A Romance of Early Days in the Middle West

Author of "Keith of the Border," "My Lady of Doubt," "The Maid of the Forest," etc.



Adele la Chesnayne, a belle of New France, is among conspirators at her uncle's house, Cassion, the commissaire, has enlisted her Uncle Chevet's aid against La Salle. D'Artigny, La Salle's friend, offers his services as guide to Cassion's party on the journey to the wilderness. The uncle informs Adele that he has betrothed her to Cassion and forbids her to see D'Artigny again. In Quebec Adele visits her friend, Sister Celeste, who brings D'Artigny to her. She tells him her story and he vows to release her from the bargain with Cassion. D'Artigny leaves promising to see her at the dance. Cassion escorts Adele to the hall. She meets the governor, La Barre, and hears him warn the commissaire against D'Artigny, D'Artigny's ticket to the ball has been recalled, but he gains entrance Adele la Chesnayne, a belle of New has been recalled, but he gains entrance by the window. Adele informs him of the governor's words to Cassion.

La Barre and Cassion, enemies of Adele and haters of her protector, Rene d'Artigny, visit a frightful tragedy on this brave little girl-one which marks her for life-all unbeknownst to Rene. How she meets the great sorrow, with what courage she faces a future that looks forever dark, is described with keen sympathy in this installment.

CHAPTER VI .- Continued.

(Adele, hiding in a dark room with D'Artigny, is caught eavesdropping on the governor as he conspires with rascals to steal her heritage and is brought into the open. He questions

"I do not know, monsieur."

"Who was here when you came in?" "No one, monsieur; the room was empty."

"Then you hid there, and overheard the conversation between Colonel Delguard and myself?"

"Yes, monsieur," I confessed, feeling my limbs tremble.

'And also all that has passed since

Monsieur Cassion entered?" "Yes, monsieur."

He drew a deep breath, striking his hand on the desk, as though he would control his anger.

"Were you alone? Had you a companion?"

raised my eyes to his, simulating a

surprise I was far from feeling. "Alone, monsieur? I am Adele la

His suspicious, doubting eyes never

left my face, and there was sneer in young D'Artigny." his voice as he answered. "Bah! I am not in love to be played

with by a witch. Perchance 'tis not easy for you to lie. Well, we will see, Look within the alcove, Cassion."

The commissaire was there even before the words of command were uttered, and my heart seemed to stop beating as his heavy hand tore aside the drapery. I leaned on the desk, bracing myself, expecting a blow, a struggle; but all was silent. Cassion. braced, and expectant, peered into the shadows, evidently perceiving nothing; then stepped within, only to instantly reappear, his expression that of disappointment.

"No one is there, monsieur," he reported, "but the window is open."

"And not a dangerous leap to the court below," returned La Barre thoughtfully. "So far you win, mademoiselle. Now will you answer me-



Black Robe Entered.

were you alone there ten minutes ago?"

"It is useless for me to reply, monsieur," I answered with dignity, "as it will in no way change your deci-

"The inheritance of my race, monsieur." "Well, we'll test it then, but not in the form you anticipate." He smiled, but not pleasantly, and resumed his seat at the desk. "I propose closing your mouth, mademoiselle and placing you beyond temptation. Monsieur Cassion, have the lieutenant at the door

"You have courage, at least."

As though in a daze I saw Cassion open the door, speak a sharp word to one without and return, followed by a young officer, who glanced curiously aside at me, even as he saluted La Barre, and stood silently awaiting his orders. The latter remained a moment motionless, his lips firm set.

"Where is Father Le Guard?" "In the chapel, monsieur; he passed me a moment ago."

"Good; inform the pere that I desire his presence at once. Wait! know you the fur trader, Hugo Chevet?"

"I have seen the man, monsieur-a big fellow, with a shaggy head."

"Ay, as savage as the Indians he has lived among. He is to be found at Eclair's wine shop in the Rue St. Louis. Have your sentries bring him here to me. Attend to both these matters."

