Roberts Charles G. D. Sir

The Forge in the Forest

Charles Roberts

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Содержание

Charles G. D. Roberts
The Forge in the Forest Being the Narrative of the Acadian Ranger, Jean de Mer, Seigneur de Briart and How He Crossed the Black Abbé and of His Adventures in a Strange Fellowship

Part I
Marc

The Forge in the Forest
A Foreword

Where the Five Rivers flow down to meet the swinging of the Minas tides, and the Great Cape of Blomidon bars out the storm and the fog, lies half a county of rich meadow-lands and long-arcaded orchards. It is a deep-bosomed land, a land of fat cattle, of well-filled barns, of ample cheeses and strong cider; and a well-conditioned folk inhabit it. But behind this countenance of gladness and peace broods the memory of a vanished people. These massive dykes, whereon twice daily the huge tide beats in vain, were built by hands not suffered to possess the fruits of their labour. These comfortable fields have been scorched with the ruin of burning homes, drenched with the tears of women hurried into exile. These orchard lanes, appropriate to the laughter of children or the silences of lovers, have rung with battle and run deep with blood. Though the race whose bane he was has gone, still stalks the sinister shadow of the Black Abbé.

The low ridge running between the dykelands of the Habitants and the dyke-lands of the Canard still carries patches of forest interspersed among its farms, for its soil is sandy and not greatly to be coveted for tillage. These patches are but meagre second growth, with here and there a gnarled birch or overpeering pine, lonely survivor of the primeval brotherhood. The undergrowth has long smoothed out all traces of what a curious eye might fifty years ago have discerned, – the foundations of the chimney of a blacksmith's forge. It is a mould well steeped in fateful devisings, this which lies forgotten under the creeping roots of juniper and ragged-robin, between the diminished stream of Canard and the yellow tide of Habitants.

The forest then was a wide-spreading solemnity of shade wherein armies might have moved unseen. The forge stood where the trail from Pereau ran into the more travelled road from the Canard to Grand Pré. The branches of the ancient wood came down all about its low eaves; and the squirrels and blue jays chattered on its roof. It was a place for the gathering of restless spirits, the men of Acadie who hated to accept the flag of the English king. It was the Acadian headquarters of the noted ranger, Jean de Mer, who was still called by courtesy, and by the grace of such of his people as adhered to his altered fortunes, the Seigneur de Briart. His father had been lord of the whole region between Blomidon and Grand Pré; but the English occupation had deprived him of all open and formal lordship, for the de Briart sword was notably conspicuous on the side of New France. Nevertheless, many of Jean de Mer's habitants maintained to him a chivalrous allegiance, and paid him rents for lands which in the English eye were freehold properties. He cherished his hold upon these faithful folk, willing by all honest means to keep their hearts to France. His one son, Marc,

grew up at Grand Pré, save for the three years of his studying at Quebec. His faithful retainer, Babin, wielding a smith's hammer at the Forge, had ears of wisdom and a tongue of discretion for the men who came and went. Once or twice in the year, it was de Mer's custom to visit the Grand Pré country, where he would set his hand to the work of the forge after Babin's fashion, playing his part to the befooling of English eyes, and taking, in truth, a quaint pride in his pretended craft. At the time, however, when this narrative opens, he had been a whole three years absent from the Acadian land, and his home-coming was yet but three days old.

Chapter I
The Capture at the Forge

It was good to be alive that afternoon. A speckled patch of sunshine, having pushed its way through the branches across the road, lay spread out on the dusty floor of the forge. On a block just inside the door sat Marc, his lean, dark face, – the Belleisle face, made more hawklike by the blood of his Penobscot grandmother, – all aglow with eagerness. The lazy youngster was not shamed at the sight of my diligence, but talked right on, with a volubility which would have much displeased his Penobscot grandmother. It was pleasant to be back with the lad again, and I was aweary of the war, which of late had kept my feet forever on the move from Louisbourg to the Richelieu. My fire gave a cheerful roar as I heaved upon the bellows, and turned my pike-point in the glowing charcoal. As the roar sighed down into silence there was a merry whirr of wings, and a covey of young partridges flashed across the road. A contented mind and a full stomach do often make a man a fool, or I should have made shift to inquire why the partridges had so sharply taken wing. But I never thought of it. I turned, and let the iron grow cool, and leaned with one foot on the anvil, to hear the boy's talk. My soul was indeed asleep, lulled by content, or I would surely have felt the gleam of the beady eyes that watched me through a chink in the logs beside the chimney. But I felt those eyes no more than if I had been a log myself.

"Yes, Father," said Marc, pausing in rich contemplation of the picture in his mind's eye, "you would like her hair! It is unmistakably red, – a chestnut red. But her sister's is redder still!"

I smiled at his knowledge of my little weakness for hair of that colour; but not of a woman's hair was I thinking at that moment, or I should surely have made some question about the sister. My mind ran off upon another trail.

"And what do the English think they're going to do when de Ramezay comes down upon them?" I inquired. "Do they flatter themselves their tumble-down Annapolis is strong enough to hold us off?"

The lad flushed resentfully and straightened himself up on his seat.

"Do you suppose, Father, that I was in the fort, and hobnobbing with the Governor?" he asked coldly. "I spoke with none of the English save Prudence and her sister, and the child."

"But why not?" said I, unwilling to acknowledge that I had said anything at which he might take offence. "Every one knows your good disposition toward the English, and I should suppose you were in favour at Annapolis. The Governor, I know, makes much of all our people who favour the English cause."

Marc stood up, – lean, and fine, and a good half head taller than his father, – and looked at me with eyes of puzzled wrath.

"And you think that I, knowing all I do of de Ramezay's plans, would talk to the English about them!" he exclaimed in a voice of keen reproach.

Now, I understood his anger well enough, and in my heart rejoiced at it; for though I knew his honour would endure no stain, I had nevertheless feared lest I should find his sympathies all English. He was a lad with a way of thinking much and thinking for himself, and even now, at twenty year, far more of a scholar than I had ever found time to be. Therefore, I say, his indignation pleased me mightily. Nevertheless I kept at him.

"Chut!" said I, "all the world knows by now of de Ramezay's plans. There had been no taint of treachery in talking of them!"

Marc sat down again, and the ghost of a smile flickered over his lean face. Though free enough of his speech betimes, he was for the most part as unsmiling as an Indian.

"I see you are mocking me, Father," he said presently, relighting his pipe. "Indeed, you know very well I am on your side, for weal or ill. As long as there was a chance of the English being left in peaceable possession of Acadie, I urged that we should accept their rule fully and in good faith.

No one can say they haven't ruled us gently and generously. And I feel right sure they will continue to rule us, for the odds are on their side in the game they play with France. But seeing that the game has yet to be played out, there is only one side for me, and I believe it to be the losing one. Though as a boy I liked them well enough, I have nothing more to do with the English now except to fight them. How could I have another flag than yours?"

