

# BEYOND THE FRONTIER



Randall Parrish

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# **Beyond the Frontier**

**Western Novel**

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# CHAPTER I

## AT THE HOME OF HUGO CHEVET

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It was early autumn, for the clusters of grapes above me were already purple, and the forest leaves were tinged with red. And yet the air was soft, and the golden bars of sun flickered down on the work in my lap through the laced branches of the trellis. The work was but a pretense, for I had fled the house to escape the voice of Monsieur Cassion who was still urging my uncle to accompany him on his journey into the wilderness. They sat in the great room before the fireplace, drinking, and I had heard enough already to tell me there was treachery on foot against the Sieur de la Salle. To be sure it was nothing to me, a girl knowing naught of such intrigue, yet I had not forgotten the day, three years before, when this La Salle, with others of his company, had halted before the Ursuline convent, and the sisters bade them welcome for the night. 'Twas my part to help serve, and he had stroked my hair in tenderness. I had sung to them, and watched his face in the firelight as he listened. Never would I forget that face, nor believe evil of such a man. No! not from the lips of Cassion nor even from the governor, La Barre.

I recalled it all now, as I sat there in the silence, pretending to work, how we watched them embark in their canoes and disappear, the Indian paddlers bending to their task, and Monsieur la Salle, standing, bareheaded as he

waved farewell. Beyond him was the dark face of one they called De Tonty, and in the first boat a mere boy lifted his ragged hat. I know not why, but the memory of that lad was clearer than all those others, for he had met me in the hall and we had talked long in the great window ere the sister came, and took me away. So I remembered him, and his name, Rene de Artigny. And in all those years I heard no more. Into the black wilderness they swept and were lost to those of us at home in New France.

No doubt there were those who knew--Frontenac, Bigot, those who ruled over us at Quebec--but 'twas not a matter supposed to interest a girl, and so no word came to me. Once I asked my Uncle Chevet, and he replied in anger with only a few sentences, bidding me hold my tongue; yet he said enough so that I knew the Sieur de la Salle lived and had built a fort far away, and was buying furs of the Indians. It was this that brought jealousy, and hatred. Once Monsieur Cassion came and stopped with us, and, as I waited on him and Uncle Chevet, I caught words which told me that Frontenac was La Salle's friend, and would listen to no charges brought against him. They talked of a new governor; yet I learned but little, for Cassion attempted to kiss me, and I would wait on him no more.

Then Frontenac was recalled to France, and La Barre was governor. How pleased my Uncle Chevet was when the news came, and he rapped the table with his glass and exclaimed: "Ah! but now we will pluck out the claws of this Sieur de la Salle, and send him where he belongs." But he would explain nothing, until a week later. Cassion came up the river in his canoe with Indian paddlers, and stopped to

hold conference. The man treated me with much gallantry, so that I questioned him, and he seemed happy to answer that La Barre had already dispatched a party under Chevalier de Baugis, of the King's Dragoons to take command of La Salle's Fort St. Louis in the Illinois country. La Salle had returned, and was already at Quebec, but Cassion grinned as he boasted that the new governor would not even give him audience. Bah! I despised the man, yet I lingered beside him, and thus learned that La Salle's party consisted of but two *voyageurs*, and the young Sieur de Artigny. I was glad enough when he went away, though I gave him my hand to kiss, and waved to him bravely at the landing. And now he was back again, bearing a message from La Barre, and seeking volunteers for some western voyage of profit. 'Twas of no interest to me unless my uncle joined in the enterprise, yet I was kind enough, for he brought with him word of the governor's ball at Quebec, and had won the pledge of Chevet to take me there with him. I could be gracious to him for that and it was on my gown I worked, as the two planned and talked in secret. What they did was nothing to me now--all my thought was on the ball. What would you? I was seventeen.

