his eyes and remained very still. Madame Louise rose to her feet and went to the fire-place. She soon

returned, bearing in her hand a dish containing some broth she had prepared from a piece of moose meat.

"Drink this," she ordered. "It will strengthen you."

Pierre opened his eyes, and like a child allowed himself to be fed from the spoon the woman placed to his lips. He was hungry, and the broth tasted good.

"Why do you do this for me, Louise?" he asked when he had taken enough. "I don't deserve it."

"Perhaps not. But never mind that now. Tell me, where is Cecile?"

"Ah, Cecile! I have almost forgotten that name. She is Lucille now."

"I know that. But where is she?"

"I do not know. She was stolen away from me."

"Just like you stole her away from me, Gervais. You are being paid back for what you did."

"Yes, yes, I know. God forgive me. I'm only getting what I deserve."

"Why did you do it, Gervais?"

"You surely know."

"I know why you deserted me. But why did you take Cecile?"

"Why? It was the devil that made me do it."

"To spite me?"

"Yes. You knew the terrible secret of my life, and I could not endure the look in your eyes, and that made me furious. I was afraid you would tell what I did, so I wanted to go where nobody would know."

"But that was impossible. You could not escape from your own conscience. And, besides, the avenger is after you here."

"So you know about LeRoi's son?"

"I do, and I was talking to him yesterday. He is not far away."

A great fear came into Pierre's eyes, and he tried to rise, but fell back exhausted.

"Save me!" he moaned. "Don't let him know!"

"Why should I save you, Gervais Reynard? Are you worth saving?"

"For the love you had for me, Louise. You loved me once."

"I did. But why do you think I love you now? Why should I love you after the way you have treated me?"

Pierre lay very still, his eyes fixed beseechingly upon the woman's face. Her eyes were stern and cold now, for the memory of what she had suffered from this man came upon her like a flood. It was hard for her to forget and forgive. How often she had dreamed of the time when she would meet him and upbraid him. And that hour had now arrived, and he was before her, pleading for her help. For a while his agony of mind thrilled her soul with joy, and his wailing voice was music to her ears. It was what she had longed for through the years, and now her wish was gratified. This feeling of exultation, however, soon passed as she watched the pathetic creature before her. The cold stern expression faded from her eyes, and tenderly she placed her hand upon his hot brow.

"I shall protect you from LeRoi, Gervais. He does not know you, and I shall not tell him."

At these words Pierre gave a sigh of relief. He was very weak, and this Madame Louise noticed.

"You must not talk any more now, Gervais. Wait until you are stronger."

"No, no, Louise. I want to talk. I have much to say, and many things to ask you. I have not much longer to live, and I want to die in peace. Do you think the Bon Dieu will forgive me for what I have done?"

"Have you ever asked Him?"

"Yes, but not of late. I need a priest, but there is none near. What am I to do? How can I confess my sins?"

"I guess the Bon Dieu will hear you if you confess them to Him. He will understand that there is no priest here."

"Most likely He will, Louise. But will He forgive me for what I did at Fort LaTour? Oh, that was terrible! It has never been out of my mind. It is burnt upon my soul as with a hot iron. And you know about it, Louise. You know what I did. That was why I left you."

"Hush, don't mention that again, Gervais. I can't stand it. I am surprised at myself for taking care of you now. I often thought I would kill you when I met you for stealing Cecile from me."

"Have you been hunting for her ever since? How did you make a living?"

"Did that worry you, Gervais?"

"Sometimes. But I have money now, Louise, and it will be all yours and Lucille's."

"We shall not need it. I have plenty, for I was left a fortune in France shortly after you deserted me. I went home, and when my business matters were arranged I returned to Acadia and have been searching for you ever since."

"So you are rich, Louise?" A greedy expression came into Pierre's eyes. He had made money his god and he still worshipped it.

"I am very wealthy, Gervais. Just think what you missed. But money means nothing to me without Cecile."

"How did you come here?"

"With Monsieur Norvall and his Indians. I might have hired a brigade at Quebec, but I preferred to travel quietly. I was afraid that you might hear of my coming if I brought a large body of men to protect me, and you would carry off Cecile to some other place."

"But how did you know about me here?"

"I did not know. But I knew you, and was certain that you would keep out of my way if you possibly could."

"You were right, Louise. And if you had brought a large company of men with you I would have been suspicious. I was afraid that Count Frontenac would supply you with rangers to search for me. Lucille often wondered why I watched the river so anxiously."

"Did she ever ask about me?"

"She did at first."