"You are my own true lad, whatever our difference of opinion!" said I. And if my voice trembled in a manner that might show a softness unsuited to a veteran of my training, bear in mind that, till within the past three days, I had not seen the lad for three years, and then but briefly. At Grand Pré, and in Quebec at school, Marc had grown up outside my roving life, and I was just opening my eyes to find a comrade in this tall son of my boyhood's love. His mother, a daughter of old Baron St. Castin by his Penobscot wife, had died while he was yet at the breast. A babe plays but a small part in the life of a ranging bush-fighter, though I had ever a great tenderness for the little lad. Now, however, I was looking upon him with new eyes.

Having blown the coals again into a heat, I returned to Marc's words, certain of which had somewhat stuck in my crop.

"But you speak with despondence, lad, of the chances of the war, and of the hope of Acadie! By St. Joseph, we'll drive the English all the way back of the Penobscot before you're a twelvemonth older. And Acadie will see the Flag of the Lilies flapping once more over the ramparts of Port Royal."

Marc shook his head slowly, and seemed to be following with his eyes the vague pattern of the shadows on the floor.

"It seems to me," said he, with a conviction which caught sharply at my heart even though I bore in mind his youth and inexperience, "that rather will the Flag of the Lilies be cast down even from the strong walls of Quebec. But may that day be far off! As for our people here in Acadie, during the last twelvemonth it has been made very clear to me that evil days are ahead. The Black Abbé is preparing many sorrows for us here in Acadie."

"I suppose you mean La Garne!" said I. "He's a diligent servant to France; but I hate a bad priest. He's a dangerous man to cross, Marc! Don't go out of your way to make an enemy of the Black Abbé!"

Again that ghost of a smile glimmered on Marc's lips.

"I fear you speak too late, Father!" said he, quietly. "The reverend Abbé has already marked me. He so far honours me as to think that I am an obstacle in his path. There be some whose eyes I have opened to his villany, so that he has lost much credit in certain of the parishes. I doubt not that he will contrive some shrewd stroke for vengeance."

My face fell somewhat, for I am not ashamed to confess that I fear a bad priest, the more so in that I yield to none in my reverence for a good one. I turned my iron sharply in the coals, and then exclaimed:

"Oh, well, we need not greatly trouble ourselves. There are others, methinks, as strong as the Black Abbé, evil though he be!" But I spoke, as I have often found it expedient to do, with more confidence than I felt.

Even at this moment, shrill and clear from the leafage at one end of the forge, came the call of the big yellow-winged woodpecker. I pricked up my ears and stiffened my muscles, expectant of I knew not what.

Marc looked at me with some surprise.

"It's only a woodpecker!" said he.

"But it's only in the spring," I protested, "that he has a cry like that!"

"He cries untimely, as an omen of the ills to come!" said Marc, half meaning it and half in jest.

Had it been anywhere on the perilous frontier, – on the Richelieu or in the West, or nigh the bloody Massachusetts line, my suspicions would have sprung up wide awake. But in this quiet land between the Habitants and the Canard I was off my guard, – and what a relief it was, indeed, to let

myself be careless for a little! I thought no more of the woodpecker, but remembered that sister with the red hair. I came back to her by indirection, however.

"And how did you manage, lad, to be seeing Mistress Prudence, and her sister, and the child, and yet no others of the English? A matter of dark nights and back windows? Eh? But come to think of it, there was a clear moon this day four weeks back, when you were at Annapolis."

"No, Father," answered Marc, "it was all much more simple and less adventurous than that. Some short way out of the town is a little river, the Equille, and a pleasant hidden glade set high upon its bank. It is a favoured resort of both the ladies; and there I met them as often as I was permitted. Mizpah would sometimes choose to play apart with the child, down by the water's edge if the tide were full, so I had some gracious opportunity with Prudence. – My time being brief, I made the most of it!" he added drily. His quaint directness amused me mightily, and I chuckled as I shaped the red iron upon the anvil.

"And who," I inquired, "is this kind sister, with the even redder hair, who goes away with such a timely discretion?"

"Oh, yes," said Marc, "I forgot you knew nothing of her. She is Mistress Mizpah Hanford, the widow of a Captain Hanford who was some far connection of the Governor's. Her property is in and about Annapolis, and she lives there to manage it, keeping Prudence with her for companionship. Her child is four or five years old, a yellow-haired, rosy boy called Philip. She's very tall, – a head taller than Prudence, and older, of course, by perhaps eight years; and very fair, though not so fair as Prudence; and altogether – "

But at this point I interrupted him.

"What's the matter with the Indian?" I exclaimed, staring out across Marc's shoulders.

He sprang to his feet and looked around sharply. An Indian, carrying three shad strung upon a sapling, had just appeared on the road before the forge door. As he came in view he was reeling heavily, and clutching at his head. He dropped his fish; and a moment later he himself fell headlong, and lay face downward in the middle of the road. I remember thinking that his legs sprawled childishly. Marc strolled over to him with slow indifference.

"Have a care!" I exclaimed. "There may be some trap in it! It looks not natural!"

"What trap can there be?" asked Marc, turning the body over. "It's Red Moose, a Shubenacadie Micmac. I like not the breed; but ever since he got a hurt on the head, in a fight at Canseau last year, he has been subject to the falling sickness. Let us carry him to a shady place, and he'll come to himself presently!"

I was at his side in a moment, and we stooped to lift the seemingly lifeless figure. In an instant its arms were about my neck in a strangling embrace. At the same time my own arms were seized. I heard a fierce cry from Marc, and a groan that was not his. The next moment, though I writhed and struggled with all my strength, I found myself bound hand and foot, and seated on the ground with my back against the door-post of the forge. Marc, bound like myself, lay by the roadside; and a painted savage sat near him nursing with both hands a broken jaw. A dozen Micmacs stood about us. Leaning against the door-post over against me was the black-robed form of La Garne. He eyed me, for perhaps ten seconds, with a smile of fine and penetrating sarcasm. Then he told his followers to stand Marc up against a tree.

Chapter II
The Black Abbé

When first I saw that smile on the Black Abbé's face, and realized what had befallen us, I came nigh to bursting with rage, and was on the point of telling my captor some truths to make his ears tingle. But when I heard the order to stand Marc up against a tree my veins for an instant turned to ice. Many men – and some women, too, God help me, I then being bound and gagged, – had I seen thus stood up against a tree, and never but for one end. I could not believe that such an end was contemplated now, and that by a priest of the Church, however unworthy of his office! But I checked my tongue and spoke the Abbé fair.

"It is quite plain to me, Monsieur," said I, quietly, "that my son and I are the victims of some serious mistake, for which you will, I am sure, feel constrained to ask our pardon presently. I await your explanations."

La Garne, still smiling, looked me over slowly. Never before had I seen him face to face, though he had more than once traversed my line of vision. I had known the tireless figure, as tall, almost, as Marc himself, stoop-shouldered, but robust, now moving swiftly as if propelled by an energy irresistible, now languid with an affectation of indolence. But the face – I hated the possessor of it with a personal hate the moment my eyes fell upon that face. Strong and inflexible was the gaunt, broad, and thin jaw, cruel and cunning the high, pinched forehead and narrow-set, palely glinting eyes. The nose, in particular, greatly offended me, being very long, and thick at the end. "I'll tweak it for him, one fine day," says I to myself, as I boiled under his steady smile.