The grape trellis ran down toward the river landing, and from where I sat in the cool shadow, I could see the broad water gleaming in the sun. Suddenly, as my eyes uplifted, the dark outline of a canoe swept into the vista, and the splashing paddles turned the prow inward toward our landing. I did not move, although I watched with interest, for it was not the time of year for Indian traders, and these were white men. I could see those at the paddles,

voyageurs, with gay cloths about their heads; but the one in the stern wore a hat, the brim concealing his face, and a blue coat. I knew not who it could be until the prow touched the bank, and he stepped ashore. Then I knew, and bent low over my sewing, as though I had seen nothing, although my heart beat fast. Through lowered lashes I saw him give brief order to the men, and then advance toward the house alone. Ah! but this was not the slender, laughing-eyed boy of three years before. The wilderness had made of him a man--a soldier. He paused an instant to gaze about, and held his hat in his hand, the sun touching his tanned cheeks, and flecking the long, light-colored hair. He looked strong and manly in his tightly buttoned jacket, a knife at his belt, a rifle grasped within one hand. There was a sternness to his face too, although it lit up in a smile, as the searching eyes caught glimpse of my white dress in the cool shade of the grape arbor. Hat still in hand he came toward me, but I only bent the lower, as though I knew nothing of his approach, and had no interest other than my work.

“Mademoiselle,” he said gently, “pardon me, but is not this the home of Hugo Chevet, the fur trader?”

I looked up into his face, and bowed, as he swept the earth with his hat, seeing at a glance that he had no remembrance of me.

“Yes,” I answered. “If you seek him, rap on the door beyond.”

“’Tis not so much Chevet I seek,” he said, showing no inclination to pass me, “but one whom I understood was his guest--Monsieur Francois Cassion.”



“The man is here,” I answered quickly, yet unable to conceal my surprise, “but you will find him no friend to Sieur de la Salle.”

“Ah!” and he stared at me intently. “In the name of the saints, what is the meaning of this? You know me then?”

I bowed, yet my eyes remained hidden.

“I knew you once as Monsieur’s friend,” I said, almost regretting my indiscretion, “and have been told you travel in his company.”

“You knew me once!” he laughed. “Surely that cannot be, for never would I be likely to forget. I challenge you, Mademoiselle to speak my name.”

“The Sieur Rene de Artigny, Monsieur.”

“By my faith, the witch is right, and yet in all this New France I know scarce a maid. Nay look up; there is naught to fear from me, and I would see if memory be not new born. Saint Giles! surely ’tis true; I have seen those eyes before; why, the name is on my tongue, yet fails me, lost in the wilderness. I pray you mercy, Mademoiselle!”

“You have memory of the face you say?”

“Ay! the witchery of it; ’tis like a haunting spirit.”

“Which did not haunt long, I warrant. I am Adele la Chesnayne, Monsieur.”

He stepped back, his eyes on mine, questioningly. For an instant I believed the name even brought no familiar sound; then his face brightened, and his eyes smiled, as his lips echoed the words.

“Adele la Chesnayne! Ay! now I know. Why ’tis no less than a miracle. It was a child I thought of under that name-- a slender, brown-eyed girl, as blithesome as a bird. No, I had

not forgotten; only the magic of three years has made of you a woman. Again and again have I questioned in Montreal and Quebec, but no one seemed to know. At the convent they said your father fell in Indian skirmish."

"Yes; ever since then I have lived here, with my uncle, Hugo Chevet."

"Here!" he looked about, as though the dreariness of it was first noticed. "Alone? Is there no other woman?"

I shook my head, but no longer looked at him, for fear he might see the tears in my eyes.

"I am the housekeeper, Monsieur. There was nothing else for me. In France, I am told, my father's people were well born, but this is not France, and there was no choice. Besides I was but a child of fourteen."

"And seventeen, now, Mademoiselle," and he took my hand gallantly. "Pardon if I have asked questions which bring pain. I can understand much, for in Montreal I heard tales of this Hugo Chevet."

"He is rough, a woodsman," I defended, "yet not unkind to me. You will speak him fair?"

He laughed, his eyes sparkling with merriment.

"No fear of my neglecting all courtesy, for I come beseeching a favor. I have learned the lesson of when the soft speech wins more than the iron hand. And this other, the Commissaire Cassion--is he a bird of the same plumage?"

I made a little gesture, and glanced back at the closed door.

"Oh, no; he is the court courtier, to stab with words, not deeds. Chevet is rough of speech, and hard of hand, but he

fighters in the open; Cassion has a double tongue, and one never knows him." I glanced up into his sobered face. "He is a friend of La Barre."