"And you told her I was dead, I suppose?"

"I did, I did. I lied to her, and she believed me."

"Not altogether, Gervais. I was really dead to you before you left me. That is the truth, and you know it."

With a groan the unhappy man averted his face from his wife's accusing eyes. He was suffering in body and mind, and nothing could relieve him.

Madame Louise rose to her feet and walked across the room. The strain of this interview had been very severe, and she felt that she could endure no more. Hatred and affection battled in her soul. Now one prevailed, and then the other. When she thought of how Pierre had wronged her, she could hardly control herself. But when she saw him lying so helpless upon the floor, her anger subsided. She was in this unsettled state as she walked across the room. He was unworthy of her care, she told herself. He had forgotten her and had told Cecile that her mother was dead. No doubt he hoped it was

true. Her hands were clenched hard together as she stood facing the fire-place, fighting the battle that was raging in her heart. What should she do? Leave him to his fate?

And as she stood there, Paul entered, and following him was LeRoi, the last man in the world she wished to see just then.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Isle au Garce was a lonely place for old Marie with Lucille away. The light went out of her life, and her heart was sad. The days dragged wearily by, and the evenings which were now lengthening were very dreary. She missed the girl's presence and cheery voice. Often she would look out of the window as if expecting to see her coming along the woodland path leading to the house under the big oak tree. At first she hoped and prayed that Lucille would soon return. But as the days passed and she did not come, she felt certain that some terrible fate had overtaken the girl.

Besides her anxiety over Lucille, Marie was worried about what would become of herself and husband. They were both well advanced in years, and their main dependence for a living had been upon Pierre LeNoir. Although rough, the trader had been good to them, and supplied them with all the food they needed. But now the post was destroyed, Pierre had gone, and winter was not far away. She hoped that Noel might be able to obtain several moose which she could cure against the long hard months ahead. But since Pierre's departure he had lost all desire for the chase, although she had done her best to arouse him to action. She decided to speak once again.

"When are you going after moose?" she asked as she went to the door near which her husband was making an axe handle.

Noel made no reply, but continued his whittling as if he had not heard her.

"When?" she emphatically repeated.

"Oh, in a day or two, maybe. There's no hurry."

"But there is, Noel. We must have fresh meat, and if we don't get a moose or two we shall starve when winter comes."

"Haven't we plenty of fish? And what about Pierre's supplies over on yon hillside?"

"Do you know where they are?"

"Oh, yes, I know. Pierre thought that his hole over there was a secret, ha, ha. But I know where it is, for I followed him once. Pierre is a cunning man, but I got ahead of him that time, all right."

"But we must not touch those supplies, Noel. That would be stealing."

"Not if we're starving, Marie."

"But why should we ever starve with plenty of game around us? I know why you will not hunt. You are planning to live upon those supplies."

"Well, what of it? Pierre will never need them."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because he went away with Jean LeJeune. Isn't that reason enough?"

"That he wants Lucille, and would like to get Pierre out of the way?"

"I didn't say so, remember that, Marie."

"Are you afraid of Jean?"

"It is just as well to be careful."

"Pierre would like Jean to have Lucille. He wants him to marry her."

"Jean doesn't want to marry any girl. He wants to be free and yet have Lucille."

Marie looked at her husband as he examined the piece of wood he was holding in his hands.

"You are not as stupid as I thought, Noel. You do think sometimes. So you suspect Jean? I hate him. He is a bad man."

"And that is why I think Pierre will not need his supplies, Marie. And there is something else, and it is on this island."

Marie looked keenly at her husband, but his face was turned from her. He did not wish to meet her eyes just then, and this she knew.

"Who told you, Noel?" she questioned.

"Ah, you understand what I mean. Pierre will not need it, so it will be ours."

"But what about Lucille? It will be hers."

"She will never have it if Jean gets hold of her. He would kill her for that money."

"Does he know about it?"

"Not likely. If he did he would have been after it before now. But maybe Lucille will tell him. Doesn't she love him?"

"She was very fond of him, though I don't believe she would tell him about that money."

"That's all nonsense, Marie. When a girl is in love with a man there is no knowing what she might do and say. She has perfect trust in him and thinks he can do no wrong."

"Do you know where that money is, Noel?"

"Why do you ask that, Marie?"

"Because I think you do. How did you find out?"

"You are too sharp, old woman. You want to know too much."

"The same as you, old man," Marie retorted. "Did you watch Pierre?"