"There is no mistake, Monsieur de Briart, believe me!" he said, still smiling.

There could be no more fair words, of course, after that avowal.

"Then, Sir Priest," said I, coldly, "you are both a madman and a scurvy rogue, and you shall yet be on your knees to me for this outrage. You will see then the nature of your mistake, I give you my word."

The priest's smile took on something of the complexion of a snarl.

"Don't be alarmed, Monsieur de Briart," said he. "You are quite safe, because I know you for a good servant to France; and for your late disrespect to Holy Church, in my person, while in talk with your pestilent son, these bonds may be a wholesome and sufficient lesson to you!"

"You shall have a lesson sufficient rather than wholesome, I promise you!" said I.

"But as for this fellow," went on the Abbé, without noticing my interruption, "he is a spy. You understand how spies fare, Monsieur!" And a malignant light made his eyes appear like two points of steel beneath the ambush of his ragged brows.

I saw Marc's lean face flush thickly under the gross accusation.

"It is a lie, you frocked hound!" he cried, careless of the instant peril in which he stood.

But the Black Abbé never looked at him.

"I wish you joy of your son, a very good Englishman, Monsieur, and now, I fear, not long for this world," said he, in a tone of high civility. "He has long been fouling with his slanders the names of those whom he should reverence, and persuading the people to the English. But now, after patiently waiting, I have proofs. His treachery shall hang him!"

For a moment the dear lad's peril froze my senses, so that it was but dimly I heard his voice, ringing with indignation as he hurled back the charge upon the lying lips that made it.

"If the home of lies be anywhere out of Hell, it is in your malignant mouth, you shame of the Church," he cried in defiance. "There can be no proof that I am a spy, even as there can be no proof that you are other than a false-tongued assassin, defiling your sacred office."

It was the galling defiance of a savage warrior at the stake, and even in my fear my heart felt proud of it. The priest was not galled, however, by these penetrating insults.

"As for the proofs," said he, softly, never looking at Marc, but keeping his eyes on my face, "Monsieur de Ramezay shall judge whether they be proofs or not. If he say they are not, I am content."

At a sign, a mere turn of his head it seemed to me, the Indians loosed Marc's feet to lead him away.

"Farewell, Father," said he, in a firm voice, and turned upon me a look of unshakable courage.

"Be of good heart, son," I cried to him. "I will be there, and this devil shall be balked!"

"You, Monsieur," said the priest, still smiling, "will remain here for the present. To-night I will send a villager to loose your bonds. Then, by all means, come over and see Monsieur de Ramezay at Chignecto. I may not be there then myself, but this business of the spy will have been settled, for the commander does not waste time in such small matters!"

He turned away to follow his painted band, and I, shaking in my impotent rage and fear, called after him: —

"As God lives and is my witness, if the lad comes to any harm, these hands will visit it upon you an hundredfold, till you scream for death's mercy!"

But the Black Abbé moved off as if he heard no word, and left me a twisted heap upon the turf, gnawing fiercely at the tough deer-hide of my bonds.

Chapter III
Tamin's Little Stratagem

I had been gnawing, gnawing in an anguish at the thongs, for perhaps five minutes. There had been no more than time for the Abbé's wolf-pack to vanish by a turn of the road. Suddenly a keen blade slit the thongs that bound my wrists. Then my feet felt themselves free. I sat up, astonished, and saw stooping over me the droll, broad face of Tamin the Fisher, – or Tamin Violet, as he was rightly, though seldom, called. His mouth was solemn, as always, having never been known to wear a smile; but the little wrinkles laughed about his small bright eyes. I sprang up and grasped his hand.

"We must not lose a moment, Tamin, my friend!" I panted, dragging him into the thick shade of the wood.

"I was thinking you might be in a hurry, M'sieu," said my rescuer. "But unless the mouse wants to be back in the same trap I've just let it out of, you'd better keep still a half-minute and make up your mind. They've a round road to go, and we'll go straight!"

"You saw it all?" I asked, curbing myself as best I could, for I perceived the wisdom of his counsel.

"Oh, ay, M'sieu, I saw it!" replied the Fisher. "And I laughed in my bones to hear the lad talk up to the good father. There was more than one shot went home, I warrant, for all the Black Abbé seemed so deaf. They're festering under his soutane even now, belike!"

"But come!" said I. "I've got my wind!" And we darted noiselessly through the cool of the great trees, turning a little east from the road.

We ran silently for a space, my companion's short but massive frame leaping, bending, gliding even as lightly as my own, which was ever as lithe as a weasel's. Tamin was a rare woodsman, as I marked straightway, though I had known him of old rather as a faithful tenant, and marvellously patient to sit in his boat all day a-fishing on the drift of the Minas tides.

Presently he spoke, under his breath.

"Very like," said he, drily, "when we come up to them they will all fall down. So, we will take the lad and walk away! eh, what, M'sieu?"

"Only let us come up to them," said I, "and learn their plans. Then we will make ours!"

"Something of theirs I know," said Tamin. "Their canoes are on the Canard maybe three furlongs to east of the road. Thence they will carry the lad to de Ramezay, for the Black Abbé will have things in due form when he can conveniently, and now it is plain he has a scheme well ripe. But if this wind holds, we'll be there before them. My boat is lying hard by."

"God be praised!" I muttered; for in truth I saw some light now for the first time. Presently, drawing near the road again, I heard the voice of La Garne. We at once went softly, and, avoiding again, made direct for where lay the canoes. There we disposed ourselves in a swampy thicket, with a little breadth of water lying before and all the forest behind. The canoes lay just across the little water, and so close that I might have tossed my cap into them. The clean smell of the wet salt sedge came freshly into the thicket. The shadows lay long on the water. We had time to grow quiet, till our breathing was no longer hasty, our blood no longer thumped in our ears. A flock of sand-pipers, with thin cries, settled to feed on the red clay between the canoes and the edge of the tide. Suddenly they got up, and puffed away in a flicker of white breasts and brown wings; and I laid a hand on Tamin's shoulder. The painted band, Marc in their midst, La Garne in front, were coming down the slope.

The lad's face was stern and scornful. To my joy I saw that there was to be no immediate departure. The redskins flung themselves down indolently. The Black Abbé saw his prisoner made fast to a tree, and then, telling his followers that he had duties at Pereau which would keep him till past sunset, strode off swiftly up the trail. Tamin and I, creeping as silently as snakes back into the forest, followed him.

For half an hour we followed him, keeping pace for pace through the shadow of the wood. Then said I softly to Tamin: —

"This is my quarrel, my friend! Do you keep back, and not bring down his vengeance on your head."

"That for his vengeance!" whispered Tamin, with a derisive gesture. "I will take service with de Ramezay, as a regular soldier of France!"

"Even there," said I, "his arm might reach and pluck you forth. Keep back now, and let him not see your face!"