"So 'tis said, and has been chosen by the governor to bear message to De Baugis in the Illinois country. I seek passage in his company."

"You! I thought you were of the party of Sieur de la Salle?"

"I am," he answered honestly, "yet Cassion will need a guide, and there is none save myself in all New France who has ever made that journey. 'Twill be well for him to listen to my plan. And why not? We do not fight the orders of the governor: we obey, and wait. Monsieur de la Salle will tell his story to the King."

"The King! to Louis?"

"Ay, 'twill not be the first time he has had audience, and already he is at sea. We can wait, and laugh at this Cassion over his useless journey."

"But he--he is treacherous, Monsieur."

He laughed, as though the words amused.

"To one who has lived, as I, amid savages, treachery is an old story. The Commissaire will not find me asleep. We will serve each other, and let it go at that. Ah! we are to be interrupted."

He straightened up facing the door, and I turned, confronting my uncle as he emerged in advance. He was a burly man, with iron-gray hair, and face reddened by out-of-doors; and he stopped in surprise at sight of a stranger, his eyes hardening with suspicion.

“And who is this with whom you converse so privately, Adele?” he questioned brusquely, “a young popinjay new to these parts I venture.”

De Artigny stepped between us, smiling in good humor.

“My call was upon you, Monsieur Chevet, and not the young lady,” he said quietly enough, yet with a tone to the voice. “I merely asked her if I had found the right place, and if, Monsieur, the Commissaire Cassion was still your guest.”

“And what may I ask might be your business with the Commissaire Cassion?” asked the latter, pressing past Chevet, yet bowing with a semblance of politeness, scarcely in accord with the studied insolence of his words. “I have no remembrance of your face.”

“Then, Monsieur Cassion is not observant,” returned the younger man pleasantly, “as I accompanied the Sieur de la Salle in his attempt to have audience with the governor.”

“Ah!” the word of surprise exploded from the lips. “*Sacre!* ’tis true! My faith, what difference clothes make. I mistook you for a *courier du bois.*”

“I am the Sieur Rene de Artigny.”

“Lieutenant of La Salle’s?”

“Scarcely that, Monsieur, but a comrade; for three years I have been with his party, and was chosen by him for this mission.”

Cassion laughed, chucking the gloomy-faced Chevet in the side, as though he would give point to a good joke.

“And little the trip hither has profited either master or man, I warrant. La Barre does not sell New France to every adventurer. Monsieur de la Salle found different reception in

Quebec than when Frontenac ruled this colony. Where went the fur-stealer?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"To whom? Heaven help us, Chevet, the man would play nice with words. Well, let it go, my young cock, and answer me."

"You mean the Sieur de la Salle?"

"To be sure; I called him no worse than I have heard La Barre speak. They say he has left Quebec; what more know you?"

"'Tis no secret, Monsieur," replied De Artigny quietly enough, although there was a flash in his eyes, as they met mine. "The Sieur de la Salle has sailed for France."

"France! Bah! you jest; there has been no ship outward bound."

"The *Breton* paused at St. Roche, held by the fog. When the fog lifted there was a new passenger aboard. By dawn the Indian paddlers had me landed in Quebec."

"Does La Barre know?"

"Faith! I could not tell you that, as he has not honored me with audience."

Cassion strode back and forth, his face dark with passion. It was not pleasant news he had been told, and it was plain enough he understood the meaning.

"By the saints!" he exclaimed. "'Tis a sly fox to break through our guard so easily. Ay, and 'twill give him a month to whisper his lies to Louis, before La Barre can forward a report. But, *sacre!* my young chanticleer, surely you are not here to bring me this bit of news. You sought me, you said? Well, for what purpose?"

“In peace, Monsieur. Because I have served Sieur de la Salle loyally is no reason why we should be enemies. We are both the King’s men, and may work together. The word has come to me that you head a party for the Illinois, with instructions for De Baugis at Fort St. Louis. Is this true?”

Cassion bowed coldly, waiting to discover how much more his questioner knew.

“Ah, then I am right thus far. Well, Monsieur, ’twas on that account I came, to volunteer as guide.”