"Never mind about that now. I know where the money is, and it will be ours if Pierre doesn't come back. We will be rich, and we will leave this island and go to France. You will have fine clothes, and have nothing to do as long as you live."

"I am not longing for fine clothes and idleness. We wouldn't be happy in France, Noel, after having lived so long in Acadia. We wouldn't be contented there for any length of time. We would soon long for the quiet woods, the river, and the freedom we have here. I ask for nothing better than this island home, with sufficient food, and Lucille to come to see me every day."

"And your dried fish, why don't you say, Marie?"

"We might have more than dried fish, Noel, if you would do a little hunting and get a moose now and then. You can eat fish if you like, but I need fresh meat occasionally."

"All right, Marie, you shall have your meat. But when I get that money I shall do no more hunting. What a life it will be, to have nothing to do all day long."

"You should know what it is like already, Noel. You have done nothing for days, as it is. I don't know what will become of you. If we get Pierre's money, you will drink yourself to death."

"That shouldn't worry you, my dear. If I die, you can get another man, one who will satisfy you."

"One experience is all I want," was Marie's parting thrust as she returned to her work.

Noel's eyes twinkled with amusement. He had heard such words before, so was not surprised. He knew that Marie thought a great deal of him, and should he die, she would be almost heart-broken. She was a good woman, he was well aware, and very sensible. Yes, he would go to the woods in the morning and get a moose. Marie would then be satisfied.

He finished the axe-handle, and stood it up against the house. He then turned and looked for some time off among the trees. His mind was upon Pierre's money. He had been thinking of it for days, and the longing to possess it was stronger

now than ever. It would relieve him of all worry, and keep him and Marie in their old age. It was a very pleasant prospect, and the thought made him happy.

During the night Marie awoke with a start. She sat up in bed and listened attentively. At once she knew what had awakened her. It was the excited cries of Minuit, the crow. It was an unheard of thing for the bird to make such a noise at night, so the woman's interest was aroused. She believed that something of an unusual nature was taking place over there among the trees, so she at once awoke her husband. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and as they stood at the opened door, they could plainly hear Minuit's hoarse cries.

"That bird is somewhere near where Pierre's money is hidden," Noel whispered. "Somebody must be stealing it, and I am going to find out who it is."

He quickly dressed and seized his loaded musket.

"Be very careful," his wife warned in a low voice. "There may be more than one, remember."

Noel made no reply, but sped across the cleared space of ground and disappeared among the dark shadows of the forest.

Anxiously Marie waited and listened. She could hear Minuit still scolding furiously, which told plainly of its intense excitement. Suppose several men were over there! Noel would be no match for them, and they might kill him. But what could she do?

At length when she could endure the strain no longer, she left the house and made her way cautiously in the direction Noel had taken. Beneath the great trees the shadows of night were deep. But in partly open places the light of the moon sifted down, and she was able to see quite clearly. Her heart was beating fast, and at times she stopped to listen. No sound, however, fell upon her ears. Minuit had ceased his cries, and she wondered what that meant. Had the robbers gone and carried with them Pierre's money? But where was their canoe? They must have landed somewhere on the island, on the eastern shore, most likely. If she went there, she might learn something.

As she was thinking of this, the report of a gun startled her. This was followed immediately by another shot, and then all was still. Trembling violently, Marie leaned against a tree for support. Had Noel been killed? How could she go forward and find him lying dead upon the ground! But he might be only wounded, and would need her assistance. Her husband meant a great deal to her now, and she regretted the harsh words she had said to him the evening before.

All sense of fear vanished as she hurried forward. Noel needed her; that was all she could think about. At length she slackened her speed and advanced more cautiously. It was well to be careful, and she wished to see how many men were there before she showed herself.

She was now close to the spot where the trees fell away and an open space was exposed to view. At first she could see no one. But presently on the right she saw something move. What it was she could not tell, as it was beneath the branches of a large tree. She knew, however, that it was there Pierre had hidden his money. It might be the thief! But where was Noel?

Skirting the edge of the open space, she was able in a short time to see the form of a man bending over some object upon the ground. A few steps more and she recognized Noel. With a cry of joy she rushed forward and stood by his side. Then she started back, for lying before her was the body of Jean LeJeune. His wide staring eyes filled her soul with a nameless horror, and she clutched Noel by the arm.

"Is he dead?" she gasped.

"I think he is, but I am not sure. He doesn't show any sign of life."

"Did you shoot him?"

"I did. He shot at me first, but I dodged and fired."

"Was he stealing the money?"

"He was trying to, but couldn't find the place. He must have been searching around for some time."