"Yes, monsieur."

La Barre's eyes turned from the disappearing figure of the officer, rested a moment on my face, and then smiled grimly as he fronted Cassion. He seemed well pleased with himself, and to have recovered his good humor.

"A delightful surprise for you, Monsieur Cassion," he said genially, "and let us hope no less a pleasure for the fair lady. Be seated, mademoiselle. Your marriage is to take place tonight."

"This affair is no longer one of affection; it has become the king's business, a matter of state. I decide it is best for you to leave Quebec; ay! and New France, mademoiselle. There is but one choice, imprisonment here, or exile into the wilderness." He leaned forward staring into my face with his flerce, threatening eyes. "I feel it better that you go as Monsieur Cassion's wife, and under his protection. I decree that so you shall go."

"Alone-with-with-Monsieur Cassion?"

"One of his party. 'Tis my order Chesnayne; if you doubt, the way of also that Hugo Chevet be of the comdiscovery is open without word from pany. Perchance a year in the wilderness may be of benefit to him, and he might be of value in watching over

Never have I felt more helpless, more utterly alone. I knew all he meant, but my mind grasped no way of escape. His face leered at me as through a mist, yet as I glanced aside at Cassion it only brought home to me a more complete dejection. The man was glad-glad! He had no conscience, no shame. To appeal to him would be waste of breath-a deeper humiliation. Suddenly I felt cold, hard, reckless; ay! they had the power to force me through the unholy ceremony. I was only a helpless girl; but beyond that I would laugh at them; and Cassion-if he dared-

The door opened, and a lean priest in long black robe entered noiselessly, bending his shaven bead to La Barre, as his crafty eyes swiftly swept our faces.

"Monsieur desired my presence?" "Yes, Pere le Guard, a mission of happiness. There are two here to be joined in matrimony by bonds of Holy church. We but walt the coming of

the lady's guardian." The pere must have interpreted the

expression of my face. "'Tis regular, monsieur?" he asked. "By order of the king," returned La Barre sternly. "Beyond that it is not necessary that you inquire. Ah! Monsleur Chevet; they found you then? I have a pleasant surprise for you. 'Tis hereby ordered that you accompany Commissaire Cassion to the Illinois country as interpreter, to be paid from my private fund."

Chevet stared into the governor's dark face, scarce able to comprehend, his brain dazed from heavy drinking. "The Illinois country! I-Hugo Che-

vet? 'Tis some joke, monsieur?" "None at all, as you will discover

presently, my man. I do not jest on you and the wilderness to do the tamthe king's service." "But my land, monsieur; my niece?"

"Bah! let the land lie fallow; 'twill dame?" cost little while you draw a wage, and as for mademoiselle, 'tis that you may contemptuously. accompany her I make choice. Stand back; you have your orders, and now I'll show you good reason." He stood up and placed his hand on Cassion's arm. "Now, my dear Francois, if you will join the lady."

CHAPTER VI.

The Wife of Francois Cassion.

more in a passing picture than an actual reality in which I was an actor. But one clear impression dominated the command of La Barre. His word there was no appeal, save to the king. Through swimming mist I saw his face, stern, dark, threatening, and then glimpsed Cassion approaching me, a smile curling his thin lips. I shrank trembling so that I clung to the chair to keep erect.

"Do not touch me, monsieur," I said in a voice which scarcely sounded like my own. Cassion stood still, the smile of triumph leaving his face. La Barre turned, his eyes cold and hard.

"What is this, mademoiselle? You would dare disobey me?"

I caught my breath, gripping the chair with both hands.

"No, Monsieur le Governor," I answered, surprised at the clearness with which I spoke, "That would be useless; you have behind you the power of France, and I am a mere girl. Nor do I appeal, for I know well the cause of your decision. It is indeed my privllege to appeal to Holy church for protection from this outrage, but not through such representative as I see

"Pere le Guard is chaplain of my household."