“You! ’Twould be treachery.”

“Oh, no; our interests are the same so far as the journey goes. I would reach St. Louis; so would you. Because we may have different ends in view, different causes to serve, has naught to do with the trail thither. There is not a man who knows the way as well as I. Four times have I traveled it, and I am not a savage, Monsieur--I am a gentleman of France.”

“And you pledge your word?”

“I pledge my word--to guide you safe to Fort St. Louis. Once there I am comrade to Sieur de la Salle.”

“Bah! I care not who you comrade with, once you serve my purpose. I take your offer, and if you play me false--”

“Restrain your threats, Monsieur Cassion. A quarrel will get us nowhere. You have my word of honor; ’tis enough. Who will compose the party?”

Cassion hesitated, yet seemed to realize the uselessness of deceit.

“A dozen or more soldiers of the Regiment of Picardy, some *couriers du bois*, and the Indian paddlers. There will be four boats.”

“You go by the Ottawa, and the lakes?”

“Such were my orders.”

“’Tis less fatiguing, although a longer journey; and the time of departure?”

Cassion laughed, as he turned slightly, and bowed to me.

“We leave Quebec before dawn Tuesday,” he said gaily. “It is my wish to enjoy once more the follies of civilization before plunging into the wilderness. The Governor permits that we remain to his ball. Mademoiselle la Chesnayne does me the honor of being my guest on that occasion.”

“I, Monsieur!” I exclaimed in surprise at his boastful words. “’Twas my uncle who proposed--”

“Tut, tut, what of that?” he interrupted in no way discomposed. “It is my request which opens the golden gates. The good Hugo here but looks on at a frivolity for which he cares nothing. ’Tis the young who dance. And you, Monsieur de Artigny, am I to meet you there also, or perchance later at the boat landing?”

The younger man seemed slow in response, but across Cassion’s shoulder our eyes met. I know not what he saw in the glance of mine, for I gave no sign, yet his face brightened, and his words were carelessly spoken.

“At the ball, Monsieur. ’Tis three years since I have danced to measure, but it will be a joy to look on, and thus keep company with Monsieur Chevet. Nor shall I fail you at the boats: until then, Messieurs,” and he bowed hat in hand, “and to you, Mademoiselle, adieu.”

We watched him go down the grape arbor to the canoe, and no one spoke but Cassion.

“*Pouf!* he thinks well of himself, that young cockerel, and ’twill likely be my part to clip his spurs. Still ’tis good policy to have him with us, for ’tis a long journey. What say you, Chevet?”

“That he is one to watch,” answered my uncle gruffly. “I trust none of La Salle’s brood.”

“No, nor I, for the matter of that, but I am willing to pit my brains against the best of them. Francois Cassion is not likely to be caught asleep, my good Hugo.”

He turned about, and glanced questioningly into my face.

“And so, Mademoiselle, it did not altogether please you to be my guest at the ball? Perchance you preferred some other gallant?”

The sunlight, flickering through the leaves, rested on his face, and brought out the mottled skin of dissipation, the thin line of his cruel lips, the insolent stare of his eyes. I felt myself shrink, dreading he might touch me; yet dominating all else was the thought of De Artigny--the message of his glance, the secret meaning of his pledge--the knowledge that he would be there. So I smiled, and made light of his suspicion.

“It was but surprise, Monsieur,” I said gaily “for I had not dreamed of such an honor. ’Tis my wish to go; see, I have been working on a new gown, and now I must work the faster.”

I swept him a curtsey, smiling to myself at the expression of his face, and before he could speak had disappeared within. Bah! I would escape those eyes and be alone to dream.



# CHAPTER II

## THE CHOICE OF A HUSBAND

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It was just before dark when Monsieur Cassion left us, and I watched him go gladly enough, hidden behind the shade of my window. He had been talking for an hour with Chevet in the room below; I could hear the rattle of glasses, as though they drank, and the unpleasant arrogance of his voice, although no words reached me clearly. I cared little what he said, although I wondered at his purpose in being there, and what object he might have in this long converse with my uncle. Yet I was not sent for, and no doubt it was some conference over furs, of no great interest. The two were in some scheme I knew to gain advantage over Sieur de la Salle, and were much elated now that La Barre held power; but that was nothing for a girl to understand, so I worked on with busy fingers, my mind not forgetful of the young Sieur de Artigny.