"What are you going to do with him, Noel?"

"Bury him, of course, just as soon as I am sure he's dead."

"What will the rangers say when they hear about this?"

"They need not hear, Marie. They had no use for Jean, anyway, so they will not trouble themselves about him. In this land men disappear and no questions are asked. Every man is a law unto himself now since the raiders destroyed Fort Jemseg and carried off the commander. There is no one to punish me for killing this man."

"But I don't want him buried here, Noel."

"Why not?"

"He would be too near, and his ghost might come to visit this place."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. You must bury him on the mainland, over there on that hillside. Maybe the water will keep him away. And, besides, if the rangers should come looking for him they might find his grave on this island."

"You are right, Marie. Yes, the rangers might come. But I shall bury him where they cannot find him. You will have to help me."

"Not now. Not now," the woman emphatically replied. "Let us be sure he is dead before we do anything. We must wait until morning."

"It is almost that now, Marie. But we shall wait, as you say."

The woman stepped forward and looked down upon the face of the dead man. Her heart was touched, and tears came to her eyes.

"He died in sin," she murmured. "He had no time to ask for pardon."

"He would not have got it, anyway," Noel growled. "He didn't deserve it. No priest would have shriven him."

"But I can't bear to think of him suffering in Purgatory, Noel. I must light a candle or two, and pray for him. The Bon Dieu may yet be merciful. Lay him out straight upon the ground. See, he is quite dead and growing cold. I shall go to the house for candles."

"You'll be only wasting your time and breath, old woman. A million prayers and candles wouldn't do any good to the likes of him."

"You hold your tongue, Noel, and do as I say. You'll need many prayers and candles for yourself some day. Your life hasn't been any too good, remember."

"Oh, that's not worrying me now. But I want to get Jean under the ground. I can't bear to see him lying there. He gives me the shivers. I wish I hadn't shot him. But what was I to do? If I hadn't killed him, he would have killed me. But, there, go for your candles and get through with your prayers. You are bound to have your own way."

After Marie had gone, Noel straightened out Jean's body. He crossed himself, to ward off any evil spirit that might be hovering around. He then stood for a minute viewing the still form.

"Well, my boy, so this is the end of your career," he mused. "You didn't get very far with your deviltry. You were heading this way for some time, and it had to come sooner or later. But I'm mighty sorry that I had to do the stopping. Maybe the Bon Dieu will forgive us both, and if we meet in the next world I hope you won't have any hard feeling against me."

He turned and walked over to where Pierre had hidden his gold. It was but a short distance away, but so cunningly concealed was the hole that even the most careful searcher would have passed it by unnoticed. Noel, however, knew where it was, and a thrill of pleasure came into his heart at the thought that one day it would be all his.

"Poor Pierre!" he murmured. "You never imagined that you were working and saving for old Noel and Marie. But this will make up for all your abuse and the slaves you made of us."

CHAPTER XXX

RETRIBUTION

With a candle at his feet and another at his head, Marie prayed for the soul of Jean LeJeune. The sun came up and poured its hot beams upon her bowed form. She had covered the body with a blanket, and upon this she had placed a few wild flowers. And there in that secluded spot in a great wilderness the sole worshipper offered up her humble and simple petitions. It was a grander place than any cathedral made with hands. The tall trees formed the pillars and arches, the grassy and mossy turf made the richest of carpets, for incense there were the pungent perfumes of fir, spruce, pine, and various shrubs, while birds and insects composed a woodland choir. Jean LeJeune may not have deserved all this, and during his earthly life his soul may not have responded to the beautiful things around him. But beneficent nature decks the graves of all with her robe of green, and chants her sweet, sad requiem over saint and sinner alike. And if nature be the outward manifestation of the Great Loving Heart, even the wayward LeJeune, perhaps, found mercy. He certainly would if the prayers of the woman kneeling by his side were of any avail, for they came from a heart full of pitying compassion.

Rising at last from the ground, she looked for Noel, but he was nowhere to be seen. This surprised her, for she had expected that he would be impatiently waiting for her to finish her prayers. What had become of him? she wondered. He wished to bury Jean as soon as possible, so something unusual must have detained him.

Hurrying through the forest, it did not take her long to reach the house. All was quiet around the place, with no sign of life except Minuit who was perched silently upon a bough of the big oak tree. A fear came into her heart that something had happened to Noel. But what could it be? Perhaps he had killed himself in a fit of despondency while brooding over what he had done.