"Priest though he be, M'sieu," urged Tamin, anxiously, "he is a mighty man of his hands!"

I turned upon him a face of scorn which he found sufficient answer. Then, signing to him to hold off, I sped forward silently. No weapon had I but a light stick of green ash, just cut. There was smooth, mossy ground along the trail, and my running feet made no more sound than a cat's. I was within a pace of springing upon his neck, when he must have felt my coming. He turned like a flash, uttered a piercing signal cry, and whipped out a dagger.

"They'll never hear it," mocked I, and sent the dagger spinning with a smart pass of my stick. The same stroke went nigh to breaking his wrist. He grappled bravely, however, as I took him by the throat, and I was astonished at his force and suppleness. Nevertheless the struggle was but brief, and the result a matter to be sworn to beforehand; for I, though not of great stature, am stronger than any other man, big or little, with whom I have ever come to trial; and more than that, when I was a prisoner among the English, I learned their shrewd fashion of wrestling. In a little space the Black Abbé lay choked into submission, after which I bound him in a way to endure, and seated him against a tree. Behind him I caught view of Tamin, gesturing drolly, whereat I laughed till I marked an amazement growing in the priest's malignant eyes.

"How like you my lesson, good Father?" I inquired.

But he only glared upon me. I suppose, having no speech that would fitly express his feelings, he conceived that his silence would be most eloquent. But I could see that my next move startled him. With my knife I cut a piece from my shirt, and made therewith a neat gag.

"Though you seem so dumb at this present," said I, "I suspect that you might find a tongue after my departure. Therefore I must beseech you to wear this ornament, for my sake, for a little." And very civilly prying his teeth open, I adjusted the gag.

"Do not be afraid!" I continued. "I will leave you in this discomfort no longer than you thought it necessary to leave me so. You shall be free after to-morrow's sunrise, if not before. Farewell, good Father, and may you rest well! Let me borrow this ring as a pledge for the safe return of the fragment of my good shirt which you hold so obstinately between your teeth!" And drawing his ring from his finger I turned away and plunged into the forest, where Tamin presently joined me.

Tamin chuckled, deep in his stomach.

"My turn now!" said he. "Give me the ring, M'sieu, and I'll give you the boy!"

"I see you take me!" said I, highly pleased at his quick discernment.

We now made way at leisure back to the canoes, and our plans ripened as we went.

Before we came within hearing of the Indians I gave over the ring with final directions, to Tamin, and then hastened toward the point of land which runs far out beyond the mouth of the Habitants. Around this point, as I knew, lay the little creek-mouth wherein Tamin kept his boat. Beyond the point, perchance a furlong, was a narrow sand-spit covered deep at every flood tide. In a thicket of fir bushes on the bluff over against this sand-spit I lay down to wait for what Tamin should bring to pass. I had some little time to wait; and here let me unfold, as I learned it after, what Tamin did whilst I waited.

About sunset, the tide being far out, and the Indians beginning to expect their Abbé's return, came Tamin to them running in haste along the trail from Pereau, as one who carried orders of

importance. Going straight to the chief, he pointed derisively at Marc, whose back was towards him, and cried: —

"The good father commands that you take this dog of a spy straightway to the sand-spit that lies off the point yonder. There you will drive a strong stake into the sand, and bind the fellow to it, and leave him there, and return here to await the Abbé's coming. You shall do no hurt to the spy, and set no mark upon him. When the tide next ebbs you will go again to the sand-spit and bring his body back; and if the Abbé finds any mark upon him, you will get no pay for this venture. You will make your camp here to-night, and if the good father be not returned to you by sunrise to-morrow, you will go to meet him along the Pereau trail, for he will be in need of you."

The tall chief grunted, and eyed him doubtfully. After a brief contemplation he inquired, in broken French: —

"How know you no lie to me?"

"Here is the holy father's ring, in warranty; and you shall give it back to him when he comes."

"It is well," said the chief, taking the ring, and turning to give some commands in his own guttural tongue. Tamin repeated his message word by word, then strode away; and before he got out of sight he saw two canoes put off for the sand-spit. Then he made all haste to join me on the point.

Long before he arrived the canoes had come stealing around the point and were drawn up on the treacherous isle of sand. My heart bled for the horror of death which, as I knew, must now be clutching at Marc's soul; but I kept telling myself how soon I would make him glad. It wanted yet three hours or more till the tide should cover the sand-spit. I lay very still among the young fir trees, so that a wood-mouse ran within an arm's length of my face, till it caught the moving of my eyes and scurried off with a frightened squeak. I heard the low change in the note of the tide as the first of the flood began to creep in upon the weeds and pebbles. Then with some farewell taunts, to which Marc answered not a word, the savages went again to their canoes and paddled off swiftly.

When they had become but specks on the dim water, I doffed my clothes, took my knife between my teeth, and swam across to the sand-spit. There was a low moon, obscured by thin and slowly drifting clouds, and as I swam through the faint trail of it, Marc must have seen me coming. Nevertheless he gave no sign, and I could see that his head drooped forward upon his breast. An awful fear came down upon me, and for a second or two I was like to sink, so numb I turned at the thought that perchance the savages had put the knife to him before quitting. I recovered, however, as I called to mind the orders which Tamin had rehearsed to me ere starting on his venture; for I knew how sorely the Black Abbé was feared by his savage flock. What they deemed him to have commanded, that would they do.

Drawing closer now, I felt the ground beneath my feet.

"Marc," I called softly, "I'm coming, lad!"

The drooped head was lifted.

"Father!" he exclaimed. And there was something like a sob in that cry of joy. It caught my heart strangely, telling me he was still a boy for all he had borne himself so manfully in the face of sudden and appalling peril. Now the long tension was loosed. He was alone with me. As I sprang to him and cut the thongs that held him, one arm went about my neck and I was held very close for the space of some few heart-beats. Then he fetched a deep breath, stretched his cramped limbs this way and that, and said simply, "I knew you would come, Father! I knew you would find a way!"

Chapter IV
The Governor's Signature

The clouds slipped clear of the moon's face, and we three – Marc, I, and the stake – cast sudden long black shadows which led all the way down to the edge of the increeping tide. I looked at the shadows, and a shudder passed through me as if a cold hand had been laid upon my back. Marc stood off a little, – never have I seen such quick control, such composure, in one so inexperienced, – and remarked to me: —

"What a figure of a man you are, Father, to be sure!"

I fell into his pretence of lightness at once, a high relief after the long and deadly strain; and I laughed with some pleasure at the praise. In very truth, I cherished a secret pride in my body.

"'Tis well enough, no doubt, in a dim light," said I, "though by now surely somewhat battered!"

Marc was already taking off his clothes. As he knotted them into a convenient bundle, there came from the woods, a little way back of the point, the hollow "Too-hoo-hoo-whoo-oo!" of the small gray owl.

"There's Tamin!" said I, and was on the point of answering in like fashion, when the cry was reiterated twice.