It was not that I already loved him, yet ever since girlhood the memory of him had remained in my thought, and in those years since I had met so few young men that the image left on my imagination had never faded. Indeed, it had been kept alive by the very animosity which my uncle cherished against Monsieur de la Salle. The real cause of his bitterness, outside of trade rivalry, I never clearly understood, but he was ever seeking every breath of gossip from that distant camp of adventurers, and angrily

commenting thereon. Again and again I overheard him conspiring with others in a vain effort to influence Frontenac to withdraw his support of that distant expedition, and it was this mutual enmity which first brought Cassion to our cabin.

With Frontenac's removal, and the appointment of La Barre as Governor, the hopes of La Salle's enemies revived, and when Cassion's smooth tongue won him a place as Commissaire, all concerned became more bold and confident in their planning. I knew little of it, yet sufficient to keep the remembrance of those adventures fresh in my mind, and never did they recur to me without yielding me vision of the ardent young face of De Artigny as he waved me adieu from the canoe. Often in those years of silence did I dream of him amid the far-off wilderness--the idle dreaming of a girl whose own heart was yet a mystery--and many a night I sat at my window gazing out upon the broad river shimmering in the moonlight, wondering at those wilderness mysteries among which he lived.

Yet only once in all those years had I heard mention of his name. 'Twas but a rumor floating back to us of how La Salle had reached the mouth of a great river flowing into the South Sea, and among the few who accompanied him was De Artigny. I remember yet how strangely my heart throbbed as I heard the brief tale retold, and someone read the names from a slip of paper. Chevet sat by the open fire listening, his pipe in his mouth, his eyes scowling at the news; suddenly he blurted out: "De Artigny, say you? In the name of the fiend! 'tis not the old captain?" "No, no, Chevet," a voice answered testily, "Sieur Louis de Artigny

has not stepped foot on ground these ten years; 'tis his brat Rene who serves this freebooter, though 'tis like enough the father hath money in the venture." And they fell to discussing, sneering at the value of the discovery, while I slipped unnoticed from the room.

Chevet did not return to the house after Monsieur Cassion's canoe had disappeared. I saw him walking back and forth along the river bank, smoking, and seemingly thinking out some problem. Nor did he appear until I had the evening meal ready, and called to him down the arbor. He was always gruff and bearish enough when we were alone, seldom speaking, indeed, except to give utterance to some order, but this night he appeared even more morose and silent than his wont, not so much as looking at me as he took seat, and began to eat. No doubt Cassion had brought ill news, or else the appearance of De Artigny had served to arouse all his old animosity toward La Salle. It was little to me, however, and I had learned to ignore his moods, so I took my own place silently, and paid no heed to the scowl with which he surveyed me across the table. No doubt my very indifference fanned his discontent, but I remained ignorant of it, until he burst out savagely.

"And so you know this young cockerel, do you? You know him, and never told me?"

I looked up in surprise, scarce comprehending the unexpected outburst.

"You mean the Sieur de Artigny?"

"Ay! Don't play with me! I mean Louis de Artigny's brat. Bah! he may fool Cassion with his soft words, but not Hugo Chevet. I know the lot of them this many year, and no ward

of mine will have aught to do with the brood, either young or old. You hear that, Adele! When I hate, I hate, and I have reason enough to hate that name, and all who bear it. Where before did you ever meet this popinjay?"

"At the convent three years ago. La Salle rested there overnight, and young De Artigny was of the party. He was but a boy then."

"He came here today to see you?"

"No, never," I protested. "I doubt if he even had the memory of me until I told him who I was. Surely he explained clearly why he came."

He eyed me fiercely, his face full of suspicion, his great hand gripping the knife.

"'Tis well for you if that be true," he said gruffly, "but I have no faith in the lad's words. He is here as La Salle's spy, and so I told Cassion, though the only honor he did me was to laugh at my warning. 'Let him spy,' he said, 'and I will play at the same game; 'tis little enough he will learn, and we shall need his guidance.' Ay! and he may be right, but I want nothing to do with the fellow. Cassion may give him place in his boats, if he will, but never again shall he set foot on my land, nor have speech with you. You mark my words, Mademoiselle?"