Entering the building, she was greatly relieved to see her husband stretched full length upon the couch near the fire-place. He was asleep and breathing heavily. She was astonished that he could sleep after the excitement of shooting LeJeune until she saw a mug upon the table. She then knew the reason. Noel had been drinking to drown his worry and remorse. She had always kept a close watch upon the jug of rum, and only doled out a little to Noel on rare occasions. But he had helped himself, she was well aware, and it was not a small quantity he had taken. She knew from sad experience that he could not be trusted with liquor, but would always drink more than was good for him when he had the chance. He had done so now, and she looked upon him with disgust.

"Oh, these men!" she muttered. "One dead outside, and another drunk in the house. What good are they, anyway?"

Despite her words, she covered Noel with a blanket, and started a fire in the fire-place. She needed a cup of hot tea and a bite to eat, for she felt weak after the excitement of the morning. As she waited for the water to boil, she sat upon the doorstep and thought of the dead man lying among the trees. She was sorry that Noel had been the means of his death. It was a terrible sin to kill anyone, so she believed, and Noel would have to atone for his crime in some way. He would have to see the black-robed priest and confess what he had done. But it might be a long time before a priest came to the island, and suppose her husband should die in the meantime with his sin unconfessed! It was a terrible thought, and her heart was very heavy. She had experienced many troubles, but this seemed to her the heaviest of all. Her husband was a murderer! Noel said that he had shot Jean in self-defence, but that brought no comfort to Marie. He had killed a man, and he was now lying over there unburied.

As the morning wore on and Noel showed no sign of waking, Marie wondered what she should do about Jean. Twice she went over to where he was lying, and stood for awhile looking down upon the still form. It would not do to leave him there all day. He must be buried before night. Would she have to dig a grave herself and commit him to the ground? It seemed so, and she trembled at the thought.

As she was returning to the house after her second visit, she happened to glance out upon the river, which was like a great mirror. And as she did so, she was startled to see two canoes some distance away, headed for the island. Instinctively she shrank back among the trees and watched. Were they friends or foes? If the latter, what was she to do? With Noel drunk she could do little in self-defence. And if they were rangers, what might they not do if they learned of Jean's death?

The canoes were much nearer now, and she could tell the number of persons in each, two in one and four in the other.

Ere long she was able to distinguish the forms of two women, and at once her fear vanished. Perhaps one of them was Lucille! But who could the other be? Anxiously she waited and watched, and presently she recognized LeRoi, Norvall and his two Indians. But the women she did not know.

Hurrying from her hiding-place, she was standing close to the water's edge as the canoes touched land. And then she saw Lucille. Unheeding the strange woman who was seated by the girl's side, she rushed forward.

"My darling! My darling!" she cried. "What has happened to you?"

At these words Madame Louise's body slightly stiffened. An expression of resentment appeared in her eyes as she looked at the excited woman arrayed in such rough patched old clothes. She was about to order her away, when Lucille held out her hand to her faithful friend.

"It is Marie, mother," she explained in a weak voice. "She has been very good to me."

Marie recoiled as from a blow at the word "mother". What did Lucille mean? Her mother was dead, so Pierre had told her. Why, then, did she call this woman "mother"? At once a new light dawned upon her bewildered mind. This woman, so good-looking and noble, must be a Mother Superior, of the Hotel Dieu at Quebec, or one of the Ursulines, of which religious and charitable Orders she had heard so much. Yes, this must be one of them who had been sent to look after Lucille. And the strange girl with her must be one of the sisters. A feeling of awe came into Marie's heart, for to her such devoted women were almost like priests. She felt a great relief, too, for these women would help her to bury the dead man, and they would know how to pray for him.

"You are most welcome to our island, Mesdames," she told them. "And you have come at the right time to help bury a dead man we have here."

"Who is dead?" Lucille quickly asked. "Not Noel, I hope."

"Oh, no, not Noel. He is drunk. It is Jean LeJeune I mean. He is lying over there among the trees."

At these words Lucille made an effort to rise, but sank back again upon her blankets. This was startling news.

"Not Jean!" she gasped. "What happened to him?"

"Some one shot him this morning, and—"

She was interrupted by Pierre's voice from the other canoe. He was lying upon the bottom with Kondo and Matta standing on the shore by his side.

"Come here, Marie," he called. "Did Jean get my money? And did Noel steal my rum?"

Before Marie could reply, Paul stepped forward and laid a hand upon the old woman's arm.

"This is not the time to answer such questions," he said. "Lucille must be taken up to the house. She is sick, and Pierre is, too, but we will look after him."