"That means danger, and much need of haste for us," I growled. Together we ran down into the tide, striking out with long strokes for the fine white line that seethed softly along the dark base of the point. I commended the lad mightily for his swimming, as we scrambled upon the beach and slipped swiftly into our clothes. Though carrying his bundle on his head, he had given me all I could do to keep abreast of him.

We climbed the bluff, and ran through the wet, keen-scented bushes toward the creek where lay the boat. Ere we had gone half-way Tamin met us, breathless.

"What danger?" I asked.

"I think they're coming back to tuck the lad in for the night, and see that he's comfortable!" replied Tamin, panting heavily. "I heard paddles when they should have been long out of earshot."

"Something has put them in doubt!" said Marc.

"Sure," said I, "and not strange, if one but think of it!"

"Yet I told them a fair tale," panted Tamin, as he went on swiftly toward his boat.

The boat lay yet some yards above the edge of tide, having been run aground near high water. The three of us were not long in dragging her down and getting her afloat. Then came the question that was uppermost.

"Which way?" asked Tamin, laconically, taking the tiller, while Marc stood by to hoist the dark and well-patched sail.

I considered the wind for some moments.

"For Chignecto!" said I, with emphasis. "We must see de Ramezay and settle this hound La Garne. Otherwise Marc stands in hourly peril."

As the broad sail drew, and the good boat, leaning well over, gathered way, and the small waves swished and gurgled merrily under her quarter, I could hardly withhold from laughing for sheer gladness. Marc was already smoking with great composure beside the mast, his lean face thoughtful, but untroubled. He looked, I thought, almost as old as his war-battered sire who now watched him with so proud an eye. Presently I heard Tamin fetch a succession of mighty breaths, as he emptied and filled the ample bellows of his lungs. He snatched the green and yellow cap of knitted wool from his head, and let the wind cool the sweating black tangle that coarsely thatched his broad skull.

"Hein!" he exclaimed, with a droll glance at Marc, "that's better than *that*!" And he made an expressive gesture as of setting a knife to his scalp. To me this seemed much out of place and time;

but Tamin was ever privileged in the eyes of a de Mer, so I grumbled not. As for Marc, that phantom of a smile, which I had already learned to watch for, just touched his lips, as he remarked calmly:

"Vraiment, much better. That, as you call it, my Tamin, came so near to-night that my scalp needs no cooling since!"

"But whither steering?" I inquired; for the boat was speeding south-eastward, straight toward Grand Pré.

Tamin's face told plainly that he had his reasons, and I doubted not that they were good. For some moments that wide, grave mouth opened not to make reply, while the little, twinkling, contradictory eyes were fixed intently on some far-off landmark, to me invisible. This point being made apparently to his satisfaction, he relaxed and explained.

"You see, M'sieu," said he, "we must get under the loom o' the shore, so's we'll be out of sight when the canoes come round the point. If they see a sail, at this time o' night, they'll suspicion the whole thing and be after us. Better let 'em amuse themselves for a spell hunting for the lad on dry land, so's we won't be rushed. Been enough rush!"

"Yes! Yes!" assented I, scanning eagerly the point behind us. And Marc said: —

"Very great is your sagacity, my Tamin. The Black Abbé fooled himself when he forgot to take you into his reckoning!"

At this speech the little wrinkles gathered thicker about Tamin's eyes. At length, deeming us to have gone far enough to catch the loom of the land, as it lay for one watching from the sand-spit, Tamin altered our course, and we ran up the basin. Just then we marked two canoes rounding the point. They were plainly visible to us, and I made sure we should be seen at once; but a glance at Tamin's face reassured me. The Fisher understood, as few even among old woodsmen understand it, the lay of the shadow-belts on a wide water at night.

Noiselessly we lowered our sail and lay drifting, solicitous to mark what the savages might do. The sand-spit was by this so small that from where we lay it was not to be discerned; but we observed the Indians run their canoes upon it, disembark, and stoop to examine the footprints in the sand. In a moment or two they embarked again, and paddled straight to the point.

"Shrewd enough!" said Marc.

"Yes," said I, "and now they'll track us straight to Tamin's creek, and understand that we've taken the boat. But they won't know what direction we've taken!"

"No, M'sieu," muttered Tamin, "but no use loafing round here till they find out!"

Which being undoubted wisdom of Tamin's, we again hoisted sail and continued our voyage.

Having run some miles up the Basin, we altered our course and stood straight across for the northern shore. We now felt secure from pursuit, holding it highly improbable that the savages would guess our purpose and destination. As we sat contenting our eyes with the great bellying of the sail, and the fine flurries of spray that ever and again flashed up from our speeding prow, and the silver-blue creaming of our wake, Marc gave us a surprise. Thrusting his hand into the bosom of his shirt he drew out a packet and handed it to me.

"Here, perhaps, are the proofs on which the gentle Abbé relied!" said he.

Taking the packet mechanically, I stared at the lad in astonishment. But there was no information to be gathered from that inscrutable countenance, so I presently recollected myself, and unfolded the papers. There were two of them. The moon was partly clear at the moment, and I made out the first to be an order, written in English, on one Master Nathaniel Apthorp, merchant, of Boston, directing him to pay Master Marc de Mer, of Grand Pré in Nova Scotia, the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds. It was signed "Paul Mascarene, Gov^{r} of Nova Scotia." The other paper was written in finer and more hasty characters, and I could not decipher it in the uncertain light. But the signature was the same as that appended to the order on Mr. Apthorp.

"I cannot decipher this one, in this bad light," said I; "but what does it all mean, Marc? How comes the English Governor to be owing you two hundred and fifty pounds?"

"Does he owe me two hundred and fifty pounds? That's surely news of interest!" said Marc.

I looked at him, amazed.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know what is in these papers?" I inquired, handing them back.

"How should I know that?" said Marc, with a calmness which was not a little irritating. "They were placed in my pocket by the good Abbé; and since then my opportunities of reading have been but scant!"

Tamin ejaculated a huge grunt of indignant comprehension; and I, beholding all at once the whole wicked device, threw up my hands and fell to whistling an idle air. It seemed to me a case for which curses would seem but tame and pale.

"This other, then," said I, presently, "must be a letter that would seem to have been written to you by the Governor, and worded in such a fashion as to compromise you plainly!"

"'Tis altogether probable, Father," replied Marc, musingly, as he scanned the page. He was trying to prove his own eyesight better than mine, but found the enterprise beyond him, – as I knew he would.

"I can make out nothing of this other, save the signature," he continued. "We must even wait for daylight. And in the meanwhile I think you had better keep the packet, Father, for I feel my wits and my experience something lacking in this snarl."

I took the papers and hid them in a deep pocket which I wore within the bosom of my shirt.

"The trap was well set, and deadly, lad," said I, highly pleased at his confidence in my wisdom to conduct the affair. "But trust me to spring it. Whatever this other paper may contain, de Ramezay shall see them both and understand the whole plot."

"'Twill be hard to explain away," said Marc, doubtfully, "if it be forged with any fair degree of skill!"