I felt the color flame into my cheeks, and knew my eyes darkened with anger, yet made effort to control my speech.

"Yes, Monsieur; I am your ward and have always been obedient, yet this Sieur de Artigny seems a pleasant spoken young man, and surely 'tis no crime that he serves the Sieur de la Salle."

“Is it not!” he burst forth, striking the table with his fist. “Know you not I would be rich, but for that fur stealer. By right those should be my furs he sends here in trade. There will be another tale to tell soon, now that La Barre hath the reins of power; and this De Artigny--bah! What care I for that young cockerel--but I hate the brood. Listen, girl, I pay my debts; it was this hand that broke Louis de Artigny, and has kept him to his bed for ten years past. Yet even that does not wipe out the score between us. 'Tis no odds to you what was the cause, but while I live I hate. So you have my orders; you will speak no more with this De Artigny.”

“'Tis not like I shall have opportunity.”

“I will see to that. The fool looked at you in a way that made me long to grip his throat; nor do I like your answer, yet 'twill be well for you to mark my words.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Oh, you're sweet enough with words. I have heard you before, and found you a sly minx--when my back was turned--but this time it is not I alone who will watch your actions. I have pledged you a husband.”

I got to my feet, staring at him, the indignant words stifled in my throat. He laughed coarsely, and resumed his meal.

“A husband, Monsieur? You have pledged me?”

“Ay! why not? You are seventeen, and 'tis my place to see you well settled.”

“But I have no wish to marry, Monsieur,” I protested. “There is no man for whom I care.”

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and laughed.

“Pooh! if I waited for that no doubt you would pick out some cockerel without so much as a spur to his heel. ’Tis my choice, not yours, for I know the world, and the man you need. Monsieur Cassion has asked me to favor him, and I think well of it.”

“Cassion! Surely, you would not wed me to that creature?”

He pushed back his chair, regarding me with scowling eyes.

“And where is there a better? *Sacre!* do you think yourself a queen to choose? ’Tis rare luck you have such an offer. Monsieur Cassion is going to be a great man in this New France; already he has the Governor’s ear, and a commission, with a tidy sum to his credit in Quebec. What more could any girl desire in a husband?”

“But, Monsieur, I do not love him; I do not trust the man.”

“Pah!” He burst into a laugh, rising from the table. Before I could draw back he had gripped me by the arm. “Enough of that, young lady. He is my choice, and that settles it. Love! who ever heard of love nowadays? Ah, I see, you dream already of the young gallant De Artigny. Well, little good that will do you. Why what is he? a mere ragged adventurer, without a sou to his name, a prowling wolf of the forest, the follower of a discredited fur thief. But enough of this; I have told you my will, and you obey. Tomorrow we go to Quebec, to the Governor’s ball, and when Monsieur Cassion returns from his mission you will marry him--you understand?”

The tears were in my eyes, blotting out his threatening face, yet there was naught to do but answer.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“And this De Artigny; if the fellow ever dares come near you again I’ll crush his white throat between my fingers.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“To your room then, and think over all I have said. You have never found me full of idle threats I warrant.”

“No, Monsieur.”

I drew my arm from his grasp, feeling it tingle with pain where his fingers had crushed the flesh, and crept up the narrow stairs, glad enough to get away and be alone. I had never loved Chevet, but he had taught me to fear him, for more than once had I experienced his brutality and physical power. To him I was but a chattel, an incumbrance. He had assumed charge of me because the law so ordained, but I had found nothing in his nature on which I could rely for sympathy. I was his sister’s child, yet no more to him than some Indian waif. More, he was honest about it. To his mind he did well by me in thus finding me a husband. I sank on my knees, and hid my face, shuddering at the thought of the sacrifice demanded. Cassion! never before had the man appeared so despicable. His face, his manner, swept through my memory in review. I had scarcely considered him before, except as a disagreeable presence to be avoided as much as possible. But now, in the silence, the growing darkness of that little chamber, with Chevet’s threat echoing in my ears, he came to me in clear vision--I saw his dull-blue, cowardly eyes, his little waxed mustache, his insolent swagger, and heard his harsh, bragging voice.