Tenderly Paul and LeRoi lifted the girl from the canoe and carried her up the path. Beneath the shade of a big tree near the shore Kondo and Matta laid Pierre. This was his wish. He wanted to remain in the open where he could see what was going on. The touch of his island seemed to revive him, and it brought back his former spirit of caution and greediness. He was more worried over his money and rum than he was about his own condition and his daughter's illness.

As soon as Paul and LeRoi had taken Lucille to the house they came back to Pierre. But he wanted Marie.

"Why doesn't she come?" he asked. "I want to speak to her. She said that Noel is drunk. He must have stolen my rum, the rascal! Just wait till I get my hands on him."

"Marie will come to you as soon as she can," Paul told him. "She is attending to Lucille now."

"She thinks more of her than she does of me. She always did, and I kept her and Noel from starving. I won't have anything more to do with them. They are too ungrateful."

His voice was weaker now, and the watchers believed that he could not live much longer. There was nothing they could do to help him, and their presence gave him no comfort. The Indians were stretched out upon the sand a short distance away, enjoying their well-earned rest. Their faces expressed no sign of interest in what was taking place under the big tree. They knew that the trader was dying, but it was no concern of theirs. The ways of these white people were strange to them, and they could not understand why so much fuss was made over a sick girl and dying father. To them the old, the weak, the sick and the wounded were only impediments to their wandering manner of living, and the sooner they were out of the way the better. But Paul and LeRoi had a different code of life, and although they, too, had passed years in the wilderness, sympathy for the unfortunate had not been obliterated from their hearts. It was, accordingly, pathetic for them to see Pierre lying before them, clinging so tenaciously to the baubles of earth with death's grim hand laid upon him. They drew aside a short distance and discussed what they should do for him. Pierre, seeing them talking, lifted up a wailing voice.

"Don't leave me!" he cried. "It's getting dark, and I don't want to be left here alone in the night."

He then raised his head, and a look of horror came into his eyes.

"Look! Look! there's the name in the sand! LeRoi's son is after me, and he'll kill me! Don't let him get me! Keep him away!"

With a bound LeRoi was by Pierre's side. Keenly he peered down upon the unhappy man's face.

"Did you know Jean LeRoi?" he asked. "Were you his friend? Are you Gervais Reynard?"

Pierre, however, paid no heed to these questions. He was beyond all sense of the present, and in another minute he was living over again that terrible scene at Fort LaTour.

"Take that rope away! It's strangling me! Jean, Jean, don't look at me that way! I can't stand your eyes!"

He lay silent for a while, struggling for breath. He then reached out a groping hand.

"Louise, are you there? I want you."

Paul knew the meaning of these words. He beckoned to Kondo, and spoke a few words in the native tongue. In another minute the Indian was speeding up the path towards the house.

But LeRoi never moved. He stood like a statue looking down upon the man before him. He had found his father's murderer at last, the traitor he had sworn to kill. But he was too late. Another hand had struck the avenging blow first.

In the meantime, Madame Louise and Isabel were standing by Jean LeJeune's side. Old Marie had guided them to the place and had then hurried back to attend to Lucille. The body was entirely covered with a blanket, so the women could not see the dead man's face. Isabel shrank back a little as she looked at the still form. Even Madame Louise was impressed by this forest tragedy. Stooping, she drew aside the blanket from Jean's face, and as she did so, the girl uttered a startling cry.

"It's Rolfe! It's Rolfe, Madame! It's the man who deserted me!"

"Are you sure?"

"I am. I would know him anywhere."

Quietly Madame Louise replaced the blanket.

"Your search is over, then, my dear," she remarked, as she put her arms tenderly around the girl's trembling body. "You need not remain in this country any longer. Let us go back to the house."

As they moved away, Kondo suddenly appeared before them.

"Come. Quick."

That was all he said ere he turned and sped back among the trees. Silently the women followed, wondering what had happened during the short time since they had left the shore.

CHAPTER XXXI

RENUNCIATION

During the following days Lucille steadily improved. Isabel was with her most of the time, and the girls became very fond of each other. They had many things to talk about, and each was greatly interested in the story of the other's life. Madame Louise joined them at times as they sat in the bright sunshine outside the door. At night there was the glowing fire in the big fire-place, with Noel and Marie sitting near listening to the talk and smiling benignly. They were happy in having such people in their house to cheer their loneliness.