"And servant to your will, monsieur. Tis known in all New France he is more diplomat than priest. Nay! I take back my word, and will make trial of his priesthood. Father, I do not love this man, nor marry him of my own free will. I appeal to you, to the church, to refuse the sanction."

The priest stood with fingers interlocked, and head bowed, nor did his eyes meet mine,

"I am but the humble instrument of those in authority, daughter," he replied gently, "and must perform the sacred duties of my office. 'Tis your own confession that your hand has been pledged to Monsieur Cassion."

"By Hugo Chevet, not myself." "Enough of this," broke in La Barre sternly, and he gripped my arm. "The girl hath lost her head, and such controversy is unseemly in my presence. Pere le Guard, let the ceremony pro-

"'Tis your order, monsieur?" "Ay! do I not speak my will plainly enough? Come, the hour is late, and our king's business is of more import than the whim of a girl."

I never moved, never lifted my eyes. was conscious of nothing, but helpless, impotent anger, of voiceless shame. They might force me to go through the form, but never would they make me the wife of this man. My heart throbbed with rebellion, my mind hardened into revolt. I knew all that occurred, realized the significance of every word and act, yet it was as if they appertained to someone else. I felt the clammy touch of Cassion's hand on my nerveless fingers, and I must have answered the interrogatorles of the priest, for his voice droned on, meaningless to the end. It was only in the silence which followed that I seemed to regain consciousness, and a new grip on my numbed faculties. Indeed I was still groping in the fog, bewildered, inert, when La Barre gave utterance to a coarse laugh,

"Congratulations, Francois," he cried. "A fair wife, and not so unwilling after all. And now your first

The sneer of these words was like a slap in the face, and all the hatred, and indignation I felt seethed to the surface. A heavy paper knife lay on the desk, and I gripped it in my fingers, and stepped back, facing them. The mist seemed to roll away, and I saw their faces, and there must have been that in mine to startle them, for even La Barre gave back a step, and the grin faded from the thin lips of the commissaire.

"'Tis ended then," I said, and my voice did not falter. "I am this man's wife. Very well, you have had your way! now I will have mine. Listen to what I shall say, Monsieur le Gouverneur, and you also, Francois Cassion. By rite of church you call me wife, but that is your only claim. I know your law, and that this ceremony has sealed my lips. I am your captive, nothing more; you can rob me now-but, mark you! all that you will ever get is money. Monsieur Cassion, if you dare lay so much as a finger on me, I will kill you as I would a snake. I know what I say, and mean it. You kiss me! Try it, monsieur, if you doubt how my race repays insult. I will go with you; I will bear your name; this the law compels, but I am still mistress of my soul, and of my body. You hear me, messieurs? You understand?"

Cassion stood leaning forward, just where my first words had held him motionless. As I paused his eyes were on my face, and he lifted a hand to wipe away drops of perspiration. La Barre crumpled the paper he held

savagely. "So," he exclaimed, "we have unchained a tiger cat. Well, all this is naught to me; and Francois, I leave were off. You agree to accompany La Barre permitted himself a laugh, the party without resistance, ma-

> "As well there, as here," I answered "And you, Hugo Chevet?"

The giant growled something inarticulate through his beard, not altogether, I thought, to La Barre's liking, for his face darkened.

"By St. Anne! 'tis a happy family amid which you start your honeymoon, Monsieur Cassion," he ejaculated at length, "but go you must, though I send a file of soldiers with It is vague, all that transpired. I you to the boats. Now leave me, and the scene, yet it returns to memory comes of your arrival at St. Louis."

of us, and no one spoke, as we traversed the great assembly hall, in which my brain-my helplessness to resist dancers still lingered, and gained the outer hall. Cassion secured niy cloak, was law in the colony, and from it and I wrapped it about my shoulders, for the night air without was already chill, and then, yet in unbroken silence, we passed down the steps into the darkness of the street. I walked beside Chevet, who was growling to back from him, yet arose to my feet, himself, scarce sober enough to clearly realize what had occurred, and so we followed the commissaire down the step path which led to the river.