Ay! he would get on; there was no doubt of that, for he would worm his way through where only a snake could

crawl. A snake! that was what he was, and I shuddered at thought of the slimy touch of his hand. I despised, hated him; yet what could I do? It was useless to appeal to Chevet, and the Governor, La Barre, would give small heed to a girl objecting to one of his henchmen. De Artigny! The name was on my lips before I realized I had spoken it, and brought a throb of hope. I arose to my feet, and stared out of the window into the dark night. My pulses throbbed. If he cared; if I only knew he cared, I would fly with him anywhere, into the wilderness depths, to escape Cassion. I could think of no other way, no other hope. If he cared! It seemed to me my very breath stopped as this daring conception, this mad possibility, swept across my mind.

I was a girl, inexperienced, innocent of coquetry, and yet I possessed all the instincts of a woman. I had seen that in his eyes which gave me faith--he remembered the past; he had found me attractive; he felt a desire to meet me again. I knew all this--but was that all? Was it a mere passing fervor, a fleeting admiration, to be forgotten in the presence of the next pretty face? Would he dare danger to serve me? to save me from the clutches of Cassion? A smile, a flash of the eyes, is small foundation to build upon, yet it was all I had. Perchance he gave the same encouragement to others, with no serious thought. The doubt assailed me, yet there was no one else in all New France to whom I could appeal.

But how could I reach him with my tale? There was but one opportunity--the Governor's ball. He would be there; he had said so, laughingly glancing toward me as he spoke the words, the flash of his eyes a challenge. But it would be difficult. Chevet, Cassion, not for a moment would they take



eyes from me, and if I failed to treat him coldly an open quarrel must result. Chevet would be glad of an excuse, and Cassion's jealousy would spur him on. Yet I must try, and, in truth, I trusted not so much in Monsieur de Artigny's interest in me, as in his reckless love of adventure. 'Twould please him to play an audacious trick on La Salle's enemies, and make Cassion the butt of laughter.

Once he understood, the game would prove much to his liking, and I could count on his aid, while the greater the danger the stronger it would appeal to such a nature as his. Even though he cared little for me he was a gallant to respond gladly to a maid in distress. Ay, if I might once bring him word, I could rely on his response; but how could that be done? I must trust fortune, attend the ball, and be ready; there was no other choice.

'Tis strange how this vague plan heartened me, and gave new courage. Scarce more than a dream, yet I dwelt upon it, imagining what I would say, and how escape surveillance long enough to make my plea for assistance. Today, as I write, it seems strange that I should ever have dared such a project, yet at the time not a thought of its immodesty ever assailed me. To my mind Rene de Artigny was no stranger; as a memory he had lived, and been portion of my life for three lonely years. To appeal to him now, to trust him, appeared the most natural thing in the world. The desperation of my situation obscured all else, and I turned to him as the only friend I knew in time of need. And my confidence in his fidelity, his careless audacity, brought instantly a measure of peace. I crept back and lay down

upon the bed. The tears dried upon my lashes, and I fell asleep as quietly as a tired child.

# CHAPTER III

## I APPEAL FOR AID

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It had been two years since I was at Quebec, and it was with new eyes of appreciation that I watched the great bristling cliffs as our boat glided silently past the shore and headed in toward the landing. There were two ships anchored in the river, one a great war vessel with many sailors hanging over the rail and watching us curiously. The streets leading back from the water front were filled with a jostling throng, while up the steep hillside beyond a constant stream of moving figures, looking scarcely larger than ants, were ascending and descending. We were in our large canoe, with five Indian paddlers, its bow piled deep with bales of fur to be sold in the market, and I had been sleeping in the stern. It was the sun which awoke me, and I sat up close beside Chevet's knee, eagerly interested in the scene. Once I spoke, pointing to the grim guns on the summit of the crest above, but he answered so harshly as to compel silence. It was thus we swept up to the edge of the landing, and made fast. Cassion met us, attired so gaily in rich vestments that I scarcely recognized the man, whom I had always seen before in dull forest garb, yet I permitted him to take my hand and assist me gallantly to the shore. Faith, but he appeared like a new person with his embroidered coat, buckled shoes and powdered hair, smiling and debonair, whispering compliments to me, as he helped me across a

strip of mud to the drier ground beyond. But I liked him none the better, for there was the same cold stare to his eyes, and a cruel sting to his words which he could not hide. The man was the same whatever the cut of his clothes, and I was not slow in removing my hand from his grasp, once I felt my feet on firm earth.