Lucille thought much about her father, and his death caused her deep sorrow. He had been good to her, and, in fact, she was the only one he really loved. She planned to visit his grave on the hillside when she was strong enough, and place flowers upon the mound. She could hardly yet believe that Madame Louise was her mother. It seemed too good to be true. Often she would look at her, and the woman seeing the expression in the girl's eyes, was satisfied. She had told Lucille the story of her life so far as she considered advisable. But of Pierre's deed at Fort LaTour she said nothing. Neither did she tell how he had stolen Lucille away from her. She knew of the girl's affection for her father, and now that he was dead it would do no good to injure her memory of him. She had asked LeRoi to keep Pierre's deed a secret, and he had willingly promised to respect her request, which he faithfully fulfilled.

Paul Norvall spent much of his time in the woods with his two Indians, and brought back an abundance of game. After the first three days he purposely stayed away from the island, returning only at evening when he and his natives slept on the shore. He was in a most serious and thoughtful state of mind. To him Lucille and Isabel were wonderful. He loved them both with the deep affection of his true strong nature. That little house under the big oak was a sacred place because of their presence there. He could not think of them apart, for one was as dear and beautiful to him as the other. Over and over again out in the woods a vision of them would come to his mind. He recalled their faces, and the words they had spoken. Yet it was the depth and strength of his love which caused him to keep away from them as much as possible. Neither could ever be his. Of that he was certain. His nature would never suit such girls. They were animated, bright and lively, while he was dull and slow of speech. And he knew very well that Lucille's heart was set upon going to France with her mother. He had heard her talk about the great times she would have there, the wonderful dresses she would wear, and the many interesting people she would meet. No, she would never consent to spend the rest of her life in the wilderness with a stupid ranger as her husband. And he could not give her the things she desired. Her mother was wealthy, while he had nothing of this world's goods. And the same was true to a certain extent of Isabel. She was poor, and she might be willing to remain with him. But would it not be wrong to ask such a girl to share his lonely life? It would be the height of cruelty to submit her to the dangers and privations of a rough country. There would be no companions of her own age and sex, and she would soon become discontented and long to go away.

As he thought of all these things and many more, he became firmly convinced that the sooner he left the island the better it would be. To no one, however, did he confide his thoughts, not even to LeRoi who accompanied him on several of his trips. He liked LeRoi, and found him a good companion. He was always cheerful, and took every hardship as a matter of course. He appeared to have no aim in life, and he never talked about any plans he might have in view. At this Paul wondered, for he did not know that since LeRoi had come to the end of his search he was uncertain what to do.

One evening as Paul was seated upon a log near the water cleaning his gun, Madame Louise came and sat down by his side.

"Getting ready for more moose, Monsieur?" she asked.

"One must always keep his gun in good condition in this country, Madame. Life depends upon it, you know."

"I certainly do. I have now come, Monsieur, to thank you and your good Indians for what you have done for me. Without your aid I do not know how I should have found my daughter, and—and my husband."

"I am glad for your sake, Madame, that your search is now at an end. You will be going away soon, I suppose?"

"That is why I have come to talk to you, Monsieur. Cecile is quite able to travel now, and we must leave before it is too late."

"You wish to go to Quebec?"

"It is the shortest way, and I hope to get a vessel there to take us to France before the river freezes."

"I have made arrangements for your journey to Quebec, Madame."

"You have! And you will take us?"

Paul slowly shook his head, and looked thoughtfully out over the water.

"I cannot go. But I shall send Kondo with a strong company of Indians. You can trust them, and they will take good care of you. You will take Pierre's money, of course."

"I shall not touch it," the woman vehemently declared. "I don't want anything to do with it."

"Who will get it, then?" Paul asked, surprised at her words and manner.

"I do not know, neither do I—"

She suddenly paused as an idea came into her mind. "Monsieur LeRoi must have it."

"LeRoi!"

"Yes, and for a reason which I cannot explain, except that his father was a friend of my husband."

"Do as you wish, Madame, but I should like for Noel and his wife to get some of it. They served Pierre faithfully, and both are old now with little to support them."

"You are right. I shall speak to Monsieur LeRoi about it, and he can share with them. But I do not want to see the money, neither do I desire to know how much there is. But you should receive something. I know that I can never repay you for what you have done for me. But is there not something I can do?"

"Nothing, Madame. I am more than repaid. What I have done has been a great pleasure to me. Please say nothing more about it."

From the tone of his voice the woman knew that he meant what he said. He was a mystery to her. She could not understand why such a man should be spending his life in the wilderness with two Indians as his companions. She had often thought about this but had always hesitated to ask him. But now she knew that there might never be another opportunity, and she did wish to know before going away.