> Vaguely I comprehended that I was no longer Adele la Chesnayne, but the wife of that man I followed. A word, a muttered prayer, an uplifted hand, had made me his slave, his vassal. Nothing could break the bond between us save death. I might bate, despise, revile, but the bond held. This thought grew clearer as my mind readjusted itself, and the full horror of the situation took possession of me. Yet there was nothing I could do: I could neither escape nor fight, nor had I a friend to whom I could appeal. Suddenly I realized that I still grasped in my hand the heavy paper knife I had snatched up from La Barre's desk, and



'Try It, Monsieur, If You Doubt How My Race Repays Insult."

I thrust it into the wan band of my skirt. It was my only weapon of defense, yet to know I had even that seemed to bring me a glow of courage.

We reached the river's edge and halted. Below us, on the bank, the blazing fire emitted a red gleam reflecting on the water, and showing us the dark outlines of waiting canoes, and seated figures. Gazing about Cassion broke the silence, his voice assuming the harshness of authority.

"Three canoes! Where is the other? Huh! if there be delay now, someone will make answer to me word for the sergeant; ah! is this you. Le Claire?"

"All is prepared, monsieur." He glared at the stocky figure fronting him in infantry uniform.

"Prepared! You have but three boats at the bank." "The other is below, monsieur; it is

loaded and waits to lead the way." "Ah! and who is in charge?"

"Was it not your will that it be the gulde-the Sieur d'Artigny?" "Sacre! but I had forgotten the fellow. Ay! 'tis the best place for him.

And are all provisions and arms aboard? You checked them, Le Claire?" "With care, monsieur; I watched the stowing of each piece; there is noth-

ing forgotten." I found myself in one of the canoes, so filled with men any movement was almost impossible, yet of this I did not complain, for my Uncle Chevet was next to me, and Cassion took place at the steering oar in the stern. To be separated from him was all I asked. He had won! he had used his power to conquer! Very well, now he would pay the price. He thought me a helpless girl; he would find me a woman, and a La Chesnayne. The tears left my eyes, and my head lifted,

as purpose and decision returned. We were skirting the northern bank, the high bluffs blotting out the stars, with here and there, far up above us, a light gleaming from some distant window, its rays reflecting along the black water. The Indian paddlers worked silently, driving the sharp prow of the heavily laden cance steadily up stream. Farther out to the left was the dim outline of another boat, keeping pace with ours, the moving figures of the paddlers revealed

against the water beyond. As the sun forced its way through an obscuring cloud, the mist rose slowly and drifted aside, giving me glimpse of the canoe in advance, although it remained indistinct, a vague speck in the waste of water. I sat motionless, gazing about at the scene, yet vaguely comprehending the nature ing. In faith, 'tis time already you of our surroundings. My mind reviewed the strange events of the past night, and endeavored to adjust itself to my new environment. Almost in an instant of time my life had utterly changed-I had been married and exiled; wedded to a man whom I despised, and forced to accompany him into the unknown wilderness. It was like a dream, a delirium of fever, and even yet I could not seem to comprehend its dread reality. But the speeding canoes, the strange faces, the occasional sound of Cassion's voice, the slumbering figure of Chevet was evidence of truth not to be ignored, and ahead yonder, a mere outline, was the knew then, and recall now, much of I would hear no more until word boat which contained D'Artigny. What would he say, or do, when he learned

We left the room together, the three the truth? Would be care greatly? Had I read rightly the message of his eyes? Could I have trust, and confidence in his loyalty? Would he accept my explanation! or would he condemn me for this act in which I was in no wise to blame? Mother of God! it came to me that it was not so much Monsieur Cassion I feared, as the Sieur d'Artigny. What would be his verdict? My heart seemed to stop its beating, and tears dimmed my eyes, as I gazed across the water at that distant canoe. I knew then that all my courage, all my hope, centered on his decision—the decision of the man I loved.