"Trust my credit with de Ramezay for that. It is something the Black Abbé has not reckoned upon!" said I, with assurance, stuffing my pipe contentedly with the right Virginia leaf. Marc, being well tired with all that he had undergone that day, laid his head on the cuddy and was presently sound asleep. In a low voice, not to disturb the slumberer, I talked with Tamin, and learned how he had chanced to come so pat upon me in my bonds. He had been on the way up to the Forge, coming not by the trail, but straight through the forest, when he caught a view of the Indians, and took alarm at the stealth of their approach. He had tracked them with a cunning beyond their own, and so achieved to outdo them with their own weapons.

The moon now swam clear in the naked sky, the clouds lying far below. By the broad light I could see very well to read the letter. It was but brief, and ran thus: —

To my good Friend and trusted Helper Monsieur Marc de Mer: —

DEAR SIR, – As touching the affair which you have so prudently carried through, and my gratitude for your so good help, permit the enclosed order on Master Apthorp to speak for me. If I might hope that you would find it in your heart and within your convenience to put me under yet weightier obligations, I would be so bold as to desire an exact account of the forces at Chignecto, and of the enterprize upon which Monsieur de Ramezay is purposing to employ them.

Believe me to be, my dear Sir, yours with high esteem and consideration,

PAUL MASCARENE.

With a wonder of indignation I read it through, and then again aloud to Tamin, who cursed the author with such ingenious Acadian oaths as made me presently smile.

"It is right shrewdly devised," said I, "but the deviser knew little of the blunt English Governor, or never would he have made him write with such courtly circumlocutions. De Ramezay, very like, will have seen communications of Mascarene's before now, and will scarce fail to note the disagreement."

"The fox has been known to file his tongue too smooth," said Tamin, sententiously.

By this we were come over against the huge black front of Blomidon, but our course lay far outside the shadow of his frown, in the silvery run of the seas. The moon floated high over the great Cape, yellow as gold, and the bare sky was like an unruffled lake. Far behind us opened the mouth of the Piziquid stream, a bright gap in the dark but vague shore-line. On our right the waters unrolled without obstruction till they mixed pallidly with the sky in the mouth of Cobequid Bay. Five miles ahead rose the lofty shore which formed the northern wall of Minas Channel, – grim and forbidding enough by day; but now, in such fashion did the moonlight fall along it, wearing a face of fairyland, and hinting of fountained palaces in its glens and high hollows. After I had filled my heart with the fairness and the wonder of it, I lay down upon a thwart and fell asleep.

Chapter V
In the Run of the Seas

It seemed as if I had but fairly got my eyes shut, when I was awakened by a violent pitching of the boat. I sat up, grasping the gunwale, and saw Marc just catching my knee to rouse me. The boat, heeling far over, and hauled close to the wind, was heading a little up the channel and straight for a narrow inlet which I knew to be the joint mouth of two small rivers.

"Where are you going? Why is our course changed?" I asked sharply, being nettled by a sudden notion that they had made some change of plan without my counsel.

"Look yonder, Father!" said Marc, pointing.

I looked, and my heart shook with mingled wrath and apprehension. Behind us followed three canoes, urged on by sail and paddle.

"They outsail us?" I inquired.

"Ay, before the wind, they do, M'sieu!" said Tamin. "On this tack, maybe not. We'll soon see!"

"But what's this but a mere trap we are running our heads into?" I urged.

"I fear there's nothing else but to quit the boat and make through the woods, Father," explained Marc; "that is, if we're so fortunate as to keep ahead till we reach land."

"In the woods, I suppose, we can outwit them or outfoot them," said I; "but those Micmacs are untiring on the trail."

"I know a good man with a good boat over by Shulie on the Fundy shore," interposed Tamin. "And I know the way over the hills. We'll cheat the rogue of a priest yet!" And he shrewdly measured the distance that parted us from our pursuers.

"It galls me to be running from these dogs!" I growled.

"Our turn will come," said Marc, glowering darkly at the canoes. "Do you guess the Black Abbé is with them?"

"Not he!" grunted Tamin.

"Things may happen this time," said I, "and the good father may wish to keep his soutane clear of them. It's all plain enough to me now. The Indians, finding themselves tricked, have gone back on the Pereau trail and most inopportunely have released the gentle Abbé from his bonds. He has seen through our game, and has sent his pack to look to it that we never get to de Ramezay. But *he* will have no hand in it. Oh, no!"

"What's plain to me now," interrupted Tamin, with some anxiety in his voice, "is that they're gaining on us fast. They've put down leeboards; an' with leeboards down a Micmac canoe's hard to beat."

"Oh!" I exclaimed bitterly, "if we had but our muskets! Fool that I was, thus to think to save time and not go back for our weapons! Trust me, lad, it's the first time that Jean de Mer has had that particular kind of folly to repent of!"

"But there was nought else for it, Father," said Marc. "And if, as seems most possible, we come to close quarters presently, we are not so naked as we might be. Here's your two pistols, my good whinger, and Tamin's fishy dirk. And Tamin's gaff here will make a pretty lance. It is borne in upon me that some of the good Abbé's lambs will bleat for their shepherd before this night's work be done!"

There was a steady light in his eyes that rejoiced me much, and his voice rose and fell as if fain to break into a war song; and I said to myself, "The boy is a fighter, and the fire is in his blood, for all his scholar's prating of peace!" Yet he straightway turned his back upon the enemy and with great indifference went to filling his pipe.

"Ay, an' there be a right good gun in the cuddy!" grunted Tamin, after a second or two of silence.

"The saints be praised!" said I. And Marc's long arm reached in to capture it. It was a huge weapon, and my heart beat high at sight of it. Marc caressed it for an instant, then reluctantly passed it to me, with the powder-horn.

"I can shoot, a little, myself," said he, "but I would be presumptuous to boast when you were by, Father!"

"Ay, vraiment," said Tamin, sharply; "don't think you can shoot with the Sieur de Briart yet!"

"I don't," replied Marc, simply, as he handed me out a pouch of bullets and a pouch of slugs.

The pursuing canoes were by this come within fair range. There came a strident hail from the foremost: —

"Lay to, or we shoot!"

"Shoot, dogs!" I shouted, ramming home the good measure of powder which I had poured into my hand. I followed it with a fair charge of slugs, and was wadding it loosely, when —

"Duck!" cries Tamin, bobbing his head lower than the tiller.

Neither Marc nor I moved a hair. But we gazed at the canoes. On the instant two red flames blazed out, with a redoubled bang; and one bullet went through the sail a little above my head.

"Not bad!" said Marc, glancing tranquilly at the bullet hole.

But for my own part, I was angry. To be fired upon thus, at a priest's orders, by a pack of scurvy savages in the pay of our own party, – never before had Jean de Briart been put to such indignity. I kneeled, and took a very cautious aim, – not, however, at the savages, but at the bow of the nearest canoe.

Tamin's big gun clapped like a cannon, and kicked my shoulder very vilely. But the result of the shot was all that we could desire. As I made haste to load again I noticed that the savage in the bow had fallen backward in his place, hit by a stray slug. The bulk of the charge, however, had torn a great hole in the bark, close to the water-line.