"Pardon me, Monsieur, but I am quite curious about that red badge upon the sleeve of your jacket."

Paul smiled as he glanced down at his arm.

"It is only a reminder, Madame, of the man who killed my father."

"And you are seeking for him?"

"I was. My father was an English officer with Sir Thomas Temple, and he was slain when Fort Jemseg was captured."

"Do you expect to find him in Acadia?"

"Not now. I have given up the hope of ever meeting him since that fort was destroyed by the Dutchmen. And, besides, I have not the same desire for revenge now that I had a short time ago. The blood-thirsty spirit of the wild had taken possession of me, and I longed to kill. But since I have come into contact with civilized women I have begun to see things in a different light. I also remember that I am the son of an English officer, and no true Englishman will kill another in the spirit of revenge. And, after all, my father's death was due to the fortunes of war, and we do not call that murder. I was a fool not to have realized that before. But it is the Indian way, and I have been as one of them for years."

Paul ceased, drew his sharp hunting-knife from its sheath at his belt, and with the keen point cut the thread which held the badge to his sleeve. He then threw it upon the ground and stamped it into the soft sand.

If Madame Louise was surprised at his words, she was amazed at his action. He had risen to his feet and was standing before her in all the strength of his young manhood. She was deeply impressed by his manner and the expression upon his face.

"You will give up the wilderness life now, I suppose, Monsieur? You will go back to your own people?"

"Not yet, Madame. I love this life of freedom, and, besides, I have much to do. There is no trading-post on this island since the Dutchmen destroyed Pierre's and the other at the Jemseg. There is good money in the fur trade, and the Indians are my friends. I shall treat them fair, and not rob them."

"But what about the rangers who attacked us, Monsieur? Will they not give you considerable trouble?"

Paul smiled and looked over at Kondo and Matta.

"We shall manage them, all right, Madame. Jean LeJeune was the one who caused that trouble. But now that he is dead, the rangers will be easily handled. They were very angry after their defeat, but they have calmed down. They will not do such a foolish thing again. We have been watching them and listening to their talk."

"What! have you been in their midst since you brought us here? Were you not afraid they would kill you?"

"They didn't see us. But we saw them and learned their plans. They will not trouble us any more, as they are afraid of the Indians."

"Where will you make your headquarters, Monsieur?"

"I am not certain yet. This island is a good place, and Noel likes it here."

"So you two will work together?"

"I hope so. Noel will help, but his wife will be the main one. She knows how to manage the Indians, and they are fond of her. I feel quite certain that we shall get on well together."

And Madame Louise felt so, too. She was greatly drawn to this strong independent young man. She thought of her daughter. What a worthy husband he would make for her. But she well knew that it could not be. Their natures were different. One longed for the gay life of cities; the other was satisfied with the solitude of a lone land. She gave a slight sigh as she rose to her feet and walked slowly away from the shore.

That night the open fire made the homely room bright and cosy. It illuminated the rugged features of old Noel and his faithful wife. It lighted up LeRoi's well-formed face, and brought out in clear relief Madame Louise's shapely head. It touched with a soft, gentle radiance the cheeks of Lucille and Isabel seated side by side. They had been gathered there for some time, talking and occasionally listening to several of Noel's hunting stories. After a while they became quiet, and gazed dreamily into the fire. At length Marie began to hum an old familiar air. The words were taken up by the rest, and soon all were singing "La Claire Fontaine."

Outside Paul was watching the pleasant scene through the window. That room was no place for him, so he believed. He would have felt out of place there. He knew nothing about quiet home life, and he would not have known what to do or say. He listened to the singing, watching with intense longing the faces of Lucille and Isabel. He knew that he should never see them again, and he wished to have their features stamped indelibly upon his heart and mind. They would go away, and in the great world of civilization their memory of him would soon fade. But he would never forget, and on river, lake, and trail their bright faces would be ever with him.

With one more lingering look, he left the window and made his way back to the shore where Kondo and Matta were awaiting him. A few minutes later their canoe was cutting through the water, headed for the main channel beyond. What the future held in store for him Paul Norvall did not know. But he did know that he had changed much during the last few weeks. Instead of the Red Ranger, seeking revenge, a new light had come into his soul. And that light was due to the quiet influence of two beautiful maidens who had come for a short time into his wandering life, and had thrilled his entire being with the spirit of inspiration and romance.

Transcriber's Note

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

Numerous obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

page 201, from the Sag-gan-ik ==> from the Sah-gan-ik

[The end of *The Red Ranger* by H. A. Cody]