CHAPTER VII.

The Two Men Meet.

I could not have slept, although I must have lost consciousness of our surroundings, for I was aroused by Cassion's voice shouting some command, and became aware that we were making landing on the river bank. The sun was two hours high, and the spot selected a low grasscovered point, shaded by trees. Chevet had awakened, sobered by his nap. and the advance canoe had already been drawn up on the shore, the few soldiers it contained busily engaged in starting fires with which to cook our morning meal.

I perceived D'Artigny with my first glance, standing erect on the bank. his back toward us, directing the men in their work. As we shot forward toward the landing he turned indifferently, and I marked the sudden straightening of his body, as though in surprise, although the distance gave me no clear vision of his face. As our canoe came into the shallows he sprang down the bank to greet us, hat in hand, his eyes on me. My own glance fell before the eagerness in his face, and I turned away.

"Ah! Monsieur Cassion," he exclaimed, the very sound of his voice evidencing delight. "You have guests on the journey; 'tis unexpected."

Cassion stepped over the side and fronted him, no longer a smiling gallant of the court, but brutal in au-

"And what is that to you, may I ask, Sieur d'Artigny?" he said coldly contemptuous. "You are but our guide, and it is no concern of yours who may compose the company. 'Twill be well for you to remember your place, and attend to your duties. Go, now, and see that the men have breakfast served."

There was a moment of silence, and I did not even venture to glance up to perceive what occurred, although I felt that D'Artigny's eyes shifted their inquiry from Cassion's face to mine. There must be no quarrel now, not until he knew the truth, not until I had opportunity to explain, and yet he was a firebrand, and it would be like him to resent such words. How relieved I felt as his voice made final

"Pardon, Monsieur le Commissaire," he said, pleasantly enough. "It is true I forgot my place in this moment of surprise. I obey your orders."

I looked up as he turned away and disappeared. Cassion stared after him, smothered an oath, and evidently disappointed at so tame an ending of the affair, for it was his nature to bluster and boast. Yet as his lips changed to a grin, I knew of what the man was thinking - he had mistaken D'Artigny's actions for cowardice, and felt assured now of how he would deal with him. He turned to the canoe, a new conception of importance in the sharp tone of his voice.

"Come ashore, men; ay! draw the boat higher on the sand. Now, Monsleur Chevet, assist your niece forward to where I can help her to land with dry feet-permit me, Adele."

"It is not necessary, monsieur," I replied, avoiding his hand and leaping lightly to the firm sand. "You have forced me into marriage; the law holds me as your wife. I know not how I may escape that fate, or avoid accompanying you. So far I submit, but no further. I do not love you; I do not even feel friendship toward you. Let me pass."

He grasped my arm, turning me about until I faced him, his eyes glaring into mine.

"Not until I speak," he replied threateningly. "Do not mistake my temper, or imagine me blind. I know what has so suddenly changed you-It is that gay, simpering fool yonder. But be careful how far you go. I am your husband, and in authority here."

I released my arm, but did not move. My only feeling toward him at that moment was one of disgust, defiance. The threat in his eyes, the cool insolence of his speech, set my blood on

"Monsieur," I said coldly, although every nerve of my body throbbed, "you may know girls, but you deal now with a woman. Your speech, your insinuation is insult. I disliked you before; now I despise you, yet I will say this in answer to what you have intimated Monsieur d'Artigny is nothing to me, save that he hath shown himself friend. You wrong him, even as you wrong me, in thinking otherwise, and whatever the cause of misunderstanding between us, there is no excuse for you to pick quarrel with him."

Will the Jesuit, Uncle Chevet and D'Artigny counterplot against Cassion and his injoultous fellows to free Adele-provided she has the opportunity to tell them what she has learned before it is too late to thwart Governor La Barre's scheme?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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