"You've done it, Father!" said Marc, in a tone of quiet exultation.

"Hein!" grunted Tamin. "They don't like the wet!"

The canoe was going down by the bow. The other two craft ranged hurriedly alongside, and took in the gesticulating crew, – all but one, whom they left in the stern to paddle the damaged canoe to land, being loth to lose a serviceable craft. With broken bow high in air the canoe spun around, and sped off up the Basin before the wind. The remaining two resumed the chase of us. We had gained a great space during the confusion, yet they came up upon us fast.

But now, ere I judged them to be within gunshot, they slackened speed.

"They think better of it!" said I, raising the gun again to my shoulder. As I did so they sheered off in haste to a safer distance.

"They are not such fools as I had hoped!" said Marc.

"I so far flatter myself as to think," said I, with some complacency, "that they won't trust themselves willingly again within range of this good barker."

By this we were come well within the wide mouth of the estuary, and a steep, wooded point thrust out upon our right. All at once I muttered a curse upon my dulness.

"What fools we are, to be sure!" I cried. "No reason that we should toil across the mountains to your good man's good boat at Shulie, my Tamin. Put her about, and we'll sail in comfort around to Chignecto; and let these fellows come in range again at their peril!"

"To be sure, indeed!" grunted Tamin; and with a lurch and great flapping we went about.

The canoes, indeed, now fled before us with excellent discretion. Our new course carried us under the gloom of the promontory, whence, in a few minutes, we shot out again into the moonlight. It was pleasant to see our antagonists making such courteous haste to give us room. I could not forbear to chuckle over it, and wished mightily that the Black Abbé were in one of the canoes.

"I fear me there's to be no work for Tamin's fishy dirk or my good whinger," sighed Marc, with a nice air of melancholy; and Tamin, with the little wrinkles thicker than ever about his eyes, yelled

droll taunts after our late pursuers. In fact, we were all three in immense high feather, – when on a sudden there came a crashing bump that tumbled us headlong, the mast went overboard, and there we were stuck fast upon a sharp rock. The boat was crushed in like an egg-shell, and lay over on her side. The short, chopping seas huddled upon us in a smother. As I rose up, sputtering, I took note of Tamin's woollen cap washing away debonairly, snatched off, belike, by a taut rope as the mast fell. Then, clinging all three to the topmost gunwale, the waves jumping and sousing us derisively, we stared at each other in speechless dismay. But a chorus of triumphant screeches from the canoes, as they noted our mishap and made to turn, brought us to our senses.

"Nothing for it but to swim!" said I, thrusting down the now useless musket into the cuddy, where I hoped it might stay in case the wrecked boat should drift ashore. It was drenched, of course, and something too heavy to swim with. I emptied the slugs from my pocket. Tamin ducked his head under water and fumbled in the cuddy till I was on the point of plucking him forth, fearing he would drown, – Marc, meanwhile, looking on tranquilly and silently, with that fleeting remembrance of a smile. But now Tamin arose, gasping, with a small sack and a salted hake in his hands. The fish he passed over to me.

"Bread, M'sieu!" said he, holding up the drenched sack in triumph. "Now for the woods!"

'Twas but the toss of a biscuit to shore, and we had gained it ere our enemies were come within gunshot. Running swiftly along the strip of beach that skirted the steep, we put the shoulder of the cape between, and were safe from observation for a few minutes.

"To the woods, M'sieu!" cried Tamin, in a suppressed voice.

"No!" said I, sternly. "Straight along the beach, till I give the word to turn in! Follow me!"

"'Tis the one chance, to get out of sight now!" grumbled Tamin, running beside me, and clutching at his wet sack of bread.

"Don't you suppose he knows what he is doing, my Tamin?" interrupted Marc. "'Tis for you and me to obey orders!"

Tamin growled, but said no more.

"Now in with you to cover," I commanded, waving my salt fish as it had been a marshal's baton. At the same moment I turned, ran up the wet slope where a spring bubbled out of the wood's edge and spread itself over the stones, and sprang behind a thick screen of viburnums. My companions were beside me on the instant, – but it was not an instant too soon. As we paused to look back, there were the canoes coming furiously around the point.

Staying not long to observe them, I led the way straight into the darkness of the woods, aiming for the seashore at the other side of the point. But Tamin was not satisfied.

"Our road lies straight up yon river," said he.

"My friend," said I, "we must e'en find another road to Shulie. Those fellows will be sure to agree that we have gone that way. Knowing that I am a cunning woodsman, they will say, 'He will make them to run in the water, and so leave no trail.' And they will give hot chase up the river."

"But there be two rivers," objected Tamin.

"Bien," said I, "they will divide their party, and give hot chase up two rivers!"

"And in the meanwhile?" inquired Marc.

"I'll find the way to Shulie," said I. "The stars and the sun are guide enough! I know the main lay of all these coasts."

Chapter VI
Grûl

The undergrowth into which we had now come was thick and hindering, so there was no further chance of speech. A few minutes more and we came out upon the seaward slope of the point. We pushed straight down to the water, here sheltered from the wind and little troubled. That our footprints might be hidden, at least for a time, we ran, one behind the other, along the lip of the tide, where the water was about ankle deep. In the stillness our splashing sounded dangerously loud, and Tamin, yet in a grumbling humour, spoke of it.

"But you forget, my friend," said I, gently, "that there is noise and to spare where our enemies are, – across there in the wind!"

In a moment Tamin spoke again, pointing some little way ahead.

"The land drops away yonder, M'sieu, 'twixt the point and the main shore!" he growled, with conspicuous anxiety in his voice. He was no trembler; but it fretted him to be taking what he deemed the weaker course. "Nothing," he added, "but a bit of bare beach that the waves go over at spring tides when the wind's down the Basin!"

I paused in some dismay. But my mind was made up.

"We must go on," said I. "But we will stoop low, and lose no time in the passage. They'll scarce be landed yet."

And now, as I came to see how low indeed that strip of perilous beach was, I somewhat misdoubted of success in getting by unseen. But we went a little deeper in the tide, and bowed our bodies with great humbleness, and so passed over with painful effort but not a little speed. Being come again under shelter, we straightened ourselves, well pleased, fetched a deep breath or two, and ran on with fresh celerity.

"But if a redskin should think to step over the beach, there'd be our goose cooked!" muttered Tamin.

"Well said!" I answered. "Therefore let us strike inland at once!" And I led the way again into the darkness of the forest.