Yet naught I might do would stifle his complacency, and he talked on, seeking to be entertaining, no doubt, and pointing out the things of interest on every hand. And I enjoyed the scene, finding enough to view to make me indifferent to his posturing. Scarcely did I even note what he said, although I must have answered in a fashion, for he stuck at my side, and guided me through the crowd, and up the hill. Chevet walked behind us, gloomy and silent, having left the Indians with the furs until I was safely housed. It was evidently a gala day, for flags and streamers were flying from every window of the Lower Town, and the narrow, crooked streets were filled with wanderers having no apparent business but enjoyment. Never had I viewed so motley a throng, and I could but gaze about with wide-opened eyes on the strange passing figures.

It was easy enough to distinguish the citizens of Quebec, moving soberly about upon ordinary affairs of trade, and those others idly jostling their way from point to point of interest--hunters from the far West, bearded and rough, fur clad, and never without a long rifle; sailors from the warship in the river; Indians silent and watchful, staring gravely at every new sight; settlers from the St. Lawrence and the Richelieu, great seigniors on vast estates, but like children in the streets of the town; fishermen from Cap St. Roche;

*couriers du bois*, and *voyageurs* in picturesque costumes; officers of the garrison, resplendent in blue and gold; with here and there a column of marching soldiers, or statuesque guard. And there were women too, a-plenty--laughing girls, grouped together, ready for any frolic; housewives on way to market; and occasionally a dainty dame, with high-heeled shoe and flounced petticoat, picking her way through the throng, disdainful of the glances of those about. Everywhere there was a new face, a strange costume, a glimpse of unknown life.

It was all of such interest I was sorry when we came to the gray walls of the convent. I had actually forgotten Cassion, yet I was glad enough to be finally rid of him, and be greeted so kindly by Sister Celeste. In my excitement I scarcely knew what it was the bowing Commissaire said as he turned away, or paid heed to Chevet's final growl, but I know the sister gently answered them, and drew me within, closing the door softly, and shutting out every sound. It was so quiet in the stone passageway as to almost frighten me, but she took me in her arms, and looked searchingly into my face.

"The three years have changed you greatly, my child," she said gently, touching my cheeks with her soft hands; "but bright as your eyes are, it is not all pleasure I see in them. You must tell me of your life. The older man, I take it, was your uncle, Monsieur Chevet."

"Yes," I answered, but hesitated to add more.

"He is much as I had pictured him, a bear of the woods."

"He is rough," I protested, "for his life has been hard, yet has given me no reason to complain. 'Tis because the life is

lonely that I grow old.”

“No doubt, and the younger gallant? He is not of the forest school?”

“’Twas Monsieur Cassion, Commissaire for the Governor.”

“Ah! ’tis through him you have invitation to the great ball?”

I bowed my head, wondering at the kind questioning in the sister’s eyes. Could she have heard the truth? Perchance she might tell me something of the man.

“He has been selected by Monsieur Chevet as my husband,” I explained doubtfully. “Know you aught of the man, sister?”

Her hand closed gently on mine.

“No, only that he has been chosen by La Barre to carry special message to the Chevalier de Baugis in the Illinois country. He hath an evil, sneering face, and an insolent manner, even as described to me by the Sieur de Artigny.”

I caught my breath quickly, and my hand grasp tightened.

“The Sieur de Artigny!” I echoed, startled into revealing the truth. “He has been here? has talked with you?”

“Surely, my dear girl. He was here with La Salle before his chief sailed for France, and yesterday he came again, and questioned me.”

“Questioned you?”

“Yes; he sought knowledge of you, and of why you were in the household of Chevet. I liked the young man, and told him all I knew, of your father’s death and the decree of the court, and of how Chevet compelled you to leave the