Dark as it was, there was yet light enough from the moon to enable me to direct my course as I wished. I struck well west of the course which would have taken us most speedily to Shulie, being determined to avoid the valley of the stream which I considered our pursuers were most likely to ascend. To satisfy Tamin's doubts I explained my purpose, which was to aim straight for Shulie as soon as we were over the water-shed. And I must do him the justice to say he was content, beginning now to come more graciously to my view. We went but slowly, climbing, ever climbing. At times we would be groping through a great blackness of hemlocks. Again the forest would be more open, a mingling of fir trees, and birches, and maples. Coming at last to more level ground, we were still much hindered by innumerable rocks, amid which the underbrush and wild vines prepared pitfalls for our weary feet. But I was not yet willing to call a halt for breath. On, on we stumbled, the wet branches buffeting our faces, but a cool and pleasant savour of the wild herbs which we trod upon ever exhaling upwards to refresh our senses. As we crossed a little grassy glade, I observed that Marc had come to Tamin's help, and was carrying the sack of bread. I observed, also, that Tamin's face was drawn with fatigue, and that he went with a kind of dogged heaviness. I took pity upon him. We had put, I guessed, good miles between ourselves and our pursuers, and I felt that we were, in all reason, safe for the time. At the further limit of the glade there chattered a shallow brook, whose sweet noise reminded me that I was parched with thirst. The pallor of first dawn was now coming into the sky, and the tree tops began to lift and float in an aerial grayness. I glanced at Marc, and his eyes met mine with a keen brightness that told me he was yet unwearied. Nevertheless I cried: —

"Halt, and fall out for breakfast." And with the words I flung myself down by the brook, thrust my burning face into the babbling chill of it, and drank luxuriously. Tamin was beside me in an instant; but Marc slaked his thirst at more leisure, when he had well enjoyed watching our satisfaction.

We lay for a little, till the sky was touched here and there with saffron and flying wisps of pink, and we began to see the colour of grass and leaves. Then we made our meal, – a morsel each of the salt hake which I had clung to through our flight, and some bits of Tamin's black bread. This bread was wholesome, as I well knew, and to our hunger it was not unsavoury; but it was of a hardness which the sea-water had scarce availed to mitigate.

As we ground hastily upon the meagre fare, I felt, rather than heard, a presence come behind me. I turned my head with a start, and at the same instant heard a high, plangent voice, close beside us, crying slowly: —

"Woe, woe to Acadie the Fair, for the day of her desolation cometh."

It was an astonishing figure upon which my eyes fell, – a figure which might have been grotesque, but was not. Instead of laughing, my heart thrilled with a kind of awe. The man was not old, – his frame was erect and strong with manhood; but the long hair hanging about his neck was white, the long beard streaming upon his half-naked breast was white. He wore leathern breeches, and the upper portion of his body was covered only by a cloak of coarse woollen stuff, woven in a staring pattern of black and yellow. On his head was a rimless cap of plaited straw, with a high, pointed crown; and this was stuck full of gaudy flowers and feathers. From the point of the crown rose the stump of what had been, belike, a spray of goldenrod, broken by a hasty journeying through the obstructions of the forest. The man's eyes, of a wild and flaming blue, fixed themselves on mine. In one hand he carried a white stick, with a grotesque carven head, dyed scarlet, which he pointed straight at me.

"Do you lie down, like cows that chew the cud, when the wolves are on the trail?" demanded that plangent voice.

"It's Grûl!" cried Tamin, springing to his feet and thrusting a piece of black bread into the stranger's hand.

But the offering was thrust aside, while those wide eyes flamed yet more wildly upon me.

"They are on the trail, I tell you!" he repeated. "I hear their feet even now! Go! Run! Fly!" and he stooped, with an ear toward the ground.

"But which way should we fly?" I asked, half in doubt whether his warning should be heeded or derided. I could see that neither Marc nor Tamin had any such doubts. They were on the strain to be off, and only awaited my word.

"Go up the brook," said he, in a lower voice. "The first small stream on your left hand, turn up that a little way, and so – for the wolves shall this time be balked. But the black wolf's teeth bite deep. They shall bite upon the throats of the people!" he continued, his voice rising keenly, his white staff, with its grinning scarlet head, waving in strange, intricate curves. We were already off, making at almost full speed up the brook. Glancing back, I saw the fantastic form running to and fro over the ground where we had lain; and when the trees hid him we heard those ominous words wailed slowly over and over with the reiterance of a tolling bell: —

"Woe, woe for Acadie the Fair, for the day of her desolation cometh!"

"He'll throw them off the trail!" said Tamin, confidently.

"But how did they ever get on it?" queried Marc.

"'Tis plain that they have seen or heard us as we passed the strip of beach!" said I, in deep vexation, for I hated to be overreached by any one in woodcraft. "If we outwit them now, it's no thanks to my tactics, but only to that generous and astonishing madman. You both seemed to know him. Who, in the name of all the saints, might he be? What was it you called him, Tamin?"

"Grûl!" replied Tamin; and said no more, discreetly husbanding his wind. But Marc spoke for him.

"I have heard him called no other name but Grûl! Madman he is, at times, I think. But sane for the most part, and with some touches of a wisdom beyond the wisdom of men. The guise of madness he wears always; and the Indians, as well as our own people, reverence him mightily. It is nigh upon three years since he first appeared in Acadie. He hates the Black Abbé, – who, they say, once did him some great mischief in some other land than this, – and his strange ravings, his prodigious prophesyings, do something here and there to weaken the Abbé's influence with our people."

"Then how does he evade the good father's wrath?" I questioned, in wonder.

"Oh," said Marc, "the good father hates him cordially enough. But the Indians could not be persuaded, or bullied, or bribed, to lift a hand against him. They say a Manitou dwells in him."

"Maybe they're not far wrong!" grunted Tamin.

And now I, like Tamin, found it prudent to spare my wind. But Marc, whose lungs seemed untiring, spoke from time to time as he went, and told me certain incidents, now of Grûl's acuteness, now of his gift of prophecy, now of his fantastic madness. We came at length, after passing two small rivulets on the right, to the stream on the left which Grûl had indicated. It had a firm bed, wherein our footsteps left no trace, and we ascended it for perhaps a mile, by many windings. Then, with crafty care, we crept up from the stream, in such a fashion as to leave no mark of our divergence if, as I thought not likely, our pursuers should come that way. After that we fetched a great circuit, crossed the parent brook, and shortly before noon judged that we might account ourselves secure. Where a tiny spring bubbled beneath a granite boulder and trickled away north toward the Fundy shore, we stopped to munch black bread and the remnant of the fish. We rested for an hour, – Tamin and I sleeping, while Marc, who protested that he felt no motion toward slumber, kept watch. When he roused us, we set off pleasantly refreshed, our faces toward Shulie.

Till late that night we journeyed, having a clear moon to guide us. Coming at length to the edge of a small lake set with islands, "Here," said I, "is the place where we may sleep secure!"

We stripped, took our bundles on our heads, and swam out into the shining stillness. We swam past two islets, and landed upon one which caught my fancy. There we lay down in a bed of sweet-smelling fern, and were well content. As we supped on Tamin's good black bread, two loons laughed to each other out on the silver surface. We saw their black, watchful heads, moving slowly. Then we slept. It was high day when we awoke. The bread was now scarce, so we husbanded it, and made such good speed all day that while it wanted yet some hours of sunset we came out upon a bluff's edge and saw below us the wash and roll of Fundy. We were some way west of Shulie, but not far, Tamin said, from the house of his good friend with the good boat.

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